

Latin American postcolonial studies and global decolonization

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Given the curiously rapid rise to prominence of "postcolonial studies" as an academic field in Western metropolitan centers since the late 1980s, it is to be expected that its further development would involve efforts, like this one, to take stock of its regional expressions. Yet, while the rubric "Latin American postcolonial studies" suggests the existence of a regional body of knowledge under that name, in reality it points to a problem: there is no corpus of work on Latin America commonly recognized as "postcolonial." This problem is magnified by the multiple and often diverging meanings attributed to the signifier "postcolonial," by the heterogeneity of nations and peoples encompassed by the problematical term "Latin America," by the thoughtful critiques that have questioned the relevance of postcolonial studies for Latin America, and by the diversity and richness of reflections on Latin America's colonial and postcolonial history, many of which, like most nations in this region, long predate the field of postcolonial studies as it was developed in the 1980s. How then to identify and examine a body of work that in reality does not appear to exist? How to define it without arbitrarily inventing or confining it? How to treat it as "postcolonial" without framing it in terms of the existing postcolonial canon and thus inevitably colonizing it?

These challenging questions do not yield easy answers. Yet they call attention to the character of "postcolonial studies" as one among a diverse set of regional reflections on the forms and legacies of colonialism, or rather, *colonias*/isms. In light of the world-wide diversity of critical thought on colonialism and its ongoing aftermath, the absence of a corpus of Latin American postcolonial studies is a problem not of studies on Latin America, but between postcolonial and Latin American studies. I thus approach this discussion of Latin American postcolonial studies - or, as I prefer to see it, of postcolonial studies in the Americas - by reflecting on the relationship between these two bodies of knowledge.

While its indisputable achievements have turned postcolonial studies into an indispensable point of reference in discussions about old and new colonialisms, this field can be seen as a general standard or canon only if one forgets that it is a regional corpus of knowledge whose global influence cannot be separated from its grounding in powerful metropolitan universities; difference, not deference, orients this discussion. Rather than subordinating Latin American studies to postcolonial studies and selecting texts and authors that may meet its standards and qualify as "postcolonial," I seek to establish a dialogue between them on the basis of their shared concerns and distinctive contributions. This dialogue, as with any genuine exchange even among unequal partners, should serve not just to add participants to the "postcolonial discussion," but also to clarify its assumptions and transform its terms.

My discussion is divided into four sections: (a) the formation of the field of postcolonial studies; (b) the place of Latin America in postcolonial studies; (c) responses to postcolonial studies from Latin Americanists; and (d) open-ended suggestions for deepening the dialogue between postcolonial and Latin American studies. By focusing on exchanges between these fields, I have traded the option of offering close readings of selected texts and problems for the option of engaging texts that have addressed the postcolonial debate in terms of how they shape or define the fields of postcolonial and Latin American studies.

Postcolonial studies

Despite a long history of critical reflections on modern colonialism originating in reactions to the conquest and colonization of the Americas, "post-colonialism" as a term and as a conceptual category originates in discussions about the decolonization of African and Asian colonies after the Second World War. At that time, "postcolonial" was used mostly as an adjective by sociologists and political scientists to characterize changes in the states and economies of ex-colonies of the "Third World," a category that was also created at that time. This regional focus was already present in French sociologist George Balandier's analysis of "the colonial situation" (1951) as well as in later debates about the "colonial" and "postcolonial state" (Alavi 1972; Chandra 1981), the "colonial mode of production" (Alavi et al. 1982), or the "articulation of modes of production" (Wolpe 1980; Berman and Lonsdale 1992). Although Latin America was considered part of the Third World, because most of its nations had achieved political independence during the first quarter of the nineteenth century, it was only tangentially addressed in these discussions about decolonization that centered on the newly independent nations of Africa and Asia.

As "old" postcolonial nations that had faced the problem of national development for a long time, the key word in Latin American social thought during this period was not colonialism or postcolonialism, but "dependency." This term identified a formidable body of work developed by leftist scholars in the 1960s, designed to understand Latin America's distinct historical trajectory and to counter modernization theory. Riding atop the wave of economic growth that followed the Second World War, modernization theory presented capitalism as an alternative to socialism and argued that achieving modernity would overcome obstacles inhering in the economies, cultures, and subjective motivations of the peoples of the "traditional" societies of the Third World. W. W. Rostow's *The Stages of Economic Growth* (1960), revealingly subtitled *A Non-Communist Manifesto*, was a particularly clear example of modernization theory's unilinear historicism, ideological investment in capitalism, and teleological view of progress.

