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REVISITING THE COLONIAL QUESTION IN LATIN AMERICA

The challenge of fully comprehending the extent and implications of coloniality at the economic, political and social levels has constituted, over the centuries, one of the most complex and compelling tasks undertaken by peoples living in Latin America in the aftermath of European colonization. For academics and intellectuals working on this region, the utilization of critical and theoretical paradigms created by schools of thought in the centers of world capitalism has constituted a particularly polemic practice. As it has been argued on many occasions, most of the conceptual and even ideological models provided by European philosophy for the understanding of imperial domination often transpired, in one way or another, the privileged location of thinkers whose ideas developed in cultures that had themselves not been foreign to the practice of imperial expansion. It was at those locations where the *civilizing mission* of colonizers was defined and refined, over and over again, for a variety of historical and geo-cultural scenarios. It was also at those centers where the technologies of racial classification and the myth of modernity, which nurture the ideology of Occidentalism, were elaborated, in order to legitimize, propel, and even glamorize imperialism.

At the same time, it cannot be denied that it has been in the realm of those cultures where many philosophical and political positions opposing transnational expansion and subjugation of dominated peoples were formulated as well by thinkers who, working against the grain, opposed the practice and discursive foundations of "historic" and modern colonialism. A vast body of work has been, in fact, produced, from many fronts, in order to analyze, from a variety of disciplinary and ideological angles, the colonial machinery: its economic and political intricacies, its ability to produce and disseminate a web of discourses, regulations, and aesthetic devices aimed at representing the dominating *Self* and the colonial *Other*, its devastating economic, cultural and ecological bearings, and its ethical and political significance.

Nevertheless, outside the limits of the Hispanic and Luso-Brazilian fields of study, Spanish and Portuguese colonization, as well as those implemented by other European nations in the Caribbean region, has not received much attention in central debates. In recent decades, following the fall of state socialism and the end of the Cold War, and parallel to the strengthening of US hegemony in the context of the new world (dis)Order, the discussion of topics such as modernity and colonization has renewed, to a great extent, its critical and theoretical foun-

dations. New positions, which incorporated reflections on the processes of decolonization that took place during the first decades of the 20th-century, refurbished the discussion on colonial subjectivity, slavery, indigenous and Afro-American resistance, the consolidation of national states, implementation of modernization, and the formation of collective identities after the Emancipation, shedding new light on the conflicts and projects that traversed societies and cultures heavily impacted by territorial conquest and imperial settlement, and by the everlasting effects of foreign domination and economic dependency.

Even within this context of renovated debates and innovative critical approaches, and in spite of the ample focus of postcolonial theories, Latin America was almost systematically excluded from comparative analyses and, when mentioned, often reduced to a series of references and *clichés* relating to the aesthetics of magical realism, or to a limited corpus of canonical authors whose works are supposedly representative of Latin America's exotic imaginaries and struggling marginality.

Thus, from the perspective of the ideologically charged field of Latinamericanism, at least two things were missing in modern and postmodern exchanges on colonialism. First, the full consideration of Latin America's colonial history as a key element for the study of a phenomenon that impacted this region at a much earlier time and with a much wider scope than many of the areas traditionally used as "case studies" in comparative analyses of this kind. Secondly, the inclusion in the debate of the critical, theoretical, and testimonial voices of those who suffered and/or reflected upon colonialism and coloniality in Latin America.

Well aware of the magnitude and importance of these tasks, which can only be undertaken through collective and comparative work, and as a contribution to on-going debates on postcolonialism, modernity, decolonization, and globality, this book has gathered a series of studies that attempt to define the "colonial question" from a variety of ideological, philosophical, and critical perspectives, taking into consideration the *long durée* of Latin American coloniality. It constitutes, then, an attempt to articulate some of the problems relating to both the imposition of colonial structures in the region since the "discovery" to the emancipation, and to the perpetuation and reinvention of colonial structures in modern times.

Revisiting the Colonial Question in Latin America offers a combination of theoretical reflections and critical approaches on topics such as the role of historical accounts, cultural practices, and symbolic representation (literary writing, oral narratives, visual images, and artifacts) through which some of the parameters of colonized epistemologies become apparent to the European *Other*.

Some studies explore the role of legal, religious, and literary discourses in the depiction and regulation of cultural difference. Others elaborate on the production of stories or historical accounts in which popular beliefs intersect with

political events, or on the role of experience and power in the representation of gender relations in colonial and postcolonial settings. Many of the articles included in this book are particularly concerned with the pertinence or inadequacy of postcolonial theory for the study of Latin American history and for the analysis of the region's specific articulation to the ideology of Occidentalism. The connection between (post)modernity and (post)colonialism is proposed, in several articles as the axis, around which the practices of domination and resistance need to be understood in order to approach the "colonial question" —and the question of coloniality— in a productive and innovative manner.

