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Review of the doctoral dissertation by Taynna Mendonça Marino, MA, entitled "Empathy Beyond Anthropocentrism and Eurocentrism in Historical Theory", Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, 2025.

Taynna Mendonça Marino's doctoral dissertation constitutes an ambitious attempt to rethink the place and role of empathy in historical theory. The author undertakes a task that is not easy - not only the reconfiguration of the very concept of empathy, but also the inscription of this reflection into broader debates about the future of the humanities in an era we increasingly call the Anthropocene. The very starting point of the dissertation - the dramatic address by Brazilian indigenous leader Ailton Krenak in Congress during the Amazon fires in 2019 - signals that we are dealing with a work that does not confine itself within academic discourse, but responds to the burning challenges of our times.

The theoretical scope of the Author is impressive, as are her interdisciplinary erudition and courage in posing fundamental questions; on the other hand, certain aspects of the work raise questions and doubts, which I will attempt to present in the spirit of constructive academic criticism and within the fields delineated for doctoral dissertation reviews by the applicable legislation concerning academic degrees.

1. Assessment of general theoretical knowledge in the discipline

Marino demonstrates impressive erudition, moving freely across the vast areas of contemporary historical theory. Her knowledge of key historiographical debates: from classical hermeneutics, through LaCapra's psychohistory, to the latest proposals by Dipesh Chakrabarty or Zoltán B. Simon - testifies to thorough theoretical preparation. However, the Author does not limit herself to assimilating existing concepts, but critically reworks them, pointing to their limitations arising from anthropocentric and Eurocentric assumptions. An example is the genealogy of the concept of empathy, which Marino reconstructs, reaching back to the aesthetics of Robert Vischer and Theodor Lipps, through the phenomenology of Edith Stein and Max Scheler, to contemporary neuroscientific approaches. This work allows the Author to reveal issues constitutive of the very concept - that which "wanders" between the cognitive and affective dimensions, between understanding and co-feeling, between distance and engagement. Marino shows that empathy has never been an unambiguous concept, which - fortunately for humanists - constitutes its theoretical potential.

The Author's considerations extend far beyond the boundaries of history, encompassing philosophy of mind, moral psychology, ethology, animal studies, and environmental humanities. This interdisciplinary journey stems from the very nature of the problem undertaken. Marino understands that rethinking empathy beyond the framework of anthropocentrism requires dialogue with sciences that have long questioned human exceptionalism: from primatology to biosemiotics. However, it should be noted that this interdisciplinary scope conceals a certain weakness (which, incidentally, might be considered an immanent feature of "interdisciplinarity"). The Author sometimes too lightly? easily? hastily? - moves between different theoretical registers, not always taking care to precisely explain how specific understandings of empathy from neurobiology translate into historiographical problems. For example, the discussion of mirror neurons, though fascinating, remains somewhat suspended in a vacuum - there is a lack of deeper reflection on what neuroscientific discoveries can actually contribute to historical methodology beyond the general statement that empathy has biological foundations.

Moreover, although the Author declares a critical stance toward Eurocentrism, her theoretical arsenal remains, after all, largely Western. True, she invokes indigenous thinkers like Ailton Krenak or Davi Kopenawa, but does so mainly through the prism of Western interpreters (de la Cadena, Viveiros de Castro). One might ask whether such a way of incorporating indigenous perspectives does not subtly reproduce the same epistemological hierarchy that the Author seeks to question?

2. Assessment of the ability to conduct independent scientific work

Marino's independence of thought is revealed primarily in her original model of three dimensions of empathy: transcultural, transspecies, and transgenerational. This is an original theoretical proposal that emerges from a thorough analysis of contemporary challenges in historiography. The prefix "trans-" is not an embellishment here, but precisely defines the Author's way of thinking as crossing boundaries, but also as remaining in tension between that which is separated.

The chapter devoted to transcultural empathy, built around a dialogue between Dominick LaCapra and Ailton Krenak, represents an attempt at mediation between Western and indigenous epistemologies. Marino shows how Krenak's concept of "futuro ancestral" can challenge the linear temporalities dominant in historiography, opening space for other ways of thinking about time and memory.

