

Japhy Wilson, *Reality of Dreams: Post-Neoliberal Utopias in the Ecuadorian Amazon*

Yale University Press, 2021, pp. xiv + 304

Tom Perreault

Syracuse University

Shortly after his election in 2007, former Ecuadorean President Rafael Correa launched a putatively radical programme, the Citizens' Revolution (Revolución Ciudadana). A broadly anti-imperialist platform, the Citizens' Revolution sought to redistribute resource rents and reorient the country's productive base away from finite resources and toward a supposedly infinite, knowledge-based economy. It is the Citizens' Revolution, its distortions, contradictions and failures, that is the central focus of Japhy Wilson's excellent *Reality of Dreams*.

Wilson's book examines 'the reality of dreams in two senses of the term. It explores the role of utopian dreams in the production of social space, as constitutive dimensions of material reality. And it traces the ways in which such dreams are distorted and inverted in the process of their implementation, through which their reality emerges as something very different from their utopian vision' (p. 4). Dreams are a central leitmotif of the book, just as they were in state propaganda supporting the Citizens' Revolution. Indeed, one of Correa's primary slogans was 'Dreams are transformed into reality with the Citizens' Revolution' (p. 197). Correa himself proclaimed a Millennium City to be 'a dream in the heart of the jungle ... where before there was nothing' (p. 1). Correa's proclamations notwithstanding, there *was* something there: a Kichwa community and a rainforest, both sacrificed to make way for the state's modernising mission which, in a cruel irony, was partly justified in the name of Indigenous peoples and biodiversity. It is this tension between dreams and their reality that is at the heart of this book.

As a critique of state-led modernisation projects made possible by oil rents, *Reality of Dreams* reads like an amalgam of Fernando Coronil's *The Magical State* (University of Chicago Press, 1997), James Scott's *Seeing Like a State* (Yale University Press, 1998) and Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (Editorial Sudamericana, 1967). Wilson argues that the Citizens' Revolution failed not because of its totalising vision of modernity, but rather because its projects 'were modernist mirages, spectacular fakes, [and] absurdist incongruencies' that were ultimately overwhelmed by the social and ecological realities of the Amazon (p. 6). Wilson sets out not to explain the Citizens' Revolution's failings so much as to explore its contradictions, tensions and nonsensical, even hallucinatory, nature.

Reality of Dreams is organised into five main chapters, bookended by an introduction and a conclusion. Following a brief introduction, Chapter 1 ('Enchanted Forest') provides historical and geographical context by tracing the history of the Amazon rainforest as an Eldorado in the imaginary of the Ecuadorean state.

Chapter 2 ('The Politics of Awakening') then examines the mobilisation of oil workers, Indigenous peoples, and regional governments in the Ecuadorean Amazon in the early 2000s. These protests helped propel Correa to power, only to be absorbed, co-opted, and violently crushed by his government.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 explore specific projects of the Citizens' Revolution, and form the heart of the book. Chapter 3 ('Amazon Unbound') examines the effort to create a trans-continental trade corridor that would link the Amazonian city of Manaus, Brazil with the coastal city of Manta, Ecuador. Despite Correa's claims that Manta–Manaus would replace the Panama Canal, the route's feasibility was never adequately assessed, and the Napo River proved to be too shallow and swift for barges of the size required for shipping. Chapter 4 ('Cities of Black Gold') examines so-called Millennium Cities, planned settlements built for Amazonian populations. Of the over one hundred Millennium Cities originally planned, only two were actually built (Pañacocha and Playas de Cuyabeno). Ironically, both Correa and his detractors claimed that the Millennium Cities were the height of modernist planning. As Wilson points out, however, *'this is precisely what the Millennium Cities were not'* (p. 126, emphasis in original). Pañacocha and Playas de Cuyabeno lacked reliable water, sewers, electricity and internet connections. Shoddy construction materials quickly deteriorated, and the cities were steadily reclaimed by the forest. Faced with a lack of basic services and no prospect of employment in the cash economy, residents returned to their forest communities. In the end, the Millennium Cities were little more than Potemkin villages, built to appease Correa, but never intended to function as real cities, or even, it would seem, to be minimally inhabitable.

