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The Inner Life of Mestizo Nationalism (review)

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para terminar con la lectura de *El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo* (1971) como una obra que cierra el ciclo de la literatura como sujeción y reconocimiento, es decir, como producción de sujetos para una política que habla el lenguaje de la hegemonía. Bajo la lente de Legrás, la novela de Arguedas es y no es literatura. Si Legrás había incorporado todas las críticas a la categoría de literatura producidas desde la subalternidad y el poscolonialismo, fue para abandonar la literatura y llegar al final de su trayecto a una literatura no ontológica; como acto, fundación sin suelo metafísico, poiesis, pura vida. Esta “vida” es algo que recorre el estudio de Legrás desde el comienzo; algo que la literatura no puede capturar en su plenitud, algo que los textos niegan, pretenden explicar o dirigir, pero que en Arguedas resulta en una estética que debe ser pensada como un acto.

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TARICA, ESTELLE. *The Inner Life of Mestizo Nationalism*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2008. xxx + 240 pp.

Estelle Tarica’s engaging study, *The Inner Life of Mestizo Nationalism*, expands upon José María Arguedas’s statement, “Lo indígena está en lo más íntimo de toda la gente de la sierra del Perú,” to show how *mestizaje* as a dominant state ideology is conformed by more personal, confessional, and intimate narratives and thus a sentimentalized “intimate *indigenismo*” that creates commonalities across class and racial barriers. Through an analysis of the autobiographical writings of Arguedas himself (*Yawar fiesta* [1941] and *Los ríos profundos* [1958]), Bolivian writer Jesús Lara’s novel *Surumi* (1943) and his bilingual essay anthology *La poesía quechua* (1947), as well as Mexican *indigenista* Rosario Castellanos’s *Balún Canán* (1957), Tarica highlights how in Latin America’s racialized societies, Indianness literally inhabits the heart of *mestizos* and the imaginary heart of national formations. She also analyzes how the sentimental appeal of these narratives—despite their ideological distortions—has been (and continues to be) so appealing to non-Indians. Since Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas’s famous defense of Indians in the sixteenth century (at the expense of Africans—as Jorge Luis Borges readily pointed out), *indigenismo*, while denouncing the exploitation of native peoples and resisting the equation of Indians with primitivism and barbarity, has nevertheless, perhaps unconsciously, “continued to justify the subordination of indigenous people” (xiii). As has been shown repeatedly, *indigenismo* therefore consists of an objectifying, positivist perspective. But, as Tarica shows, it also consists of a “subjectivist, intimate outlook” (xxiv). Given these two mutually conflicting perspectives, *indi-*

genismo therefore ends up being both “a racist and an anti-racist discourse” (xxii); a private, intimate narrative and a national, hegemonic one. Tarica’s study traces how intimate *indigenismo*’s sentimentalizing first-person “affective repertoire of powerlessness and affinity” (xxv) has resulted in moving testimonies of self and other, hurt and debt. Yet despite a contestatory political stance, intimate *indigenismo*, like state sponsored *indigenismo*, “has perpetuated Indians’ subordination to the state in the name of civilizing them,” and has gone from being “oppositional and minoritarian to dominant and hegemonic” (1, xiv).

The Inner Life differs from well-established critical routes in its emphasis on subjectivity and on the inner life of *mestizos*. Thus, as Tarica points out, rather than approach the Indians as a problem, *mestizo* writers’ intimate *indigenismo* works to destigmatize Indianness as a necessary means of crafting a legitimate *mestizo* identity for themselves. They thus approach Indians “as bearers of an inner voice lodged within national subjects, one to which national subjects must listen to recover their own identity” (13). In Lara’s *Surumi*, this move consists of a double refusal where Lara resists dominant *mestizo* ideology and the concomitant pressure to negate his own indigeneity. He thus also resists the notion that Indians are slaves/objects and people without history. As a consequence, he writes redemptive narratives about indigenous subjectivities. These *Bildungsromane* then, do not chart the transition from childhood to adulthood but rather that from slave/thing to self-knowing subject. Hence, they valorize indigenous forms of knowledge and indigenous epistemologies. And contrary to a critical tradition that valorized indigenous forms of orality, they achieve this through writing. Yet despite Lara’s refusal of stigmatization and markedness which led him to embrace indigeneity as a double refusal, his form of intimate *indigenismo* became a “key element of the hegemony of Bolivia’s populist nationalism” (79).

