Remapping Bolivia: Resources, Territory, and Indigeneity in a Plurinational State

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In this issue of the Journal of Ecological Anthropology, my first as Book Review Editor, I am excited to share reviews by three University of South Florida graduate students. Maryann Cairns, Damien Contessa, and David Godfrey originally drafted their reviews as an assignment for Rebecca Zarger’s Spring 2012 Environmental Anthropology seminar. They selected their books according to their own interests from a list of recently published books and submitted revised reviews for consideration by JEA. It has been my pleasure to work closely with the authors to further develop their reviews. I hope that you find them as engaging and useful as we have.


Please contact me if you are interested in reviewing a recent book relevant to JEA.

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Swamplife: People, Gators, and Mangroves Entangled in the Everglades

LAURA A. OGDEN
University of Minnesota Press,
Minneapolis, MN, 2011
200 Pp. $22.50 Paperback

Reviewed By Damien Contessa

In Swamplife: People, Gators, and Mangroves Entangled in the Everglades, anthropologist Laura Ogden traces the lives of poor, rural whites called gladesmen through the hidden cultural, political, and ecological history of the Florida Everglades. She invites the reader to imagine a world of mythological outlaws, giant reptiles, political intrigue, conservation, and rural life in order to reveal how “oppositional culture and social class operate in our understandings of wilderness in the United States” (p.2). Her monograph is based on the stories and practices of gladesmen, and unfolds as a fluid, tangled, and lush record of the history of the Everglades landscape. Throughout her book, Ogden challenges notions of the landscape as a space of cultural significance scripted by human ideas, customs, practices, and stories. She seeks to reclaim the landscape “as a place of people and human history” through understanding “how what it means to be human is constituted through changing relations” with other species and objects (p.2).

Ogden (2011) develops the term landscape ethnography to describe the method of writing culture that is “attentive to the ways in which human relations with nonhumans produce what it means to be hu-
man” (p.28). As Ogden notes, “becoming human, becoming alligator, (and) becoming mangrove” are contingent processes specific to “particular temporalities, power relations, and geographies” (both imaginary and material) (p.28). She shows how landscapes (wild, urban, rural) become an interactive assemblage of collective species, and how they are produced through human and nonhuman relations. Ogden’s landscape ethnography explores the interconnected lives of humans and nonhumans, seeks to (re)introduce and reinscribe “the human back into the multispecies collective,” and also traces the asymmetrical political relations between species (p.29).

Along the way, gladesmen, alligators, developers, snakes, mangroves, outlaws, and swamplands emerge as characters coproduced through mutual relations, forming “shifting assemblages and alliances” in an active and evolving landscape (p.27).

Ogden begins her tale with a brief history of the Everglades, wherein she discusses the arrival of Spanish colonialists and the depopulation and deportation of native peoples, such as the Calusas, Tequestas, and the Seminoles. She then proceeds to outline the social and political history of reclamation, which transformed the Everglades from its “miasmic, dangerous, uncivilized,” and worthless state (p.12), into an agro-industrial complex. The reclamation and conservation of the Everglades also displaced the poor, rural gladesmen. Gladesmen have played an essential role in shaping the history of the Everglades, though they have been “largely overshadowed by rapid social and environmental change” (p.17). Ogden describes Swamplife as the result of 10 years of fieldwork, and a lifetime of personal experience growing up in the Everglades. Her story is personal, and involves the lives of former glades hunters whose interviews are central to her ethnography.

In the second chapter, Ogden defines her notion of landscape, and outlines her methodology and theoretical approach. She follows the naturecultures of Donna Haraway (2008) and Bruno Latour’s (2004) politics of nature, to define landscapes as heterogeneous assemblages of interconnectivity, which are “constituted by humans and nonhumans, material and semiotic processes, and histories both real and partially remembered” (p.35). To Ogden, the landscape is a coevolving, multispecies community composed of memory and interconnections, where “curious and unexpected connections...link and transform geography, people, animals, plants, and inorganic matter” (p.28). Also drawing on Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s (1987) spatial philosophy of the “rhizome,” Ogden adopts a “mangrove logic” to understand how humans engage in a conversation with the nonhuman world, how humans become animal, and how these processes relate to shifting political and economic forces. Ogden’s “mangrove logic” offers a way of theorizing alligators, mangroves, and people as “complex and changing assemblages of relations that dissolve and displace the boundaries of nature and culture” (p.29).

