



This World, Other Worlds: Sickness, Suicide, Death, and the Afterlife among the Vaqueiros de Alzada of Spain

Maria Catedra

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The Vaqueiros de Alzada, a cattle-herding people in the Asturian mountains of Spain, have one of the highest suicide rates in Europe—and an attitude toward death that gives this statistic unusual meaning. *This World, Other Worlds* considers death among the Vaqueiros as a central cultural fact which reveals local ideas about the origin and destiny of humans, the relations of humans and animals, the configuration of the universe, and the nature of society. Interested chiefly in the conceptual and meaningful aspects of death, María Cátedra focuses on the cultural resources with which the Vaqueiros confront their own mortality—how they experience death and what this reveals about the way they see this world and other worlds.

Applying sensitive ethnographic insight to a rich body of oral testimony, Cátedra discloses an unsuspected symbolic universe native to the Vaqueiros. Death is seen here in close, coherent relation to pain, age, and suffering; sickness and suicide, one must understand the cultural valuation of different ways of dying and the conditions under which suicides take place. To understand what it means to be a Vaqueiro is to understand how suicide can be perceived by a people as acceptable.

A groundbreaking work in European ethnography, *This World, Other Worlds* takes symbolic analysis to a new level. In its illumination of local conceptions of death, grace, and sainthood, the book also makes a substantial contribution to the anthropology of religion.

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