As a "floating signifier" that traverses the project of this book, the "colonial question" suggests the need to (re)define some basic temporal and special parameters. Temporally, it calls for the elaboration of periodizations that can shed light on specific historical conditions that allow for the contextualization and comparison of colonial scenarios and processes of decolonization around the world. At the same time, historical analyses provide the necessary foundation for the identification of differentiated stages in the imposition and consolidation of imperial domination, and for the study of emancipations that mark the conclusion of formal —"historical"— colonialisms and the inauguration of national projects and new forms of dependency in contemporary times. Spatially, the "colonial question" involves the reflection on a variety of cultural scenarios located in a wide array of historical and geographical settings. This diversity calls for comparative, trans-disciplinary approaches aimed at the recognition of diverse models of imperial domination as well as of specific implementations of colonial control in very different regions and historical moments. Both historically and geographically, the processes of conquest, colonization and emancipation of Latin American territories incorporate very specific and particular variables to the study of colonial encounters and, more generally, of modern coloniality. The early origins and ample duration of Peninsular domination in transatlantic domains, as well as the devastating effects of imperial control on pre-Hispanic societies have no parallel in the history of colonialism. As it is well known, the impact of the "discovery" of the New World in European imaginaries triggered the emergence of Modernity and, with it, catapulted a series of economic, political, cultural, and scientific transformations that initiated a new era in the history of Western civilization. The human cost of imperial domination due to war, illnesses, and the exploitation of indigenous peoples and African slaves also reached unimaginable levels in territories that suffered Spanish and Portuguese colonization. But the "colonial question" is not limited to the recognition of these facts. It also encompasses the analysis of the impact these conditions had on the colonizers' *weltanschauung*, and of the particular ways in which imperial domination was materially and symbolically perpetuated and reproduced over the centuries.

Thematically, the approach to the colonial question entails the study of collective subjectivities, the devices that preserve the memory of traditions, lost cultures and subaltern epistemologies. It also includes the ways in which social hierarchies, racial categorizations, and gender divisions intersect throughout the development of social practices and discourses of resistance and liberation. At the same time, the topic calls for the analysis of the complex negotiations of power and authority that characterized Creole societies in colonial times, as well as “emancipated” social formations after the wars of Independence. Finally, when we move from “historical” colonialism to coloniality (understood as the perpetuation of colonial structures throughout modernity) the “colonial question” involves the exploration of the multiple and often concealed reappearances and reconfigurations of Empire in contemporary times.

* * *

The editors of this book hope that revisiting the “colonial question” will be a step forward in the understanding of diverse models of imperial domination and of the variety of ways in which resistance and emancipation are conceived in Latin America. The articles collected here respond in different manners to the problems posed by the colonial question and by the coloniality “in question.”

Alberto Moreiras essay addresses the Spanish imperial reason analyzing its function as an ideological construct aimed at justifying colonial exploitation. He elaborates upon the function of imperial Reason as both a justification and as a critique of the unthinkable primitive imperial accumulation. Moreiras argues that historically, imperial reason continued to exist “by presenting itself as always already its own critique.” Beyond their differences and disputes what Fernández de Oviedo, Ginés de Sepúlveda, and Las Casas had in common was that they were “organic thinkers of the Spanish Empire.”

Both Lúcia Helena Costigan and Raquel Chang-Rodríguez explore forgotten colonial subjectivities and their representations in different colonial con(texts). Costigan is interested in de-centered colonial voices in Brazil, such as those of writers of African and Jewish origin, absent from the canon, due to the convenient and incorrect assumption of the scarcity or inexistence of written texts produced by them. Costigan focuses on the colonial discourse of writers of Jewish origin, using as an example the case of Bento Teixeira, a Portuguese New Christian who lived in Brazil during the second part of the 16th century. The Jewish and crypto-Jewish experience in the New World offers a new perspective on the colonial question at play in the writings of these diasporic and imperial subjects.

Raquel Chang-Rodríguez examines a neglected aspect in the study of the *New Chronicle* by Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala: the representation of Spanish women in his writing. Her study underscores the important presence of Spanish women in the First New Chronicle analyzing the ways in which the author articulates the image of women in his narrative and in his version of colonial society. The “colonial question” analyzed in this essay focuses on the relationship between culture, ethnicity, and gender, as represented in one of the most important documents of what is today considered *colonial literature*.

