

Mariela Noles Cotito (ed.), *Reflexiones sobre el Perú: Más allá del Bicentenario*

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Mercedes Crisóstomo

University College London

The commemorations of the Bicentennial of Independence in territories, now countries, that once were colonised by Spain have been remarkable events throughout Latin America. To mark these occasions, academics in the region have organised numerous conferences, congresses and seminars and published diverse academic and teaching materials. In Peru, not only but mainly around 2021, academics and academic institutions reflected on the significance of this commemoration by examining how past developments still influence aspects of present-day Peruvian society. *Reflexiones sobre el Perú: Más allá del Bicentenario*, edited by the Peruvian political scientist Mariela Noles Cotito, contributes to this effort by examining lasting structural inequalities that negatively impact Peruvian institutions and people's daily lives. Noles' book is a valuable contribution to the ongoing debate about what the Bicentennial of Independence represents to Peruvians.

Even though Noles acknowledges that 'studying Peru is a complex task' (p. 6), *Reflexiones sobre el Perú* embarks on that mission eloquently. This is an ambitious work that aspires to consider and shed light on, in Noles' words, 'everything Peru is' (p. 6). In a preface, prologue, three parts – '¿Somos una República? [Are We a Republic?]', '¿Quiénes somos la nación? [Who Are We as a Nation?]', '¿Hacia un Nuevo Pacto Social? [Towards a New Social Contract?]' – and epilogue, the book's contributors tackle crucial questions that have driven the debate surrounding the bicentennial commemoration. In each of these parts, 13 individual authors and collectives, including Noles herself, Cynthia Sanborn, Jorge Sánchez-Pérez, José Alejandro Godoy Mejía, Nicola Espinosa Anaya and Leda M. Pérez, Alexandra Ames Brachowicz, Américo Mendoza Mori, Ana Paola Yamada, Centro de Culturas Indígenas del Perú (Chirapaq), Colectiva Antirracista Disidencia Tusán, ONG Presente, Valeria Reyes Menéndez and Edward Dyer Cruzado, survey the enduring problems that have shaped Peru. Although each essay in the book is different in scope, topic and style, all of them discuss Peru's most relevant and urgent problems and needs from various analytical perspectives. At the core of the book are issues concerning the nature of the formation of the Peruvian state, nation and republic; religion and politics; citizenship and human rights; racism; linguistic discrimination; the construction of cultural, ethnic and gender identities; and the dramatic consequences of the internal armed conflict.

Although the book presents a wide range of themes, some common questions and topics intersect its 13 essays. Foremost among these crucial questions is what independence has meant for Peruvians, particularly for Indigenous people, the LGBTIQ+ community, victims of the internal armed conflict, household

workers, immigrants and their descendants, and so many other people who have felt excluded from the Peruvian nation-state. The answers to this problem, framed within different political, ethical, methodological, epistemological and theoretical approaches, emphasise three aspects. First, most of the essays in the book discuss the lack of a sense of nation, state, political community and shared history. The idea that, if one looks at the conditions of the above-mentioned social sectors, Peru might look like a failed state is both striking and appalling. From the authors' perspectives, evidence of this weak nation-state formation is apparent in a lack of national projects, inefficient reforms, governments' inability to manage the state, and the corruption that has placed millions of Peruvians in social vulnerability. Indications of this social vulnerability can be easily found in the precarious situations in which 'invisible' and excluded Peruvian citizens are living.

Second, Noles' edited book also contends that these 'invisible' citizens are systematically and persistently discriminated against and marginalised for speaking a native language; for having and embracing different cultures, ethnicities and gender identities; and for demanding respect and recognition of their rights. Furthermore, the authors argue that there is a system – and I would say a historical pattern – that has forced neglected populations to use precarious education and health institutions and to work in unstable and poor labour conditions. Such conditions steadily worsened their vulnerability and contributed to their dehumanisation and social subordination. Third, the contributors suggest that, although there is a persistent failure of the Peruvian state to include historically discriminated populations, there have been some policies, reforms, laws and institutions created to respond to and work for their demands, needs and rights. By providing the context behind the formation of these state initiatives, the authors also illuminate the crucial roles played by social and grassroots organisations in creating these institutions, which, for all their limitations, setbacks and contradictions, do represent a step forward in responding to the demands of neglected Peruvians.

Reflexiones sobre el Perú: Más allá del Bicentenario goes beyond the diagnosis and ethical denunciation of Peru's historical problems and presents alternatives and perspectives which enable the reader to imagine a different future. Particularly interesting are the proposals for the modernisation and reform of the state by promoting civil society's accountability, as well as the development of citizenship and political-participation educational programmes *from below*. In this regard, one of the book's distinctive features is the inclusion of essays written by collectives (*colectivos sociales*, grassroots and non-governmental organisations), whose voices and writings are not usually part of academic discourse. Their efforts and proposals to improve Peruvian society shed light on the importance of looking to long-term policies to transcend temporary commemorative aims and projects.

In conclusion, the essays compiled in Noles' book demonstrate the significance of continuing to examine and discuss Peru's historical tribulations. They also provide alternatives to overcome and tackle some of the main problems faced by 'invisible' citizens in Peru. Likewise, the book lays the groundwork for future publications which bring together the varied knowledge and experience of academics, activists and social grassroots organisations.