For women *indigenistas* like Castellanos, *indigenismo* served to couch Mexican women’s political vindications and search for equality. In Chiapas, Castellanos’s *indigenista* narratives valorize the “small voice” of women, Indians, and the down-trodden by inserting women into the national narrative. Refusing Doña Bárbara’s powerful persona dominant at the time (embodied by actress María Félix), Castellanos engages in a relationship of indebtedness to Indians as a way of signaling her emancipation from dominant notions of women-as-nature. From that vantage point, she refuses the barbarism imputed to her home state and indigenous Chiapanecos. By celebrating Indian craftswomen, she “plotted herself into the discourse of ‘lo mexicano’ and set herself up as student—like her contemporaries Paz and Rulfo—of an ‘alternative indigenous pedagogy’” (156). Yet, as with other male *indigenista* narratives, despite these vindications, the path of female self-discovery again nevertheless merges with the civilizing mission of *indigenismo*.

Tarica’s study revolves around why this is so and how *indigenista* narratives

became part of dominant ideology. The answer, she finds, lies in the continued appeal of *indigenista* sentimentalized narratives of self-discovery. Castellanos, for example, turned around the refusal of women's oppression and valued it for the alternative (indigenous) forms of seeing and knowledge that oppression made possible. In line with Mediz Bolio's analysis of this dynamic, Indian ways of seeing, and native insights "were subject to a certain fetishization by modernizing intellectuals searching for 'another way to be'" (165). When seen in this light, intimate *indigenismo* was forged "in an interethnic apprenticeship to a different kind of knowing" (165) and thus served as a link across class and racial divides. While informed by postcolonial studies, well-written, and theoretically savvy, this interesting chapter, like the entire study, falls prey to geography when it fails to tease out the differences between *mestizaje* as state ideology in Mexico (promoted following the 1910 Revolution) and the relative lack of dominance of the same ideology in Peru and Bolivia (not to mention Central America). Indeed, as so many of us teaching in the US academy, Tarica tends to generalize from Mexico and thus to mexicanize the rest of Latin America.

In her important conclusion, however, Tarica lays out the route to be followed by any new critical readings of *indigenismo*. She summarizes how intimate *indigenismo* forged alliances and solidarity across class and racial divides and thus served to contest the fragmentation and isolation promoted by modernity. The intimate *indigenista* rhetorical strategies she unveils throughout this study configured the nation in terms of the intimate sphere and countered colonialism's forms of imposed abjection thus rapidly becoming hegemonic. Yet despite the power and popular appeal of these narratives, "their role in the national-populist regimes of the mid-twentieth century has been downplayed" (185). Indeed, *The Inner Life* shows how power accrues "paradoxically enough, through the attribution of political powerlessness to certain kinds of people, such as the injured, women, and most importantly for mestizo nationalism, indigenous people" (186). In Mexico, Peru, and Bolivia, according to Tarica, the state accrues power *precisely and paradoxically* by listening to "small voices," and *mestizaje* as state ideology posits the "existence of a small voice at the nation's core, a forgotten voice to which one must carefully listen in order to be true" (187, 188). Predictably, like other forms of *indigenismo*, "intimate *indigenismo*," which also served as the vehicle for articulating *mestizo* (and women's) vindications, nevertheless ended up promoting national identity and delegitimizing "other, potentially more threatening kinds of liberation struggles, such as those emanating from organized workers and indigenous peasants" (189). These struggles are being articulated in numerous indigenous congresses across the Americas and in what Arguedas would have called an "Indian" literature—that is, a literature written by and for Indians.

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