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Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2012)

**De las dualidades a las ecologías (From the dualities to the ecologies)**

Cuadernos de Trabajo No 18, La Paz: Red Boliviana de Mujeres Transformando la Economía (REMTE), 159 p.

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The reviewed book is a compilation of part of Boaventura de Sousa Santos' previous work bringing together three texts, which present an in-depth reflection and discussion of his thought in light of the current Bolivian and Latin American context. This compilation encompasses different talks given by Santos against the backdrop of the Eighth Indigenous March in defense of the Indigenous Territory Isiboro-Secure National Park (known in Spanish as Territorio Indígena y Parque Nacional Isiboro Secure). The work was published by Red Boliviana de Mujeres Transformando la Economía (REMTE), a network that focuses on alternative, equitable and sustainable economic policies to promote women's rights. Therefore, the book's intended audience consists of both scholars and practitioners.

Throughout the last decades, Santos' contributions have culminated in new ideas in different fields that were influenced by an epistemology of the South. These fields include Sociology, Legal Theory, Democracy, Social Movements, Post-Colonial Theory, Human Rights and Multiculturalism. Overall, this timely volume is a comprehensive

reappraisal of Santos' contribution to Sociology and contemporary critical social thought. The book sets out to explore sociological debates in relation to culture, knowledge, biodiversity and power. The text includes the author's reflections on Bolivian democracy, globalization, multiculturalism, plurinationality and postcoloniality. More importantly, however, the core arguments set forth by Santos therein are in line with decoloniality theory; a Latin American contribution to understanding modernity from a critical epistemic perspective articulated in the work of scholars such as Walter Dignolo, Santiago Castro-Gómez, Enrique Dussel, Fernando Coronil and Anibal Quijano. The work engages with some of the central concepts of decoloniality theory, such as the "new humanity" idea (Dignolo 2011: 52)<sup>1</sup>.

"Epistemologies of the South" is the underlying thought informing this work by Santos. According to this epistemology, other forms of knowledge (such as traditional or indigenous knowledge) have been marginalized from the production of scientific knowledge by academic elites, whereas they

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<sup>1</sup> Dignolo, Walter (2011): *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*. Durham: Duke University Press.

should rightfully be included. In this vein, the main issue tackled in this study is the debate between the duality of powers and the “ecology of knowledges” (ecología de saberes). It thus treats the opposition of scientific and non-scientific knowledge and the difficult access to information and scientific-technological knowledge experienced by vast sectors of society. In particular, the book focuses on one of the most controversial social conflicts in recent years: the Eighth Indigenous March in defense of the indigenous Territory Isiboro-Secure National Park. The conflict arose from the alarming and accelerated deforestation of one of the greatest natural areas worldwide, which was triggered by the prospective construction of a highway. As Santos rightly points out, the defense of the indigenous territory constitutes a universal primary interest that could give rise to new and alternative forms of cooperation.

In this context, Santos’ exploration of the different concepts involved in the production of knowledge implicit in the inequalities or asymmetries in the recognition of different types of knowledge is particularly interesting. In particular, Santos analyzes how two different powers and ecological conceptions coexist. Moreover, Santos asserts that previous attempts to end poverty have floundered partly because they were not backed up by the population, as exemplified by action plans against poverty. At the core of the fight against poverty there is, thus, a need to change public perceptions, misconceptions and prejudices and to better identify, understand and include relevant traditional knowledge.

The book is divided into three sections as follows: a map of alternative production, case-studies and nine theses about the alternatives of production and a concluding section on democracy.

In the first section, Santos depicts the current international and regional contexts and raises the questions that emerge in the transition from the dualities to the ecologies. Santos argues that there is a new wave of “colonialism” promoted by developed and emerging states that are taking over natural resources in developing countries. In the Latin American context, Santos addresses the contradictions of the Bolivian process: the necessary compatibility between development and distribution of wealth with sustainability. The co-existence of two dual powers in the new constitutional framework poses different questions regarding the inclusion of different types of knowledge, implying new economic conceptions and re-organization of the state. In the economic field this contradiction arises between “extractive developmentalism”, with the over-exploitation of commodities and natural resources to create profit, as opposed to the possibility of a model of development able to generate welfare reflected in the conception of “Live Well” (Vivir Bien). It is possible to solve this duality through what Santos calls the “ecology of knowledges” (ecología de los saberes), which proposes another rationality as an alternative to the predominant conception. A clear example is the social struggle over the defense of the TIPNIS against deforestation, pointing to new ways to challenge mainstream conceptions.

The second section contains a lengthy discussion about the breadth of the study, echoed in nine theses on alternative production built upon case-studies. All of them show the incoherence of the capitalist system. The author addresses the gaps in the literature relating to alternative development. Accordingly, Santos offers a different approach to the means of production: cooperation and cooperatives as alternative options to mainstream production. The author presents an emblematic case: the Mondragon cooperatives. These are a federation of worker cooperatives based on democratic organization and participatory management operating in the Basque country of Spain. The cooperatives are grounded in the framework of a socialism focused on popular economies and alternative development. These concepts are further developed in the text as counter-hegemonic ideas to the prevailing capitalism based on different principles. Therefore, the value of these practices lies in their ability to challenge the hegemonic logic and stimulate the debate on options for a more just society.

Finally, the third section deals with democracy. The previous discussion is complemented by an extensive and substantive reflection on democracy as a revolutionary project for the 21st century. Santos puts forward a proposal for alternative development and social emancipation that leads to a thought-provoking and insightful challenge to long-held assumptions. This holds true, even though at times Santos' approach is perhaps too ambitious to truly overturn the predominant conceptualization of knowledge.

In sum, this publication expands Santos' contribution to post-colonial theory regarding the dissemination of economic choices not governed by capitalist principles and a radical, emancipatory and inter-cultural democracy. In this way, he contributes to the postcolonial debate, specifically ideas on pluralizing epistemology and creating spaces for alternative knowledge systems. That being said, the book fails to provide a clear-cut plan to achieve such ambitious goals. Nevertheless, it does provide the reader with an analysis of some alternatives, as seen above, that can definitely contribute to building a more democratic and equal society.