even if it could not be said that the state's rural areas have become more indigenous in any substantive sense at all. To the question 'How can the community governance be protected from infection by the vices of Mexican politics?' Recondo replies that a process has been set in motion and it will be increasingly difficult, for example, to exclude women, or people in the subordinate agencies, but it will take time.

A book on Oaxaca published in 2007 could hardly fail to mention the disastrous turn in the state's politics in 2006, when the PRI Governor Ulises Ruiz destroyed much of what passes for institutional normality, and the APPO coalition of his fiercest opponents created, or deepened, conditions of quasi-ungovernability. The account is lucid and very exciting, although it requires little allusion to the previous 400 pages: indigenous issues fade into the deep background when higher-level politics heat up.

This book teaches us many lessons, among which I would highlight the implication that indigenist politics are not necessarily cultural politics. But this does not mean that institutional changes such as these cannot lay the basis for wider and more active political participation.

Cambridge University DAVID LEHMANN

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Stephen Beckerman and Paul Valentine (eds.), *Revenge in the Cultures of Lowland South America* (Gainsville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2008), pp. xxii + 314, $59.95, hb.

This volume reflects a revival of interest in matters that previously carried the risk of stereotyping lowland South American indigenous peoples as bloodthirsty. Although that caricature has long been dissolved, the new discourse, which is realist in its treating of what actually happens and suitably culturally relativistic in its contextualising of forms of violence within complex webs of behaviour and culture logic, illustrates ways in which new themes in the social/human sciences can both open up perspectives (the prominence of evolutionary psychology, for example, underscores an interest in a 'red in tooth and claw' analysis that has an obvious bearing) as well as recalibrating the meaning of violence in the context of new social landscapes (indigenous peoples challenges to developmental onslaught, as in the case of Kayapo demonstrations against hydroelectric projects, have played – often heavily – on themes of violence).

In line with the title, the contributions to this volume by and large couch questions of violence within the idiom of revenge, that is to say structured, feud-like reciprocal violence, rather than atavism, but the renewal of interest reflects a broader revival of readings, often quite dark and mysterious, of deep forest violence (cf. the kanaíma themes pursued by Whitehead).

The introduction, by Beckerman, stands apart from most of the other contributions in trying to inject into the discussion issues most closely associated, in a lowland South American context, with the work of Chagnon (that is, does violence correlate with reproductive success), but while there is a slight return to those arguments in the rigorous chapter by Erickson, most of the chapters address questions of violence as shaped by the analyses of Raymond Verdier (and, in passing, Evans-Pritchard).

Thematic coherence is sufficient, but the collection does at times seem rather disparate: an article on Inca revenge, for example, is fine in itself, but it is an

historical essay (most of the others are ethnographic) as well as one outside the lowlands boundaries. There is clearly a sense in which analysis is converging interestingly around, and recasting, old discussions of violence and revenge, and in this sense the articles individually – and in part collectively – indicate the significant advances available.

University of London STEPHEN NUGENT

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Ilja A. Luciak, *Gender and Democracy in Cuba* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2007), pp. xxviii + 143, $59.95, hb.

As the title of this book suggests, Professor Luciak's Gender and Democracy in Cuba seeks to connect two debates that already exist in Cuban research but which have rarely been considered together. Firstly, Luciak asks to what degree gender equality has been reached in socialist Cuba. Secondly, he asks to what degree democracy exists within socialist Cuba. These questions should be asked simultaneously because meaningful democracy must include the substantive participation of women across all levels of government and civil society. Gender relations in Cuba, especially since 1959, is a topic that has been researched by quite a number of scholars in recent years. Luciak's research on this topic is as much a bringing together of existing material as an original analysis. However relating this research to democracy in Cuba provides something more original, as Luciak examines whether Cuba has substantive democracy in a form that is a meaningful alternative to representative liberal democratic models that champion multiparty elections as the only form of democracy that counts.

The argument that underpins Gender and Democracy in Cuba is that, although significant achievements have been made in gender reform, Cuban triumphalism – the need to proclaim everything successful and harmonious – has had 'unintended consequences' that conceal or even compound barriers to women's integration in political participation and to convincingly democratic practices. In terms of women's integration into politics, the government's self-declared capacity to increase women's participation through positive discrimination highlights the general failure or disinclination to include women at the highest levels of powerful decision-making. Luciak joins others in arguing that the dominance of the Federación de Mujeres Cubanas over all issues and events related to women's interests has hampered a more pluralistic development of feminist activism in Cuba. Trumpeting the genuine achievements of the revolution in such areas as women's education, family planning, and legal rights in marriage and divorce has allowed the Cuban government to overlook other areas in which gender equality has never been reached.

Luciak argues that the perceived need to be unified in the face of US aggression has caused the Cuban government to restrict pluralism on the public stage and in the civil sphere. Luciak is sympathetic to the egalitarian objectives outlined by defenders of the Cuban system he interviews, but he is not at all an automatic defender of Cuban state policy, and is particularly clear in his criticism of aspects of Cuban governance that impede democracy, such as the imprisonment of dissidents, the lack of a free press and the absence of civil society organisations.

The book is written in a clear and straightforward manner, such that each chapter deals with relatively discrete themes; the early chapters cover the role of women in the Cuban revolution and gender relations since 1959, while the middle section turns