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Review/Reseña

Estelle Tarica, *The Inner Life of Mestizo Nationalism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008.

Indigenismo Writ Intimate

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Estelle Tarica's erudite study of the mid-century *indigenista* novel centers on three indigenista authors, the Bolivian Jesús Lara, the Peruvian José María Arguedas, and the Mexican Rosario Castellanos, with a chapter dedicated to each. A methodological and theoretical reflection on literary *indigenismo* and its persistence in Latin American history begins the study, which is framed by an Introduction and a Conclusion. A rich presentation of local history and contexts accompanies the commentary on individual authors' works. Tarica strikes a healthy balance between reading indigenismo in its local, specific manifestations and interpreting its general, long arc in the continent. That balance is reflected especially in the three central chapters on each author. As much as they are case studies of

individual writers, each commentary serves as a probing look into, and indeed an education on, the three separate national cases of *indigenista* discourse.

The book's geographical breadth should not be overlooked, for it is one of its salient strengths. To my knowledge, it is rare that a study of indigenismo exceeds national or regional foci, and rarer still that it takes up these three central nations in indigenista production. The cases of Peru, Mexico, and Bolivia are sufficiently disparate to have merited few attempts at comparing them in unison, even while numerous studies exist of indigenista production within each country. It is to Tarica's credit that she brings together unwieldy histories and material—the fact, for example, that indigenismo in Mexico was institutionalized relatively early by the Revolution while in Peru it remained outside official power until much later—and distills her study's theoretical purchase in full appreciation of these differences.

That purchase turns on a felicitously termed and useful notion at the core of *Inner Life*. “Intimate indigenismo,” in Tarica's articulation, denotes a sort of indigenista discourse that “appeal[s] to the existence of interior and subjective realms of interethnic affinity and sympathy [...which] involve a turn to an interior sphere of “Indianness” that non-Indians share with Indians, a sphere that forms the basis of mestizo nationality.” (xx) This critical concept is a transformative, and compelling, tool in the study of indigenismo. Firstly, as scholars in various disciplines have recently done—for example, Javier Sanjinés in literary studies, Laura Gotkowitz in history, and Marisol de la Cadena in anthropology—it continues to mine and document the deep connections between the lettered practices of indigenismo and the social formations of *mestizaje*. Secondly, and most importantly, she insists less on the overt power imbalance between who speaks and who doesn't, a mainstay of studies of indigenismo and subalternity in Latin America, and more on the crucial question of how a language of affection and emotion, in short, of intimacy, comes to configure ties that, often coercively, bind unequal social actors to each other and within a nation. Tarica describes feelings that suffocate, because they are laden with dynamics of power that we are most accustomed to

perceiving in public, that is not sentimental, settings. Finally, the implication of Tarica's study is that it is highly instructive to understand mestizaje not primarily as mixture, but as a complex series of affective and emotional strategies. Here, mestizaje lies far from its biological implications; rather, it represents a social site of imagined community. For Tarica, "la gesta del mestizo," in Angel Rama's memorable phrase, becomes the emotive mechanism through which the indigenous are subjected to the rational, modernizing state.

She explores how this interethnic affinity, always too a declaration of affection from the lettered to the indigenous, operates in Lara, Arguedas, and Castellanos. In all three cases, Tarica is careful not to limit herself to the novel; indeed, she states outright that in order to make her arguments, she is most interested in the ways in which these authors represent the self, in particular their autobiographies, and so she has recourse to a large array of materials such as journals, essays, poems, and others' accounts. In the case of Lara, this approach frees her to read "his refusal to refuse" his Indian heritage not only in works such as the novel *Surumí*, where it is explicitly thematized, but also in the motives that animate a project such as Lara's essay-anthology *La poesía quechua*. Interestingly, the presentation of Arguedas in *Inner Life* also hinges upon his best-known novel, *Los ríos profundos*, as well as his translation of Inca hymns ascribed to the Inca Manco Capac. In these texts and others, Tarica makes a strong case for Arguedas' construction of the indigenous as morally innocent and spiritually pure, even if through translation he takes the role of the shepherd who ushers this flock into the modern nation. Comparatively, the analysis of Castellanos hews more closely to her important novel *Balún Canán*, although Tarica provides a trove of other materials, most notably letters and essays. Whereas the other two authors seem to fully inhabit their paternal attitudes toward indigenous people, Tarica reads Castellanos as textually conflicted: she first allies with the Indian in order to find a place for the feminine voice, but eventually abandons this conciliatory posture when she opts for "an ideology of progress and civilization." (182) In all these cases, reflection on the self is inescapably a reflection on the national reality.