In sharp contrast, dependency theorists argued that development and underdevelopment are the mutually dependent outcomes of capitalist accumulation on a world scale. In their view, since underdevelopment is the product of development, the periphery cannot be modernized by unregulated capitalism but through an alteration of its polarizing dynamics. This basic insight into the mutual constitution of centers and peripheries was rooted in Argentinian economist Raul Prebisch's demonstration that unequal trade among nations leads to their unequal

development. Formulated in the 1940s, Prebisch's critique of unequal exchange has been considered "the most influential idea about economy and society ever to come out of Latin America" (Love 1980: 46). His insights were integrated into "structural" reinterpretations of social and historical transformation in Latin America by Fernando Enrique Cardoso, Enzo Faletto, Anibal Quijano, Theotonio Dos Santos, Rui Mauro Marini, and many other "dependency" theorists; as Cardoso (1977) noted, their work was "consumed" in the United States as "dependency theory" associated with the work of Andre Gunder Frank.

The world-wide influence of dependency declined after the 1970s. Dependency theory was criticized for its one-dimensional structuralism and displaced by the postmodern emphasis on the textual, fragmentary and indeterminate; its Eurocentric focus on state-centered development and disregard of racial and ethnic divisions in Latin American nations has been a focus of a recent critique (Grosfoguel 2000). Despite its shortcomings, in my view the dependency school represents one of Latin America's most significant contributions to postcolonial thought within this period, auguring the post-colonial critique of historicism, and providing conceptual tools for a much needed postcolonial critique of contemporary imperialism. As a fundamental critique of Eurocentric conceptions of history and of capitalist development, dependency theory undermined historicist narratives of the "traditional," "transitional," and "modern," making it necessary to examine postcolonial and metropolitan nations in relation to each other through categories appropriate to specific situations of dependency.

Starting around three decades after the Second World War, the second usage of the term "postcolonial" developed in the Anglophone world in connection with critical studies of colonialism and colonial literature under the influence of postmodern perspectives. This change took place during a historical juncture formed by four intertwined world-wide processes: the increasingly evident shortcomings of Third-World national development projects; the breakdown of really existing socialism; the ascendance of conservative politics in Britain (Thatcherism) and the United States (Reaganism); and the overwhelming appearance of neoliberal capitalism as the only visible, or at least seemingly viable, historical horizon. During this period, postcolonial studies acquired a distinctive identity as an academic field, marked by the unusual marriage between the metropolitan location of its production and the anti-imperial stance of its authors, many of whom were linked to the Third World by personal ties and political choice.

In this second phase, while historical work has centered on British colonialism, literary criticism has focused on Anglophone texts, including those from Australia and the English-speaking Caribbean. The use of postmodern and poststructuralist perspectives in these works became so intimately associated with postcolonialism that the "post" of postcolonialism has become identified with the "post" of postmodernism and poststructuralism. For instance, a major postcolonial Reader argues that "postcolonial studies is a decidedly new field of scholarship arising in Western universities as the application of post-modern thought to the long history of colonising practices" (Schwarz 2000: 6).

In my view, equally central to postcolonialism has been the critical application of Marxism to a broad spectrum of practices of social and cultural domination not reducible to the category of "class." While marked by idiosyncratic traces, its identifying signature has been the convergence of these theoretical currents - Marxist and postmodern/poststructuralist - in studies that address

the complicity between knowledge and power. Edward W. Said's integration of Gramscian and Foucauldian perspectives in his path-breaking critique of Orientalism (1978) has been widely recognized as foundational for the field. A similar tension between Marxism and poststructuralism animates the evolving work of the South Asian group of historians associated with Subaltern Studies, the strongest historiographical current of postcolonial studies.

Postcolonial critique now encompasses problems as different as the formation of minorities in the United States and African philosophy. But while it has expanded to new areas, it has retreated from analyzing their relations within a unified field; the fragmentary study of parts has taken precedence over the systemic analysis of wholes. Its critique of the grand narratives of modernity has led to skepticism towards any grand narrative, not always discriminating between Eurocentric claims to universality and the necessary universalism arising from struggles against world-wide capitalist domination (Amin 1989; Lazarus 1999a).

As the offspring of a tense marriage between anti-imperial critique and metropolitan privilege, postcolonial studies is permeated by tensions that also affect its reception, provoking sharply different evaluations of its significance and political implications. While some analysts see it as an academic commodity that serves the interests of global capital and benefits its privileged practitioners (Dirlik 1994), others regard it as a paradigmatic intellectual shift that redefines the relationship between knowledge and emancipatory politics (Young 2001). This debate helps identify what in my view is the central intellectual challenge postcolonial studies has raised: to develop a bifocal perspective that allows one, on the one hand, to view colonialism as a fundamental process in the formation of the modern world without reducing history to colonialism as an all-encompassing process and, on the other hand, to contest modernity and its Eurocentric forms of knowledge without presuming to view history from a privileged epistemological standpoint.

