

# mundosplurales

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Reseñas



Christopher Krupa. 2022. **A Feast of Flowers: Race, Labor, and Postcolonial Capitalism in Ecuador**. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. 318 págs.

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Feast of Flowers tells the story of those Ecuadorian indigenous peoples who work in Ecuador's massive flower industry and how the flower industry in Ecuador subjects indigenous people to the dynamics of a "postcolonial primitive accumulation" (pgs 12-16). The book is based on over thirty-three months of ethnographic fieldwork working with indigenous peoples of the Cayambe region but the focus of Krupa's research is the flower plantations that define a new form of post-hacienda capitalism in Ecuador. Indeed, if one travels to the Cayambe area, even as a tourist, the landscape is defined by large towering structures ("greenhouses") of plastic and bamboo that are interspersed between indigenous territories and their agricultural fields. Interestingly, Krupa lived in an indigenous community in the area, but traveled to the flower plantations to do fieldwork on capitalism rather than focus on the dynamics of the indigenous community. Krupa successfully and creatively tells the history and dynamics of these plantations, and provides readers with key insights –and clear ethnographic examples– of the details and coercive forms used by flower capitalists. For Krupa, primitive accumulation is defined as, the "forces giving rise to a capitalist mode of production in a specific time and place" (p. 13) but he emphasizes two key components of primitive accumulation that define the

system. First, "modern" primitive accumulation requires violence to coerce people and organizations into submission to capitalistic goals, and second, history itself is "revised" and organized into a kind of historical consciousness that works as an ideology of power. Ideology and (mainly psychological) violence thus naturalize capitalistic suffering and make exploitation inevitable and profitable. The book is organized into four parts. In Part I, Krupa describes and analyzes the origins of the flower business in Ecuador and details the structural changes in the national and global political economy of the 20th century. He focuses on the credit boom of the late 20th century that made such a project viable. Chapter 3 tells the story of how the flower entrepreneurs acquired loads of credit for their initiatives, and Krupa explains how the emerging flower capitalism was connected to the haciendas through the continuity of elites—children of hacendados—who continued controlling land, money, and politics. New forms of finance defined this new world-economy whereby the expansion of labor-extensive production systems in the Global South allowed for emergent opportunities for specialized goods for Northern consumers. As has historically been the case in Ecuador, old elites transitioned successfully from one system of domination (the hacienda) to a new one (finance capitalism), and in so doing, they organized new systems and ideologies of power that reinvigorated capitalistic expansion and intensification.

Part II details the theoretical approach of "primitive accumulation" as a system of power that organized indigenous peoples into a class of workers who previously defined their livelihoods by other modes

of existence and reproduction. Chapter 4 shows how flower growers inherited the “salvationist” ideology that has, since conquest, defined the indigenous “problem.” There is an interesting discussion of “historicity” as related to different forms of capitalism, with the agrarian reforms of the 1960’s and 1970’s representing a liberation from old forms of domination. Capital, by seizing hold of temporality itself, naturalizes its expansion into new areas and new forms of production. Chapter 5 tells the story of how one flower company inserted itself in what used to be the hacienda “San José” and the failed struggle of a community to resist the building of the flower plantation. Through dialogue, propaganda, and legal maneuvering the company “possessed” the land (p. 151) through ideology, poetics, and even practices of showing respect. The change from the hacienda to these new processes defined by agrarian reform allowed flower projects to insert themselves into the landscape, and they were able to take over small strategic spaces among the indigenous territories by buying parcels of land and becoming owners. Flowers don’t require lots of land, just tons of labor, so passion rather than dispossession worked just fine. Drawing on the work of Glen Coulthard (2014), Krupa asserts that the capitalist advancement of “primitive accumulation” fosters colonialism rather than, as Marx had it, “the other way around” (p. 162). We can see, thus, how a new system of power and production came to define the Cayambe region, but one that did not seek nor cause indigenous communities and ways of life to disappear, only force them to accept the new plantations and cooperate with them. Part III focuses on capitalist “psychological”

