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Cosmopolitics Among Entangled Worlds: Indigenous Politics in the Highlands of Peru

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Abstract:

The ethnographic monograph *Earth Beings* from Marisol de la Cadena takes a closer look at indigenous practices that have challenged modern state politics in Peru in the last fifty years and that are described as “cosmopolitics”. Through a complex ethnographic narration, composed of seven stories and two interludes, the author shows the political relevance that natural entities, also called “Earth beings”, play in the lives and political struggles of two indigenous leaders from a community located in the region of Cuzco. This approach to indigenous politics in a post-colonial context not only invites us to acknowledge other forms of existence and other forms of “doing politics”, but it also critically revises ethnographic readings about indigenous practices.

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de la Cadena, Marisol: *Earth Beings: Ecologies of Practice Across Andean Worlds*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2015. 315 pages, 26.95 Euro. ISBN 978-08-2235-963-0

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Since the 90’s, many social scientists have shed light on new social movements challenging neoliberal state policies. Indigenous movements have been considered part of this rise of new cultures of resistance, which include the indigenous mobilization in Ecuador, mobilizations against the privatization of water in Bolivia, and the Zapatista movement in Mexico, among many others. These processes have not only showed how groups partially marked by otherness-production have found ways of making visible their claims as possessors “of other knowledges”. They have also shown how indigenous collectivities have partially permeated nation-state institutions, discourses, and practices, as the Plurinational constitutions of Bolivia and Ecuador or the recent protests against the Dakota Access Pipeline show.

The ethnographic monograph *Earth Beings* from Marisol de la Cadena, Professor of anthropology at

the University of California, Davis, takes a closer look at indigenous practices that have challenged state politics through the stories of two indigenous leaders from the community of Pacchanta in the highlands of Peru, Nazario and Mariano Turpo. The author goes beyond a narrative of multicultural recognition and does a deep analysis, critical towards modern political theory, where the disagreement that Mariano and Nazario's stories enact "challenges the inevitable historical requirements of politics" (p. 278).

The book is divided into seven stories composed of the narrations of the indigenous protagonists. As a theater piece, the stories are divided by two biographical interludes that introduce the reader to Mariano and Nazario. In the first story, the author talks about the theoretical perspective that will be present in her ethnographic narration and that is influenced by the concept of "partial connection". This concept, which emerges from the conversations between Donna Haraway (1991) and Marilyn Strathern (2004) (p. 31), refers to relationships that do not create a single entity, but a circuit of connections (p. 32). This analytical framework, which is at the same time a methodological approach for the conversations of de la Cadena with Mariano and Nazario, represents an alternative to stereotypes of either difference or sameness from indigeneity and advocates for the colonial historical condition of diverse and situated indigenous identities (p. 33).

The first interlude introduces us to Mariano and how he, as the *yachaq* (a person who knows) of Pacchanta, negotiated with the state and Earth beings (natural entities, non-human beings) the community's liberation from the hacienda. Through Mariano's life story, the author explains in the next three stories how partial connections are implicit in the political fight of the community, where an indigenous political leader is not only an individual interlocutor to the state but is always *in-ayllu* (existing with other human and non-human beings) (pp. 45-47). Furthermore, the role that the mountain Ausangate played in Pacchanta's struggle against the hacienda makes de la Cadena understand that Mariano's narratives cannot be accessible using the tools of history only (p. 57).

The second interlude turns to Nazario's life, the son of Mariano Turpo, who is also described as a *yachaq*, however, very skeptical about his father's political achievements that did not change the situation of abandonment of their people. Stories five, six, and seven tell how Nazario, in contrast to the political role of his father, started to work as Andean shaman in tourism. De la Cadena describes this job as the product of the neoliberal commodification of indigenous practices, where the state delegates the market the task of recognizing difference through the monetary promotion of cultural objects and practices (p. 164). However, the emergence of this Andean shamanism should also be ordered in the partial connections that this role contains. Nazario was still involved as a shaman in "*ayllu* worlding practices" that cannot be represented solely by history (p. 200).

In her epilogue, de la Cadena returns to the central argument of her book, the cosmopolitics enacted by Mariano and Nazario in connection to their community. For the author, the indigenous practices of both leaders propose a cosmopolitics, which the anthropologist translates as a decolonial practice of politics among divergent worlds “with no other guarantee than the absence of ontological sameness”(p. 281). This perspective permits de la Cadena to understand the political relevance that Earth beings played in the land struggle of the community of Pacchanta. Furthermore, this approach to indigenous politics in a postcolonial context not only invites us to acknowledge other forms of existence, but it also revises ethnographic works still entrapped in Eurocentric readings about indigenous practices.

The anthropologist’s critical and self-reflective exercise of making visible other ways of “doing politics” through focusing on the complexities and ambivalences existent in relations marked by partial connection, is her major contribution throughout the whole book. This exercise provides a useful reference for ethnographic reflections that want to go beyond a description-based reproduction of empirical data and beyond the limitations that methodological tools entail when trying to represent other worlds and other forms of knowledge. This contribution is certainly opposed to modern and multicultural interpretations of indigenous achievements as the inevitable result of increased democratic practices in postcolonial Latin America. This does not mean that a cosmopolitics’ perspective would reject the influence of certain democratic institutions; or of international human rights discourses in facilitating formal spaces of recognition for indigenous claims through, for example, the constitutional adoption of indigenous rights in several Latin American countries. However, cosmopolitics order these formal spaces within the limits of recognition offered by the modern state and focus on the “contaminations” or “partially connected relations” present within indigenous demands of visibility. De la Cadena’s book offers a sincere strategy that, without being unaware of these methodological limits, makes space for ethnographic speculation of practices and relations that exist in a way we do not know. This ethnographic speculation is possible through the ontological disagreement “with the established partition of the sensible” according to modern history (p. 281).

German Abstract:

Cosmopolitics zwischen verwobenen Welten: Indigene Politik im Hochland von Peru

Die Ethnographie *Earth Beings* von Marisol de la Cadena untersucht indigene politische Praktiken, die den modernen Staat in Peru herausfordern und die sie als "Cosmopolitics" bezeichnet. Mittels einer komplexen ethnographischen Erzählung, die in sieben Geschichten aufgeteilt ist, zeigt die Autorin die politische Wichtigkeit natürlicher Entitäten ("*Earth Beings*") im alltäglichen Leben einer Gemeinde in der Nähe von Cuzco. Diese Reflexion zu indigenen politischen Praktiken in einem postkolonialen Kontext lädt uns nicht nur dazu ein, andere Existenzformen und andere Formen "Politik zu machen" anzuerkennen, sondern auch über ethnographische Lesarten indigener Praktiken kritisch nachzudenken.

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