Ogden’s theoretical discussion leads to chapter three where she employs the elements of earth, fire, and flesh to describe the messy practice of alligator hunting. Throughout the 19th and 20th century, gladesmen relied on alligator hunting as a primary source of income. The process was often marked by “bloodshed and boredom” (p.44), and Ogden evokes a sensual account of Everglades hunters “who relied on their instincts, experiences, and senses to track, kill, and prepare glades animals” (p.44). She also draws on early 20th century photographs of gladesmen who are seen probing, canoeing, and grunting their way through the landscape. Alligator hunting was “the nastiest way to make a dollar” (p.44), and the photographs portray a laborious, male-centered lifestyle that was “immersed in water, mud, and smoke” (p.44). To gladesmen, masculinity was measured on an “ethics of animal flesh” (p.63) that required them to “become alligator” through listening, mimicry, and gesturing with the territorial reptiles (p.59).

In Chapter four we see Ogden explore how human and nonhuman mobility produce the Everglades landscape. She portrays mobility as “movement specific to a particular time and place” that unfolds through cultural, political, and ecological histories
Ogden suggests that gladesmen culture and the Everglades landscape exist in a symbiotic relationship, which lies somewhere between “the Great Divide (of) nature and culture” (p.76). The two reside in a contact zone marked “by a furious exchange of messages, territorializing acts, and countermoves” (p.76), which is “lively with cultural, political, and personal histories” (p.75). Thus, mobility becomes a strategy for claiming territory for both humans and nonhumans (p.90). Gladesmen hunters are found following the unpredictable, sinuous landscape in search of alligators and “unnaturally large snakes” (p.75). They journey along waterways, through gladeland passageways, and through isolated swamps, producing a means of sustenance, collective memory, and personal history.

In the final two chapters of Swamplife, Ogden expands her discussion to include the political and economic forces that guide and disrupt glade hunter’s landscape practices. These regional and global “agents of change” stake their claim in the Everglades landscape, and challenge “swamp-specific” relations between humans and nonhumans (p.95). In chapter five, we see Ogden explore the paradoxical development and conservation impulses in the history of the Everglades. Ogden follows the “selective vision” of naturalists and conservation scientists to understand how the Everglades landscape was transformed from a hunter’s landscape into a politicized and naturalized landscape (p.95). Using the Royal Palm Hammock as a case study, Ogden shows how gladesmen practices were co-opted by naturalists in the construction of expert knowledge systems. Throughout the chapter, Ogden seeks to challenge the prevailing wilderness and ecosystems worldview, and problematize the progression of Everglades conservation and development practices. In chapter six, Ogden shows how conservation and dredging efforts threatened gladesmen subsistence strategies, leading to criminalization of their practices and their eventual displacement. Ogden begins by describing the commodification of the alligator, and its role in conservation efforts. She then shows how state-sponsored alligator management programs, sponsored by the Florida Department of Game and Fresh Water Fish, redefined the alligator as common property, and thus undermined traditional hunting practices. In this newly arranged Everglades landscape, gladesmen were constructed as poachers, and their practices were criminalized. Ogden argues that the rhizomatic, tangled, and unpredictable Everglades landscape offered avenues of escape for gladesmen, who employed local knowledge and oppositional tactics to produce a new “subversive landscape” that defied emerging conservation efforts (p.138).

Through the book, Ogden suggests that the criminalization of gladesmen culture over the course of the twentieth century has given rise to an outlaw mythology. This “outlaw mythology has become an important part of what the Everglades is and means – including to gladesmen themselves” (p.2). Ogden notes that the romantic portrayal of rural life as exotic and villainous has inspired a trove of popular literature, and is essential to Everglades lore. For this reason, Ogden weaves the stories of the Ashley Gang – the Everglades most famous outlaws – into each chapter. Ogden employs their story as an experiment in rhizomatic logic, and describes her method as an experiment in “critical history” (p.22). Ogden “return(s) to (their) story again and again” attempting to show “how the past and the present, myth and memory, the human and nonhuman become entangled in the Everglades swamps and the swamps’ rural communities” (p.22). Though I appreciated Ogden’s attempt at creative nonfiction, I did not share her “obsession-bordering fascination” with the Ashley Gang narrative (p.22). The intermittent narrative was distracting, and often undermined her argument that the term “outlaw” often simplifies the paradoxical role of resistance and criminality in the history of wilderness conservation. The Ashley Gang narrative was entertaining, but I do not think it contributed to Ogden’s otherwise rich and detailed account of Everglades culture.