In this light, the apparently simple grammatical juxtaposition of "post" and "colonial" in "postcolonial studies" serves as a sign to address the murky entanglement of knowledge and power. The "post" functions both as a temporal marker to refer to the problem of classifying societies in historical time and as an epistemological sign to evoke the problem of producing knowledge of history and society in the context of imperial relations.

Postcolonial studies and Latin America

Given this genealogy, it is remarkable but understandable that debates and texts on or from Latin America do not figure significantly in the field of post-colonial studies as it has been defined since the 1980s. As Peter Hulme (1996) has noted, Said's canonical *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) is emblematic of this tendency: it centers on British and French imperialism from the late nineteenth century to the present; its geographical focus is limited to an area stretching from Algeria to India; and the role of the United States is restricted to the post Second World War period, disregarding this nation's origin as a colonial settlement of Britain, Spain, and France, the processes of internal colonialism through which Native Americans were subjected within its territory, and its imperial designs in the Americas and elsewhere from the nineteenth century to

the present.

The major Readers and discussions on postcolonial studies barely take Latin America into account. One of the earliest attempts to discuss post-colonial literatures as a comprehensive field, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (Aschroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 1989), acknowledges a focus on Anglophone literatures. Even so, its extensive sixteen-page bibliography, including "all the works cited in the text, and some additional useful publications" (22.4), fails to mention even a single text written on Latin America or by a Latin American author. The book treats Anglophone literatures, including those produced in the Caribbean, as if these literatures were not cross-fertilized by the travel of ideas and authors across regions and cultures-or at least as if the literatures resulting from the Iberian colonization of the Americas had not participated in this exchange.

This exclusion of Latin America was clearly reflected in the first general anthology of postcolonial texts, *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory* (P. Williams and Chrisman 1993), whose thirty-one articles include no author from Iberoamerica. Published two years later, *The Post-colonial Studies Reader* (Aschroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1995), reproduces the Anglo-centric perspective that characterizes their earlier *The Empires Writes Back*, but this time without the justification of a topical focus on English literatures. The Reader features eighty-six texts divided into fourteen thematic sections, including topics such as nationalism and hybridity, which have long concerned Latin American thinkers. While some authors are repeated under different topics (Bhabha appears three times, Spivak twice), the only author associated with Latin America is Jose Rabasa, whose contribution is a critical reading of Mercator's *Atlas*, a topic relevant but not specific to Latin America.

The marginalization of Latin America is reproduced in most works on postcolonialism published since then. For example, Leela Gandhi's *Post-colonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (1998) does not discuss Latin American critical reflections or include even a single reference to Latin American thinkers in its extensive bibliography. While *Relocating Postcolonialism* (Goldberg and Quayson 2002) "relocates" the postcolonial through the inclusion of such topics as the cultural politics of the French radical right and the construction of Korean-American identities, it maintains the exclusion of Latin America by having no articles or authors associated with this area. This taken-for-granted exclusion appears as well in a dialogue between John Comaroff and Homi Bhabha that introduces the book. Following Comaroff's suggestion, they provide a historical frame for "postcoloniality" in terms of two periods: the decolonization of the Third World marked by India's independence in 1947 and the hegemony of neoliberal capitalism signaled by the end of the Cold War in 1989 (Goldberg and Quayson 2002: 15).

In contrast, two recent works on postcolonialism include Latin America within the postcolonial field, yet their sharply different criteria highlight the problem of discerning the boundaries of this field. In an article for a book on the postcolonial debate in Latin America, Bill Aschroft (whose co-edited book, as has been mentioned above, basically excludes Latin America) presents Latin America as "modernity's first born" and thus as a region that has participated since its inception in the production of postcolonial discourses (1999). He defines postcolonial discourse comprehensively as "the discourse of the colonized" produced in colonial contexts; as such, it does not have to be "anticolonial" (14-15). He presents Menchu's I, Rigoberta Menchu and Juan

Rulfo's *Pedro Paramo* as examples that reveal that "the transformative strategies of postcolonial discourse, strategies which engage the deepest disruptions of modernity, are not limited to the recent colonized" (28). While his comprehensive definition of the field includes Latin American discourses from the conquest onwards, his examples suggest a narrower field defined by more discriminating but unexamined criteria.

The second text is Robert Young's *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (2001). While Young (like Aschcroft) had not discussed Latin America in a previous work (*White Mythologies*, 1990) that had served to sacralize Said, Bhabha, and Spivak as the foundational trinity of postcolonial studies, in his new book he gives such foundational importance to Latin America and to the Third World that he prefers to name the field "tricontinentalism," after the Tricontinental conference held in Havana in 1966 (2001: 57). Young recognizes that postcolonialism has long and varied genealogies, but he finds it necessary to restrict it to anticolonial thought developed after formal political independence has been achieved: "Many of the problems raised can be resolved if the postcolonial is defined as coming after colonialism and imperialism, in their original meaning of direct-rule domination" (57). Yet Young distinguishes further between the anticolonial thought of the periphery and the more theoretical thought formed at the heart of empires "when the political and cultural experience of the marginalised periphery developed into a more general theoretical position that could be set against western political, intellectual and academic hegemony and its protocols of objective knowledge" (65). Thus, even successful anticolonial movements "did not fully establish the equal value of the cultures of the decolonised nations." "To do that," Young argues, "it was necessary to take the struggle into the heart-lands of the former colonial powers" (65).