and how capitalism becomes “interior” to a subject’s self or being. In flower companies, workers are subjected to psychological and psychometric testing, forced to draw portraits of themselves, and answer questions about feelings, their bodies, and their inner qualities. These psychological interventions derive from the legacy of viewing indigenous people as colonial subjects devoid of “culture” and the qualities that define personal advancement. Industrial psychology came to define the social praxis of indigenous work in these plantations, and people and the landscape were brought into a new system of domination very specific to the rural Andes. These processes of affective sympathy, as Krupa argues, strengthened the bond among worker’s bodies (and their minds) with new forms of capitalist production—making indigenous territories sites of struggle and contradiction with the collective and relational values that have traditionally defined community life. Industrial psychology, thus, has become a means to continuing the European “invasion,” but through sophisticated and specialized psychological violence.

Part IV deepens the discussion and documents how Cayambe’s flower plantations promote a “Fordist” (p. 236) ideology of assimilation based on notions of self-improvement, “improvement” that has, at its essence, the intensification of industrial labor routines. Krupa provides ethnographic data and interesting vignettes that support the book’s argument that contemporary capitalism creates value as “emergent,” a future oriented idea of cultivating (mainly) human capital for future “potential” (p. 243). We are shown how roses are grown, packed, and prepared for shipment and the methods of



extracting labor from workers through “discipline, sanction, and reward” (p. 245). The work day is described, different tasks, and processes that define the industrial forms of production and management. The flower plantations, in my view, are really factories that follow a contemporary industrialization model focused on sophisticated forms of psychological manipulation and disciplined routines that are surely implemented in other places throughout the Global South. The strength of this book is that it tells the story of the flower plantations and shows the dynamics of new forms of capitalism in what is a region dominated by the presence of indigenous communities and non-industrial rural ways of life. The psychological dynamics of domination at work in these plantations is striking, and I learned much from the arguments about how capitalism adapts to, and uses different temporalities to achieve its political goals of expansion. Overall, the book works well and is a nice combination of high theory, ethnography, and historical narratives of experience and events in the region.

No research project or book can do everything, and if there is one area that requires more attention it is to account for how indigenous peoples of the Cayambe region have adapted to the “new” capitalism, but also continue to resist colonialism and fight for their rights to reproduce their communities and relations as an indigenous nationality. As we know, for example, from the work of Emilia Ferraro (2004), for example, indigenous communities in the region still define their modes of existence through different values, such as reciprocity, gift-giving, sharing, and debts to the sacred *apus* (mountain deities). In the Cayambe region,

there are over 150,000 indigenous people organized in 131 comunas (<https://conaie.org/2014/07/19/kayampi/>) who belong to different local and regional organizations that are members of the powerful Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador or CONAIE. The uprisings of 2019 and 2022, which completely shut down the country, are evidence of the continued struggle of indigenous peoples of Ecuador against capitalist/colonial domination (Bréton, Gascón, and Mármol 2023). Behind such political actions are sophisticated and complex processes of subalternate struggle, not just for “recognition,” but for right to social reproduction defined by communal values and a more egalitarian or “decolonial” society.

In many ways, while the indigenous territories of the Global South may be thought of as the “periphery” of capitalism, they could also be viewed as being in the center of subalternate modes of life that demonstrate that capitalism is not so powerful as to define all relations, values, and thought processes. However, as this sophisticated and nuanced book shows, indigenous peoples of Cayambe have been forced to coexist in complementarity and contradiction with modern capitalist plantations that have penetrated into their communities, and scarily, their “minds.” Krupa’s book is a fresh and novel way to study capitalism, from the perspective a fine-grained ethnography of the internal relations that define local implementation, ideology, and praxis of specific forms of primitive accumulation. I enthusiastically recommend this excellent book, as it fills a crucial niche in the discussion of indigenous peoples and their complex relationship to global capitalism in the Ecuadorian Andes and beyond.

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