Ultimately, Swamplife is an insightful exploration of the cultural, ecological, and historical life of the Everglades, and suggests that behind each triumph of
wilderness conservation is a hidden tale of displacement, subversion, depopulation, and transformation. Though I did not share Ogden’s passion for the Ashley Gang narrative, Ogden nonetheless weaves a sinuous tale, which is local in its application and global in its implication. Blending historical accounts and mythological narrative, she urges the reader to follow her words like a river as they pass through the asymmetrical relations of people, animals, places, and politics.

Swamplife is an excellent book, and Ogden’s unique theoretical and methodological approach makes it an important selection in the emerging interdisciplinary field of posthumanities (See Wolfe 2009). While I question whether nonacademic and undergraduate audiences will find Swamplife an accessible read, I believe the book will be well received in many graduate and upper division undergraduate courses in anthropology, animal studies, cultural geography, environmental studies, sociology, and cultural studies.

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Insectopedia

HUGH RAFFLES
PANTHEON BOOKS,
NEW YORK, NY, 2010
480 Pp. $29.95 HARDCOVER

Reviewed by David J. Godfrey

Insectopedia

Judging by the title and the praying mantis on the dust jacket, Insectopedia is about insects. On the surface, this is a book simulating an encyclopedia about insects written by a scholar in a discipline focused on the study of humanity. However, Hugh Raffles’ Insectopedia is as chimeric as its name sounds and the reader soon realizes that it is about the overlapping worlds of insects and humans. In Insectopedia twenty-six largely disparate anecdotes, one for each letter of the alphabet, are strung together with the one overarching theme that insects are relevant to all aspects of human life. Raffles shows that humans are not so different from insects, experiencing many similar things in life and facing similar adversities.

Like a standard encyclopedia, the entries cover a wide variety of topics and range from short (only two pages) to long (42 pages). If the reader finds one entry not particularly interesting, chances are the next one will seem more engaging. The first chapter, “Air,” discusses the vast aerial migrations of a great variety of insect species unbeknownst to those on the ground. Insects are not left to whims of the wind, but can deftly control their travel to a surprising degree. This is but the first of many looks at how like us insects really are (or perhaps how we are like them). Insects as human and humans as insect is a reoccurring theme tying the entries of Insectopedia. In weaving together humans and nature in such a way that it counters the assumed dichotomy characteristic of much Western thought, Insectopedia resonates with historical ecology, which posits that humans are an inseparable part of the environment (Balee 2006; Moran 2006).
Some chapters of this book depict the grimmer similarities between humans and insects, while others are more light-hearted. The reader learns of the horrors of the Holocaust, where victims thinking they were about to be deloused found out that they instead were the lice. At the other end of the spectrum there are chapters on Italian and Chinese crickets and Japanese rhinoceros and stag beetles, coddled and kept as treasured possessions. Some chapters, such as “My Nightmares,” portray insects as ghastly creatures. Others, such the chapter called “Sex” which describes a fetish in which crushing insects elicits sexual arousal, paint an even ghastlier picture of humans.

Raffles demonstrates how anthropology really can become the study of insects, a definition of anthropology occasionally provided by laypeople. Anthropologists often study how humans interact with or relate to other things in order to learn more about humanity—food, the environment, nonhuman primates, and disease are just a few examples. This book gives the reader a look inside the minds of professional entomologists, insect fanciers, and laypeople from around the world as they interact with insects and shows that anthropologists can learn more about humans by studying insects.

Contributing to literature on the history of science, many of the chapters in Insectopedia are biopics of famous figures in the entomological world. Readers may find themselves surprisingly interested in learning about previously unknown entomological figures, such as Karl von Frisch, Jean-Henri Fabre, and Cornelia Hesse-Honegger. Art is both subject and medium in Insectopedia. The chapters “Chernobyl” and “The Ineffable” focus on insect artists Cornelia Hesse-Honegger and Joris Hoefnagel respectively, whose work illustrates the volume along with other assorted pictures and drawings. Unfortunately, all illustrations are in black and white. While some were originally in black and white, reproducing others in their original colors would have brought out the full vibrancy of the insect or scenery being portrayed.

