

Waskar Ari. *Earth Politics: Religion, Decolonization, and Bolivia's Indigenous Intellectuals*. Duke University Press, 2014. 280 pp., ISBN-10: 0822356171

In his *Earth Politics*, Waskar Ari creates a fascinating reconstruction of Bolivia's indigenous activist movement, *Alcaldes Mayores Particulares* (AMP). The AMP movement vitalized a project of decolonization through the social and political affirmation of indigenous rights and culture. The movement utilized the Aymara religious and political ideals which, in part, advocated for two separate republics, one Indian and one white (2). AMP thrived between 1921-1951 until changes following the Bolivian National Revolution led the movement to reorganize and address new forms of colonialism (3) In his unique historical approach, Waskar Ari contrasts the earlier Bolivian indigenous movement with the more modern revolutionary AMP movement to show how a politics of decolonization rather than a politics of reconciliation, although both well intentioned, was better suited to serve the Indigenous populations of Bolivia. In *Earth Politics*, he uses the narratives of key activist-intellectuals in AMP to show how "by framing issues, gathering audiences, and creating networks and social movements from inside the Indian world, these actors provided alternative understandings of nation making in modern Latin America" (3).

Ari details the lives of four key AMP leaders during a time where being Indigenous in Bolivia meant either complete assimilation or complete isolation. For example, one of AMP's leaders, Gregorio Titiriku, experienced urban Bolivian society's complete segregation in the 1920s. However, he continued venturing to the city because he believed that "we [Aymaras] are in our land and we have the right to walk in the streets, the plaza, the parks, and take the streetcars, as well as to sit down on El Prado and watch the trucks and the streetcars. No one has to stop doing that because we are the owner of these lands" (87).

Through adamantly rejecting the notion that assimilation was the only path to respect as well as social and political power, these leaders invented a system of advocacy that incorporated indigenous religion, dress, language, and customs which fought not for the integration of the indigenous populations into colonial society, but instead to carve out a dignified place in society that allowed the respect and celebration of Indigenous cultures in Bolivia. For example, Indians had to deal with laws that arbitrarily discriminated against anything indicative of Indian culture. One law being campaigned for around 1925 suggested that Indians should be banned all together, but, if they were allowed in the city "they should be prohibited from wearing the poncho and pants.... The purpose of this ban is to remove from the city the exotic, ugly, colorful, and ridiculous dress ...presents to foreigners a city with ponchos, "calzones partidos," and other extravagant clothes that Indians like to use" (89). AMP battled these offensive regulations by unashamedly wearing Indian dress in city spaces and encouraging others to do the same. This worked counteract what Ari calls "cholification" and to contradict the prevalent stereotype that Indians were uncivilized and were a blow to the cause of modernity.

Additionally, although not written for a legal reader, *Earth Politics* confronts major issues social and political movements face when confronted with the Law. For example, the older generation of these activist-intellectuals were committed to trying to gain back land that had been taken from Indigenous populations and converted into haciendas by searching archives of historical documents in the hope of finding colonial land titles. These documents would then be enforced, giving Indigenous groups legal title over the land that had been taken from them. However, these earlier activists were confronted with major obstacles that are inherent in the problem of liberating a disenfranchised and exploited minority within the framework of the colonial system. First, since the ability to escape the repercussions of colonialism relied solely on

colonial institutions approval, the control still laid in the hands of the dominant social structure. Second, only a small number of all Indigenous groups were able to benefit from the colonial title model because their land was taken either before or after the colonial period and, for many, no papers reflecting evidence of prior ownership existed. After a while, this system was no longer efficient or sustainable in accomplishing the goal of liberation and it frustrated those intellectuals (the future leaders and followers of the AMP movement) who wanted to work not only toward liberation, but toward larger more deeply systemic decolonization. Accepting colonial land titles as the answer to the Indian struggle meant, for leaders like Gregorio Titiriku, also accepting the ideological implications of the strategy as well. Titiriku did not believe the agrarian reform of 1874 to be valid, and he also “opposed the very concept of property titles as a legitimization of land tenure because he did not want the Indian struggle to be restricted to a fight for lands and property within the framework of the dominant sector’s laws” (48). Because of this fundamental disbelief in the validity of the dominant sector’s power, the colonial land title approach seemed destined to fail.

In the legal world, attorneys who represent disadvantaged individuals including criminal defendants, undocumented immigrants or refugees, and impoverished victims, often face similar structural barriers. The paradox of working for progress and liberation for historically disadvantaged minority groups within the majority system is that the system being relied upon was not created to serve the minority and will require huge changes if it is ever to do so in a meaningful way. Understandably, as a future attorney, Waskar Ari’s compilation of the AMP movement’s mission and tactics was incredibly inspirational to me. The four AMP leaders won their cause in a racialized and segregated society by reimagining what progress looked like. In my interpretation, to them, it did not look like acceptance, integration, or even land alone; what it looked like was an uncompromising refusal to forget about parts of their identities in exchange for dignity. Instead, they demanded both through the narrative telling of venerable Indigenous histories. In doing this, the AMP activist-intellectuals reinvented revolution as a movement to which humanity, customs, history, and religion were required. Miraculously, this inclusive model successfully accomplished cross-cultural indigenous unification and still resisted the white-washing of Cholo and Spanish culture.

The AMP’s utilization of *Earth Politics* in taking back land, language, religion, dress, and all other aspects of Indigenous Bolivian culture reflects a truly successful reinvention of modern revolution. And from the perspective of a future attorney, *Earth Politics* has illuminated that, if as activist lawyers, we can achieve the same ends through more inclusive means which tell narratives in the fight for justice, we will be doing our jobs much more effectively.

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