The analysis of transspecies empathy, conducted in dialogue with the works of Éric Baratay, convincingly demonstrates that animal history need not oscillate between naive anthropomorphism and complete resignation from attempts to understand non-human experiences. Marino proposes critical anthropomorphism as a method that acknowledges the irremovable nature of the human perspective, but simultaneously remains open to what in animal histories escapes our cognitive categories. This subtle approach allows the Author to avoid both narcissistic projection and ethical indifference toward non-human suffering.

The most innovative appears to be the chapter on transgenerational empathy, where Marino takes up the problem of the historian's responsibility toward future generations. Using Kim

Stanley Robinson's novel "The Ministry for the Future" as a kind of thought experiment, the Author asks about the possibility of empathizing with those who do not yet exist. This question has fundamental significance for Anthropocene historiography, which must confront the problem of writing history in the face of a possible end of history.

3. Assessment of the originality of the solution to the scientific problem

The originality of Marino's dissertation lies not only in proposing a new model of empathy, but above all in convincingly showing that empathy can constitute the foundation of a historical ethics adequate to the challenges of our times. In an era of mass extinctions, climate crises, and growing inequalities, historiography cannot remain indifferent to suffering both human and non-human. However, Marino does not propose sentimental compassion, but rather "empathic unsettlement," which combines affective engagement with critical distance.

Particularly valuable is the critique of intellectualist approaches to empathy, dominant in historical theory since Dilthey's time. Marino shows that the reduction of empathy to a cognitive operation - "feeling into" or "understanding" - omits its bodily, affective, and ethical dimension. Invoking research on mirror neurons and observations of empathetic behaviors in animals, the Author argues that empathy is a capacity transcending species boundaries, rooted in the evolutionary history of life on Earth.

The proposal of a "post-anthropocentric ethics of empathy," formulated in the fifth chapter, constitutes the culmination of the argument. Marino is not satisfied with criticizing existing approaches but sketches a positive program of historical ethics based on care, responsibility, and vulnerability. This is an ethics that recognizes the interdependence of all forms of life and does not exclude any beings from the circle of moral concern.

Analysis of individual chapters

The first chapter, devoted to the genealogy of the concept of empathy, is perhaps the most "traditional" in the entire dissertation, but this does not mean it is predictable. Marino not merely reconstructs the history of the concept from German aesthetics to contemporary neuroscience, but shows how each successive reconceptualization of empathy was entangled in specific political and epistemological contexts. Particularly interesting is the discussion of empathy's "colonial unconscious" - the way in which the concept served to establish hierarchies between those capable of "full" empathy (Europeans) and those whose empathetic capacities were questioned (colonized peoples, women, animals).

The second chapter, analyzing transcultural empathy through the prism of dialogue between LaCapra and Krenak, is where the Author's theoretical originality reveals itself. Marino does not simply juxtapose two perspectives but shows how Krenak's concept of "ancestral time" can transform our understanding of historical trauma. While LaCapra focuses on working through trauma through narrative and critical distance, Krenak proposes a different model - living with ancestors who are simultaneously past and present. This is not about abandoning critical reflection, but about expanding it to include other temporalities. The chapter's strength lies in the nuanced reading of both thinkers. Marino does not idealize Krenak's perspective as "authentic" or "pure," recognizing that it too is mediated through colonial experience and dialogue with Western thought. At the same time, she does not reduce it to an exotic variant of Western philosophy. This balance is difficult to maintain, and the Author largely succeeds.

However, some doubts are raised by the very selection of Krenak as a representative of indigenous thought. The Author does not sufficiently justify this choice, which might suggest a certain arbitrariness. Moreover, focusing on one indigenous voice risks essentialization - as if there existed a single "indigenous perspective" on empathy and history.

