

## **The Moral Force of Indigenous Politics**

### **Abstract**

Political theorists often anchor state obligations to protect cultural difference in theories of identity. Liberal democratic states, they argue, have an obligation to protect the cultures and languages of minority cultural groups because such groups are the source of human identity and of an individual's most fundamental sense of himself. Constructivist theories of identity formation challenge these essentialist conceptions of identity and culture, and thus undermine dominant arguments for multiculturalism. Nevertheless, constructivism provides new grounds for assessing and legitimating the demands of oppressed minorities, including so-called cultural minorities. The obligations of states follow from the actions of states, and in particular from the role of state laws, policies, and ideologies in the formation of groups and identities. This book traces the history of exclusion and selective inclusion that has shaped indigenous politics in Mexico, from the colonial encounter to the Zapatista uprising, and from the jungle of Chiapas to the halls of the United Nations. The Mexican aboriginal population has been variously "raced," "classed," and "ethnicized," and each of these constructions has relocated them in a distinct political and policy space. The fact that the state has played a central role in forging indigenous identity has implications of normative significance regarding the legitimacy of minority claims, the source of liberal democratic renewal, and the proper scope of rights.