The amount of space Raffles dedicates to discussing the artwork warrants presenting the artwork in a more attractive fashion. Perhaps Pantheon Books will publish a future edition in color.

David and Goliath power struggles occur throughout Insectopedia. Insects are quite small, yet they have had remarkable influence on the planet. For example, as noted in the chapter “Fever/Dream,” malaria kills 1.5 million every year, making the mosquito perhaps the most deadly animal (Raffles 2010:73). Featuring humans struggling against much larger and more powerful forces in situations where humans and insects must negotiate entwined environmental and political troubles gives some chapters a political ecology flavor: investigating how the political and environmental milieu interact with each other as well as with the people involved (Robbins 2004). The chapter “On January 8, 2008, Abdou Mahamane…” shows that locust swarms in Niger are both a blessing and a curse. While they can provide a great deal of food and are a popular delicacy in Niger, they consume crops, reducing food accessibility for poor Nigeriens. Teams of entomologists tasked with predicting and preventing locust swarms are unable to leave their research stations due to political unrest, allowing the locusts to swarm unmitigated. Raffles notes importantly that the areas where the locust swarms originate in Saharan Africa are all areas rife with conflict (2010:209). This demonstrates the intersection of ecology and politics that creates a perfect storm of misfortune for the residents of these areas.

Readers may come to suspect that Raffles has a particular affinity for crickets and grasshoppers as roughly one quarter of the book deals with these insects, albeit from a variety of perspectives. The chapter on Nigerien locusts has a somber tone, although those with adventurous palates will find their mouths watering at the descriptions of locusts as food. “Generosity (the Happy Times)” discusses the ancient Chinese custom of cricket fighting. These crickets are prized possessions and a treated with great care. Crickets are anthropomorphized to a certain
extent, as an astute gambler or cricket owner can see how courageous and steadfast a cricket is going to be in a cricket fight. Characteristic of this geographically diverse book, there is also a chapter entitled “Il Parco delle Cascine on Ascension Sunday” that discusses the role of crickets in Florence, Italy. The Italians do not fight their crickets, nor do they eat them; instead they briefly keep them in cages and listen to their chirping, which they take as a sign of good luck. Crickets were so entrenched in Florentine society that Carlo Collodi included a talking cricket in his timeless children’s novel The Adventures of Pinocchio. Humans and insects can be great friends. However this fixation on crickets and grasshoppers means that many other diverse types of insects are neglected. A book purported to be about insects in general would do better to more evenly distribute discussion amongst various types of insects. In particular the lack of mention of ants was striking. Ants, with their complex social structures, could be readily compared to humans. Entomologist E.O. Wilson used his study of ants to foster the field of sociobiology, a field which would have significant impact on the anthropological discussion regarding the evolution of social behavior (1975).

In summary, Insectopedia is twenty-six accounts of the human-insect entanglement. The scholarly audience will appreciate its contribution to both historical ecology and political ecology. Anthropology as a whole benefits by gaining insight into the cultural milieu surrounding this interaction, one that this book demonstrates is very significant. Insectopedia also explores the idea of a dichotomy between humans and nature as well as the ways in which this dichotomy breaks down. A few chapters also touch on political ecology by examining how particular environments, including the insects residing in those environments, and political forces play a role in disadvantaging certain groups of people. Bookstore clerks will have a difficult time deciding where to shelve this book, as the diverse array of topics and styles make it hard to place in one genre.

Insectopedia would be suitable as optional supplementary reading at the undergraduate or graduate levels for relevant anthropology, geography, ecology, or entomology courses. It may even be appropriate for courses surveying modern literatures, as it is written with a literary rather than a scientific tone. Due to its somewhat episodic nature, various chapters could be excerpted for use as required reading. Overall, Insectopedia provides enjoyable reading for those interested in insects and what insects have to say about us.