The third chapter, devoted to transspecies empathy and Éric Baratay's animal history, is perhaps the most empirically grounded in the entire dissertation. Marino analyzes specific

examples from Baratay's works: the history of war horses, circus animals, pets - showing how the French historian attempts to reconstruct animal experiences without falling into naive anthropomorphism. The concept of "critical anthropomorphism" proposed by the Author seems particularly fruitful. It's about recognizing that we cannot completely free ourselves from the human perspective, but we can be reflexive about our projections and open to what exceeds them. Valuable here is the discussion of the "animal turn" in historiography and its limitations. Marino rightly notes that many works declaring themselves as "animal history" actually remain histories of human attitudes toward animals. Baratay goes further, attempting to write history from the animals' perspective, but even he cannot completely escape the anthropocentric trap. The Author does not see this as failure but as a productive tension that can lead to new forms of historical knowledge.

However, one can ask whether the focus on mammals - horses, dogs, cats - doesn't reproduce a certain hierarchy of beings worthy of empathy. What about the history of insects, fish, plants? Marino mentions these questions but doesn't develop them, which is somewhat disappointing given the ambition of the project. Moreover, the discussion about animal suffering as the foundation of transspecies empathy seems to narrow the field of investigation. Doesn't focusing on suffering risk reducing animals to passive victims? Where is room for animal agency, resistance, creativity?

The fourth chapter on transgenerational empathy is the most speculative and simultaneously the most urgent in the entire dissertation. Using Robinson's science fiction novel as a theoretical laboratory allows Marino to explore the limits of historical imagination. "The Ministry for the Future" is not just an illustration of theoretical concepts, but an active partner in thinking about the possibility of empathizing with those not yet born.

The Author convincingly argues that climate change forces historiography to confront an unprecedented challenge - writing history in the face of a possible lack of future readers. If historians have traditionally written for future generations, assuming continuity of civilization, what happens when this continuity becomes uncertain? Marino doesn't offer easy answers, but shows that transgenerational empathy might be the key to rethinking the historian's responsibility.

Particularly interesting is the analysis of "the rights of future generations" and their implications for historical practice. If we acknowledge that future generations have rights, does this mean historians have an obligation to them? And if so, what does this obligation consist of? Marino suggests that it's not just about preserving sources and testimonies, but about creating narratives that open rather than close possibilities for the future. However, the Author doesn't address the class dimension of thinking about the future sufficiently and the issue of intergenerational exchange. Yet it is precisely here that the aforementioned class gap reveals itself. Marino writes about responsibility toward future generations without noticing that the very possibility of thinking in terms of future generations is to some extent a class privilege. For people forced to concentrate on surviving today, thinking about future generations is an abstract luxury. Moreover, the Author does not sufficiently problematize the fact that it is precisely the wealthiest classes and countries that contributed to the climate crisis who now have the privilege of defining what responsibility toward the future means. Doesn't transgenerational empathy sometimes become a form of "temporal colonialism" - colonizing the future through the present, imposing on future generations our ideas about what they will need?

Although Marino mentions the "co-evolution of humans and intelligent machines," she does not draw consequences from this for her concept of transgenerational empathy. Meanwhile, if we accept the possibility of radical transformation of the human condition through technology, the question of empathy with future generations begins to complicate: How to empathize with post-humans? Will digital copies of consciousness be capable of empathy? These questions may seem fantastical, but in the context of a dissertation about the future that invokes science fiction, their omission is somewhat surprising.

The fifth chapter synthesizes earlier analyses into a proposal for post-anthropocentric ethics of empathy. Marino doesn't offer ready-made recipes, but rather an outline of a program that requires further development. Her concept of ethics based on care and vulnerability seems particularly adequate in times when traditional ethics based on subject autonomy prove insufficient in the face of planetary challenges. The Author convincingly argues against a purely intellectualist approach to empathy in historiography. Her postulate of "de-intellectualizing"

historical empathy deserves attention, though it also raises questions about the limits of this process. Can a historian completely abandon critical distance in favor of affective engagement? Marino suggests that it's not about choosing between one and the other, but about their dialectical combination, but she doesn't explain exactly how this would look in research practice.

The relationship between empathy and justice also remains problematic. Marino seems to assume that more empathy automatically leads to a more just world. Meanwhile, as Paul Bloom's research cited by the Author shows, empathy can be biased, leading to favoring those close to us at the expense of distant Others. Marino tries to respond to this objection by proposing trans-cultural, trans-species, and trans-generational empathy, but doesn't explain how to overcome the fundamental limitation of our empathetic capacities.