At the end of her convincing study of twentieth-century indigenista discourse, Tarica considers the proposition that indigenismo has faded from view, ushered off the stage by indigenous peoples' own voices. The conjecture, which she ascribes to the French critic Henri Favre (but which also harkens back to the critic and indigenista José Carlos Mariátegui, who originally pronounced it as a prediction in the 1920s), is an important one to consider in relation to the recent momentous rise of indigenous movements across Latin America, and is no doubt meant to open up a fresh perspective on contemporary cultural production that correlates to our contemporary history. In considering the proposal, however, Tarica demonstrates the characteristic critical thoughtfulness that saturates her book. For her, insisting on too trenchant a break with the indigenista discourse of the past risks ignoring how the indigenismo she identifies as intimately linked to state power continues to exist in the pronunciations of the indigenous peoples themselves as they attempt to gain a greater stake in their respective nations' social and political power structures. In short, the fact that indigenous social actors pronounce a discourse on the Indian, *for* the Indian, does not necessarily mean that said discourse is devoid of the deep logic and rhythms of indigenismo.

Rather than take this judgment as a cynical position concerning indigenous peoples' enunciations and claims to the public sphere, it is best to understand Tarica's skepticism as a marker of the clarity with which she understands indigenismo to be tied up with the speaking and formulation, some would say continual reformulation, of Latin American nations. Though her study at first blush would seem to be an analysis of three authors and their arguably most important novels—and indeed it is this too—Tarica's is first and foremost an unraveling of how a particular moment of indigenista discourse and form, that of the mid-twentieth century quasi-autobiographical novel, stands as a sort of *mise en abyme* for persistent efforts at the formation of the state in the image of the mestizo. Tarica is not here concerned primarily with the content and thus the representations—representativity is perhaps a better term—that the novels enact; instead, for her they stand as densely complex instances of the logic that fabricates such mestizo nationalism. As she sees it, indigenismo is the

parent discourse to mestizo nationalism (187).

The book understands indigenismo beyond the contentious social dynamics between mestizo and indigenous subjects that have been a staple in analyses of this cultural, social and political movement, at the same time that it avoids the often celebratory view of indigenismo's efficaciousness as expressed through assessments of its accuracy and veracity. It does this by focusing less on these actors and more on the state formations which they inhabit, that is, on the various ways in which indigenismo comes to configure a nationalism that interpellates or at the very least envisions a homogenous subjectivity across the many diverse subjects that make up societies such as Mexico, Peru and Bolivia. For Tarica, intimate indigenismo as she deems it is anything but circumscribed to the individual. On the contrary, the personal becomes politically public through uniquely affective channels.

It should be noted that while the dynamics that Tarica describes at the heart of intimate indigenismo are compelling when we think of indigenista discourse in the autobiographical novels that she explores, the assertion of the dynamic of intimacy as the communion between indigenous and non-indigenous in the figure of the mestizo becomes much more difficult to see in other sorts—the material is vast—of indigenista production. Would it be possible, nevertheless, to see a similar sort of discursive phenomena at play within other indigenista literature? Furthermore, Tarica's commentary on Andean *huayno* makes me think that a remarkable archive for the attitudes and effects that intimate indigenismo encapsulates lies in popular and mass cultural production, not only song and dance, but also in the filmic and the televisual. Here surely there is a rich connection to be explored in future scholarship.

The Inner Life of Mestizo Nationalism is a very good book: informative, analytically savvy, rich in scholarly knowledge, and careful in its reading of complex texts and concepts. It has already enriched the study of indigenismo and mestizaje. I do not doubt that its interpretation of indigenista discourse as an everyday form of state formation opens up a new, vital avenue of research in the study of literary and cultural production in Latin America.