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Remapping Bolivia: Resources, Territory, and Indigeneity in a Plurinational State

Nicole Fabricant and Bret Gustafson (editors)
School for Advanced Research Press, Santa Fe, NM, 2011
251 Pp. $29.95 Paper

Reviewed by Maryann Cairns

In their introduction to this edited volume, Fabricant and Gustafson critically engage the idea of Bolivia as a plurinational state. Offering a “deep rethinking and remapping” of Bolivia in the wake of Evo Morales’ election and post-neoliberal regime (p.1), the contributors use a lens of territory and space to examine a variety of cultural and political issues in Bolivia’s new state. Providing rich ethnographic detail, the book traces broad shifts in state politics around the commodification and extraction of natural resources and in changes that plurinational governance imposes on local society (p.3).

Fabricant and Gustafson draw on complementary backgrounds in Latin American resource wars and Bolivian indigenous movements, respectively, to connect policies with the natural landscape and to point to future outcomes. The edited volume, a series of journal-style articles on themes of natural resources and social movements, arose out of a conference Fabricant organized at Northwestern University in 2008. The resulting panel format effectively presents a variety of viewpoints from anthropology, Latin American studies, sociology, and geography.

Far from a simple chronicle of Bolivia’s political, social, and environmental landscape, *Remapping Bolivia* is an intricate account of a multitude of perspec-
tives and positions within a galvanized population. The authors raise difficult, complex questions and provide critical responses from a concert of scholar-activist positions. The compilation contributes to the study of territorial relationships, natural resource issues, indigenous rights, political movements, and broadly-ascribed meanings of power, agency, and representation.

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 focus on relationships between indigenous populations and state-level politics. Individually, these chapters highlight specific movements and nuanced experiences; collectively, they highlight the central role geophysical space plays in the increasingly complex relationship between the Bolivian government and the Bolivian people. Providing important background on indigenous movements, Ramirez (Chapter 2) focuses on indigenous action and protest, the election of Evo Morales, and historical tensions related to racial politics in the state. To explain the onset of a new reality in Bolivia—one headed by the indigenous identity and deeply tied to active resistance and re-claiming indigenous territories—Ramirez discusses how indigenous strategies of counter-power tore down historical barriers that had been created by the white-mestizo elite to maintain power over the indigenous majority. Kohl and Farthing (2006) discuss more fully the specific events spurring indigenous identity change.

Ramirez’s chapter sets up the central theme of Chapters 2-4: the ability of indigenous groups in Bolivia to exercise resource rights, and the role of the state in bounding and manipulating this ability. While Garcés (Chapter 3) notes the importance of reterritorializations and geophysical space in expressions of indigeneity, he focuses on the ways in which indigenous movements were negotiated and moderated by the state, thus limiting the power of the indigenous agenda. Garcés’ strong critical stance toward the ideas of plurinationality and indigenous representation within the state system is an important contribution—he argues that these ideas both increase social justice and occlude inter-indigenous difference and power imbalances. Garcés’ exploration
of how participation in the state further subjugates indigenous people suggests further areas of research for scholars and activists. Albro’s (2006:402) encouragement to think about indigenous developments more in “relation to an evolving political public” than in terms of identity complicates Garcés’ position: how is indigeneity writ if it is both formed by and silenced within political space?

In Chapter 4, Sologuren addresses tensions between autonomy, neoliberalism, and territory (a focal point of Remapping Bolivia) by critically examining the 2008 massacre in Pando and associated tensions around rubber and land tenure between the local population and elite-led autonomistas. After a deep and thoughtful reflection on the relationship between natural resources, space, labor, and violence, Sologuren discusses the sanctioning of difference within the state, arguing that this particular space for autonomy can only allow difference “when the different one, the other, does not challenge political dominion over territory” (p.88). Eloquent and provocative, Sologuren’s article is well-situated within the other works. Taken together, Chapters 2-4 highlight that, in Bolivia, state-level politics related to indigeneity and indigenous difference have influenced access to resources and territory in substantive and ever-negotiated ways.