Mabel Moraña’s study revisits the topic of popular insurgency and its multiple colonial facets by examining both the significance of documents pertaining to historical archives and the multifarious interpretations elaborated around the famous Indian tumult of 1692 in Mexico City. The essay sheds light on the kaleidoscopic nature of the “Indian tumult” and on the ways in which the indigenous rebellion challenged the unstable balance of Creole society. It also elaborates on the impact these events had on the literary protocols traditionally used at the time to document particular events that threatened the order of colonial society and jeopardized the solidity of the lettered city. The article contributes to both the study of Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora, author of the chronicle focused in this study, and of the paradoxical role of *letrados* in colonial society.

The article offered by Brazilian historian João José Reis concentrates on the subject of slavery in Brazil during the 19th century. Being the last country in the hemisphere to abolish slavery (in 1888), the history of Brazil was impacted by this regime of human exploitation. Reis’ analysis elaborates upon the discourse that prompted the recognition of slaves as historical subjects. His article studies both social actions and discourses relating to the abolitionist movement. According to Reis, the attack on slavery was produced at the intersection of “secular macro-politics,” “day-to-day micro-politics,” and “mysterious celestial politics”: “A good part of slave politics was played out” —Reis indicates— “on a field of power erected between everyday reality and the other world.”

Joshua Lund’s essay proposes a discussion of hybridity —which Lund considers “the generic mark of Latin American cultural production”— with the goal of reconnecting it with “Eurocentrically-articulated theories of *race*.” Rather than analyzing hybridity as part of a broader discussion of national politics or subject formation, Lund’s article rethinks hybridity in terms of biopolitics in order to explore the articulation between subjects, bodies, and the State. For him, “[t]he relationship between cultural mixing and racial marking is intimate, indeed inextricable.” With a thorough review of Latin American authors such as Jorge Luis Borges, Gilberto Freyre, Antonio Candido, José Vasconcelos, Néstor García Canclini, Aníbal Quijano and Roberto Schwarz, and “central” intellectuals such as Jacques Derrida, Homi Bhabha, and others, the article problematizes the strict-

ly cultural uses of the concept and suggests a new reading of the national question, particularly at the levels of identity formation and cultural production.

Boaventura de Sousa Santos's article focuses on a large colonial cultural map: a "vast, multi-secular contact-zone involving the Portuguese people and other peoples of America, Asia, and Africa." He maintains that since the 17th century, when Portugal became a mediating country in the modern capitalist world system, a colonial condition has basically persisted until today. De Sousa Santos argues that this semi-peripheral condition has reproduced itself until quite recently on the basis of a double colonial system, as Portuguese colonies were subjected to a "double colonization": that of Portugal and, indirectly, the colonization of the British Empire that placed Portugal also in a position of colonial dependency. The end of the Portuguese colonial system "did not determine the end of the colonialism of power, either in the colonies or in the former colonial power."

In addressing the topic of cultural and racial hybridity, Nadia Lie offers a re-reading of *Calibán* "not so much as a 'postcolonial text,' but rather as a document that can be analyzed by means of 'postcolonial reading strategies.'" Fernández Retamar's essay, considered by Fredric Jameson "the Latin American equivalent of Said's *Orientalism*," has been the target of multiple rewritings and interpretations. Lie's article reviews the contexts that surrounded the production of the text, the Padilla affair, the connections between Fernández Retamar's essay and other Latin American authors of the 19th and 20th centuries (Rodó, Sarmiento, et al), and analyzes the impact that the "dialectics of Caliban" has had on reflections regarding Latin America's cultural identity and neocolonial condition.

Agustín Laó-Montes' contribution also refers to the Caribbean region, particularly to the "great divide" between the two Americas, which takes place after the Spanish-Cuban-American-Philippines War of 1898; the (neo)colonial and imperial war that defined Latin America's geopolitical and cultural imaginary for more than a century. This event constitutes a key moment in the development of hemispheric imperial struggles. Laó-Montes analyzes the significance of the conflict as a strategic extension of imperial frontiers, as a step in the plan towards "civilizing the Tropics," and as a way of consolidating American Occidentalism, a project that has had enormous consequences for Latin America. The article focuses also on José Martí's and José Enrique Rodó's opposing positions with respect to the ideology of Eurocentrism.