Methodologically, Marino's dissertation represents an interesting hybrid. The Author combines conceptual analysis with inspirations from grounded theory, case study with speculative philosophy. This methodological diversity is simultaneously the work's strength and weakness. On one hand, it allows for a multidimensional approach to the problem of empathy; on the other - it sometimes gives the impression of lacking a coherent method. Particularly successful are those fragments where Marino analyzes specific texts: whether LaCapra's, Krenak's, or Robinson's. Her reading is thorough and creative, discovering non-obvious connections.

The language of the dissertation deserves separate commentary. Marino writes with passion and engagement, which makes for pleasant reading, but sometimes leads to rhetorical excess. Phrases such as "planetary catastrophe" or "world in permanent crisis" appear so frequently that they lose their impact. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that the Author skillfully operates with metaphor - "empathic unsettlement," "entangled times," "becoming-with" - creating language adequate to the complexity of the phenomena analyzed.

Despite the reservations presented, Marino's dissertation constitutes a significant contribution to the development of historical theory. Her proposal for an expanded concept of

empathy opens new perspectives for historiography attempting to grapple with the challenges of the Anthropocene. Particularly valuable is the attempt to overcome the dichotomy between constructivism and realism through a concept of empathy as a relational mode of cognition that recognizes both cultural mediation and the material reality of historical experiences. This work may become an important reference point for researchers interested in historical ethics, animal history, Anthropocene studies, or posthumanist historiography. Even if not all of the Author's proposals prove convincing, the very attempt to rethink empathy beyond anthropocentric and Eurocentric frameworks deserves recognition and continuation.

In conclusion, I would like, based on the doubts and opinions presented above, to formulate several questions that could become a starting point for discussion during the public defense:

1. How does the Author envision the practical application of her concept of empathy in specific historical research? Could she provide an example of how a historian would utilize the model of transcultural, transspecies, and transgenerational empathy in working with sources?
2. What is the Author's position on the development of AI and its implications for understanding empathy? Can machines be subjects or objects of empathy in her model?
4. Isn't transgenerational empathy a form of colonizing the future through the present? How can we be certain that future generations will need our empathy?

Conclusion

Taynna Mendonça Marino's doctoral dissertation constitutes an ambitious and in many respects pioneering theoretical undertaking. Her proposal of a triadic model of empathy - transcultural, transspecies, and transgenerational - opens fascinating perspectives for historical theory and the humanities broadly understood. The undoubted strength of the dissertation is its interdisciplinary

scope and theoretical courage. Marino is not afraid to pose fundamental questions about the possibilities and limits of historical knowledge, about historians' ethical obligations toward human and non-human Others, about responsibility toward generations that do not yet exist. At the same time, the work contains certain gaps that weaken the force of argumentation. The lack of systematic reflection on the class dimension of empathy, the omission of artificial intelligence issues, the insufficient grounding of some key concepts - all this means that Marino's ambitious project remains in certain aspects unfinished. These shortcomings, however, do not disqualify the dissertation, but rather indicate areas requiring further research and reflection.

Based on the above assessment, I state that the doctoral dissertation by Taynna Mendonça Marino, MA, meets all requirements for doctoral dissertations in accordance with Article 187 of the Act of July 20, 2018 - Law on Higher Education and Science. The Author has demonstrated general theoretical knowledge in the discipline of history, proven her ability to conduct independent scientific work, and presented an original solution to a significant scientific problem. Therefore, I recommend admitting Taynna Mendonça Marino to the public defense of her doctoral dissertation.

At the same time, taking into account the ambitious theoretical design of the dissertation, its interdisciplinary character, the originality of the proposed conceptual solutions, and the significance of the undertaken issues for contemporary historical theory, and also recognizing that the limitations I have indicated do not diminish the fundamental value of the work, but rather testify to the complexity of the undertaken topic, I propose that the doctoral dissertation by Taynna Mendonça Marino be awarded distinction.