Chapters 5 and 6 provide ethnographically-grounded and detailed accounts of urban territorial control, life, and livelihood from a variety of perspectives. Kirshner (Chapter 5) looks at migrants’ influence on local/informal economies and negotiations of public space. He shows how changes in Bolivian geopolitics, indigenous movements, and state policies have come to a head in the public marketplace in Santa Cruz where migrant vendors are victims of “spiritual stigmatization and territorial control” through the relocation of their stalls (p.115). Revilla (Chapter 6) focuses on local and grassroots relationships with identity, urban space/territory, and negotiations of difference of a different Bolivian urban area. Drawing on long-term fieldwork, Revilla provides a rich argument against representing El Alto as a rebel city or a “city characterized by utopianist political practices” (p.138), because such depictions emphasize the processes of political movements over their goals (p.118). Instead, Revilla puts the day-to-day struggle that poverty, inequality, and linguistic stigmatization imposes on El Alto residents on equal footing with residents’ protests, thereby giving space in to the structural, as well as the retaliatory, experiences. While his attempts to counter monolithic characterizations of rebel are useful, Revilla’s critique of Lazar seems heavy-handed as Lazar also discusses daily experiences of structural marginalization and clearly states that “there is a gap between the [political] rhetoric and the actual ability of these groups to unify” (Lazar 2008:232).

Chapters 7 and 8 use social and environmental themes to examine the interrelationship of land, resources, economics, and production. Fabricant (Chapter 7) details the history and current position of the landless peasant movement (MST-Bolivia). She ties the inequality in productive land ownership to the historical influence of neoliberalism and the politics of soy production and consumption (p.150). Further, through rich narrative and ethnographic methods, she discusses the relationship between the landless peasant movement, community organizing, and production based on current resources. Showing how landless peasant groups have changed views of their environment and of environmental protection is a very useful contribution (p.159). In an extremely well-executed ethnographic narrative, Gustafson (Chapter 8) shows that Guarani mobilize to create new representation in governance, not just to seek “resources and social rights coming from above,” giving us cause to rethink the relationship between autonomy and territorial rights (p.187). Chapters 7 and 8 piece together the political process surrounding the use of territory and resources in specific Bolivian contexts, adding an element of reflexivity to the volume and providing an appropriate segue to the epilogue.

Hale’s epilogue notes that the volume has successfully shown the crooked line to social justice walked by social movements in Bolivia (p.196) and suggested the multitude of social and political pressures that
impact social justice movements. He highlights the emphasis on territory and space: each of the authors effectively engaged territory in political conversation, and provided racial, ethnic, or environmental explanations for the way that these issues are contested by groups within the Bolivian state. Hale goes beyond the other authors’ contributions, however, to warn that a blanket depoliticalization of race in Bolivia runs the risk of becoming a proposal for unilateral disarmament (p.206). This argument is particularly pertinent in Bolivia, where race and ethnicity tend to gloss power and economic differences.

Overall, *Remapping Bolivia* is a well-grounded set of ethnographic accounts and rich narratives, united by overarching themes and important areas of investigation. The array of voices is striking; it is written by scholars from the U.S., Bolivia, and South Africa and interspersed with excerpts from interviews with Evo Morales, landless peasants, and urban activists. The wide range of viewpoints around similar themes should motivate future research and draw attention to Bolivia’s position vis-à-vis territorial rights and political/indigenous difference.

Environmental anthropologists will notice that the authors as a whole tend to emphasize political over ecological aspects of space. They emphasize ethnographic explanations of the political manipulation of certain environments or human ecosystems and the effects of such political action on the population.

The photo essay between Chapters 4 and 5 is meant to illuminate examples of remapping in Bolivia, and to give the reader a visual sense of the nuanced/politicized landscape and the charged nature of indigenous identity and resistance found in narratives throughout the book. Compiled from various authors, it is partially effective but lacks a clear aim. Further, as some authors refer to specific figures to make their individual points, the images would have been more effective if interspersed throughout the volume.

I recommended *Remapping Bolivia* to scholars looking at the relationship between indigenous politics, natural resources, and territory in Latin America as well as to scholars and activists who focus on indigenous movements. The volume should also be required reading for scholars in critical geography and development fields, as it uses ethnographic methods to give qualitative accounts of geographical and spatial change. This book would work well in graduate student seminars in environmental anthropology, geography, or Latin American studies. I would particularly recommend Fabricant’s and Gustafson’s chapters: together they provide an interesting example of political-ecological inquiry. Further, Gustafson’s narrative style is a page-turner, with clear nuggets of theoretical benefit and well-chosen voices from respondents. *Remapping Bolivia* would provide valuable information on major social movements, conflicts, and historical/territorial relationships to any researcher working in Bolivia.

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