For historical reasons, the "colonial question" has a traumatic centrality in the Caribbean. Iris Zavala's article engages the "simultaneity of heterogeneities" in the Caribbean (heterogeneity being, as heteroglossia, "a surplus of signification"), where the distinction between colonialism, neocolonialism, and postcolonialism tends to disappear. From the perspective of Lacanian theories the critic explores what she calls "the fantasies of postcolonialism" in the Antilles ("a totality with different identities"), where "some islands can be simultaneously colo-

nial or neocolonial and, at the same time, share the dilemmas and enigmas of a postcolonial subject." For Zavala, postcoloniality is not understood in reference to a certain temporality (it is neither a chronology nor a linear concept) but as a dialectical structure (a "logical time") where the moments of seeing, understanding, and concluding, produce subjectivities that belong to different collectivities at a time. Zavala disbelieves of the applicability of master discourses to the Caribbean region. Again, postcolonialism appears as a "floating signifier." *Caribbeanness* is then, the scenario in which society performs the fantasy of an unreachable homogeneity; a colonial fantasy that must be put in question.

Rosalva Aída Hernández Castillo examines the theoretical production of postcolonial feminists taking into consideration "the political and cultural realities that women live South of the Rio Grande." Some of the foci of Hernández Castillo's exploration are "Border identities," as described by Gloria Anzaldúa, as well as the particular contributions of feminism to the understanding of social and cultural problems affecting populations living in the Mexican border. The article elaborates upon the contributions of postcolonial feminisms to Latin American feminisms stressing the reaction against the implications of universalism and cultural essentialism, and the need to recognize that local struggles are inserted in global processes of capitalist domination.

Finally, Silvia Nagy-Zekmi also traverses the theoretical field of Border Studies by introducing the discussion of topics such as heterogeneity, transculturation, diaspora, exile, migration, and the like, in order to challenge "the binary classification deployed in the construction of the Other" with the theoretical tools provided by postcolonial theory. Her article focuses on an analysis of the "disjuncture between the nation state and the location of (its) culture." In other words, she disassembles the traditional connection between nation and culture, and introduces the concepts of border, and "conciencia mestiza" (as used by Gloria Anzaldúa, Norma Alarcón, José David Saldívar, and others) for the study of hybrid subjectivities, in which Latin American and North American components meet and intermix. This allows her to go beyond the traditional notion of "cultural resistance" into the less traditional field of displacement, *in-betweenness*, and transnational identities.

This collection of essays is aimed at illuminating the "colonial question" from a variety of cultural, theoretical, and ideological angles that would allow the reader to perceive the continuities as well as the substantial variations that imperial domination has assumed over the centuries in the Latin American region. History, as revealed by these studies, constitutes the inescapable axis around which the perpetuation of imperial control and the strategies of resistance and emancipation should be analyzed. Concurrently, regional —geo-political— specificities and cultural particularisms pose an unavoidable challenge in the study of the "colonial question": they incorporate factors into the equation that evoke locality, dai-

ly life, collective imaginaries, and political and ideological contradictions, that evidence the uniqueness of the social formations which suffered the effects of imperial expansion. Hopefully, this book will offer new avenues for the exploration of these issues, exposing the reader to the complexities of the topic and to innovative approaches for its critical examination.

Mabel Moraña and Carlos A. Jáuregui

NOTES ON PRIMITIVE IMPERIAL ACCUMULATION. GINÉS DE SEPÚLVEDA, LAS CASAS, FERNÁNDEZ DE OVIEDO

Alberto Moreiras

Thus in the zeal of the ordinary seeing of sense perception, we overlook what holds good and serves under visible things and between them and our vision, the closest of all, namely brightness and its own proper transparency, through which the impatience of our seeing hurries and must hurry. To experience the closest is the most difficult. In the course of our dealings and occupations it is passed over precisely as the easiest. Because the closest is the most familiar it needs no special appropriation. We do not think about it. So it remains what is least worthy of thought. The closest appears therefore as if it were nothing. We see first, strictly speaking, never the closest but always that which is next closest. The obtrusiveness and imperativeness of the next closest drives the closest and its closeness out of the domain of experience.

Heidegger, *Parmenides*

Antonio Gramsci's schematic comparison of the history of the intellectual classes in the New World can still provide us, in a certain sense, with one of the basic parameters from which to attempt a materialist-subalternist account of cultural history in Latin America.¹ Towards the end of "The Intellectuals," in the *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci remarks that, in the case of the United States, "one can note... the absence to a considerable degree of traditional intellectuals, and consequently a different equilibrium among the intellectuals in general... The necessity of an equilibrium is determined, not by the need to fuse together the organic intellectuals with the traditional, but by the need to fuse together in a single national crucible with a unitary culture the different forms of culture imported by immigrants of differing national origins" (20). And then: In considering the question of the intellectuals in Central and South America, one should, I think, bear in mind certain fundamental conditions. No vast category of traditional intellectuals exists in Central or South America either, but the question does not present itself in the same terms as with the United States. What in fact we find at the root of

¹ I am very grateful to Brett Levinson, Abdul Mustapha, and Ross Prinzo for their generous readings of the first draft of this essay.