Chapter 5 ('The Mirage Laboratory') examines the establishment of Ikiam University on the outskirts of the city of Tena. 'Ikiam' means 'jungle' in the Shuar language. In the inverted logic of the Citizens' Revolution, then, it is fitting that the university was built in a region of Kichwa speakers, some of whose communities were forcibly relocated to make way for Ikiam's campus and a nearby airport (which was soon shuttered for lack of demand for flights to and from Quito). Ikiam was not intended to serve the educational needs of the local population but rather to showcase visiting – mostly international – scholars. Despite its stated aim of advancing twenty-first-century socialism, it soon became apparent that Ikiam would be modelled after the neoliberal universities of the Global North. Wilson recounts a farcical academic planning event that brought together 56 academics, of whom 47 were from northern universities. The entire workshop was conducted in English, despite the event's decolonising rhetoric. No members of local communities or Indigenous organisations were invited.

As Wilson argues, the Citizens' Revolution achieved the exact opposite of its stated objectives. Over time, Correa deepened his commitments to extractivism and neoliberalism. He signed a free trade agreement with the European Union, passed laws flexibilising labour contracts, and invited the International Monetary Fund back to Ecuador (after having previously expelled it). He also further privatised portions of the oil industry, while taking on debt to make up for the shortfall in oil revenues. In particular, he increased indebtedness to China from US\$7.1 million in 2007 to US\$17.4 billion in 2017, of which US\$8.3 billion was in the form of debt-for-oil loans (p. 204). Correa also intensified oil extraction and opened

portions of the central highlands and southern Amazon to mining, despite protests from local Shuar communities (some of whom were displaced to make way for two large-scale mines).

Reality of Dreams is a tour de force, and an essential text for anyone trying to make sense of Correa's Ecuador (I recommend reading it alongside Carmen Martínez Novo's outstanding *Undoing Multiculturalism* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2021)). Though it is grounded in critical theory – ranging from Marx and Foucault to Freud and Lacan – it is empirically rich and highly readable, with lively, engaging prose. Ultimately, what emerges from *Reality of Dreams* is a picture of the Correa administration as hubristic, performative and incompetent. In the flowery discourse of the Citizens' Revolution, the 'socialism of *buen vivir*' was a utopia that 'allows us to walk ... in an emancipatory direction toward the transformation of existing social relations', the 'egalitarian redistribution of resources', and the 'inclusive participation of the indigenous peoples' (quoted on pp. 3–4). But as one critic wryly commented, '*Lo que digas es fantástico, y lo que hagas es una cagada*' ('What you say is fantastic, and what you do is a piece of shit', quoted on p. 173).

doi:10.1017/S0022216X23000585

Hugo Cerón-Anaya, *Privilege at Play: Class, Race, Gender, and Golf in Mexico*

Oxford University Press, 2019, pp. xii + 217

Alice Krozer

El Colegio de México

During my studies of Mexico's elite, I often wondered how a select few could live so completely disconnected from the reality of the many in their own country. Their respective worlds only touch superficially, and many areas of public and private life are largely segregated. One of my informants, a young inheriting entrepreneur, suggested this was because the rich and poor did not share 'similar interests' (as in leisure activities), since these were conditional on income. If he, 'just to say something', liked golf, he would interact with other people who could play golf. Their shared culture gave them a shared way of understanding life, and according to him, there was little (non-contractual) interaction between people of different interests and activities in Mexico as the cultural interests of the rich and poor were different. Rather than imagining some essentialised cultural profiles for different socio-economic levels, though, he understood this lack of interaction between people of different interests and activities in Mexico to be a 'cultural, racial and social' issue, that is: people in high social strata would not interact with people they consider Indigenous, for instance, because this would not be socially acceptable. My