Young's suggestive discussion of Latin American postcolonial thought leaves unclear the extent to which its anticolonialism is also "critical" in the sense he ascribes to metropolitan reflections. Young discusses Latin American postcolonial thought in two brief chapters. The first, "Latin America I: Mariategui, Transculturation and Cultural Dependency," is divided into four sections: "Marxism in Latin America," an account of the development of communist parties and Marxist thinkers in the twentieth century, leading to the Cuban revolution; "Mexico 1910," a presentation of the Mexican revolution as precursor of tricontinental insurrections against colonial or neo-colonial exploitation; "Mariategui," a discussion of Mariategui's role as one of Latin America's most original thinkers, highlighting his innovative interpretation of Peruvian reality; and "Cultural Dependency," an overview of the ideas of some cultural critics which, for brevity's sake, I will reduce to a few names and to the key concepts associated with their work: Brazilian Oswald de Andrade's "anthropophagy;" (the formation of Latin American identity through the "digestion" of world-wide cultural formations); Cuban Fernando Ortiz's "transculturation" (the transformative creation of cultures out of colonial confrontations); Brazilian Roberto Schwarz's "misplaced ideas" (the juxtaposition in the Americas of ideas from different times and societies); and Argentinian Nestor Garcia Canclini's "hybrid cultures" (the negotiation of the traditional and the modern in Latin American cultural formations).

Young's second chapter, "Latin America II: Cuba-Guevara, Castro, and the Tricontinental," organized around the centrality of Cuba in the development of postcolonial thought, is divided into three sections: "Compañero: Che Guevara," focuses on Guevara's antiracism and radical humanism; "New Man" relates Guevara's concept of "the new man" to Jose Marti's proposal of

cultural and political independence for "Our America" and to

Roberto Fernandez Retamar's Calibanesque vision of *mestizaje*; and the "Tricontinental," which presents the "Tricontinental Conference of Solidarity of the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America" held in Havana in 1966 as the founding moment of postcolonial thought; in Young's words, "Postcolonialism was born with the Tricontinental" (2000: 213).

While Young's selection is comprehensive and reasonable, its organizing criteria are not sufficiently clear; one can easily imagine a different selection involving other thinkers and anticolonial struggles in Latin America. Despite the significance he attaches to theoretical reflections from metropolitan centers, Young makes no mention of the many Latin Americanists who, working from those centers or from shifting locations between them and Latin America, have produced monumental critiques of colonialism during the same period as Said, Bhabha, and Spivak - for example, Enrique Dussel, Anibal Quijano, and Walter D. Mignolo, among others.

The contrasting positions of Ashcroft and Young reveal the difficulty of defining postcolonial studies in Latin America. At one extreme, we encounter a comprehensive discursive field whose virtue is also its failing, for it must be subdivided to be useful. At the other extreme, we encounter a restricted domain that includes an appreciative and impressive selection of authors, but that needs to be organized through less discretionary criteria. Whether one adopts an open or a restricted definition of Latin American postcolonial studies, however, what is fundamental is to treat alike, with the same intellectual earnestness, all the thinkers and discourses included in the general field of postcolonial studies, whether they are produced in the metropolitan centers or in the various peripheries, writing or speaking in English or in other imperial and subaltern languages. Otherwise, the evaluation of post-colonial thought risks reproducing within its midst the subalternization of peoples and cultures it claims to oppose.

Latin American studies and postcolonial studies

It is understandable that the reception of postcolonial studies among Latin Americanists should have been mixed. Many thinkers have doubted the appropriateness of postcolonial studies to Latin America, claiming that post-colonial studies responds to the academic concerns of metropolitan universities, to the specific realities of Asia and Africa, or to the position of academics who write about, not from, Latin America, and disregard its own cultural traditions (Achugar 1998; Colas 1995; IZlor de Alva 1992, 1995; Moraiia 1997; Perez 1999; and Yudice 1996). Klor de Alva has presented the most extreme critique, arguing that colonialism and postcolonialism are "(Latin) American mirages," for these terms, "as they are used in the relevant literature," or "as commonly understood today," properly apply only to marginal populations of *indigenes*, not to the major non-Indian core that has formed the largely European and Christian societies of the American territories since the sixteenth century. For him, its wars of independence were not anticolonial wars, but elite struggles inspired in European models that maintained colonial inequalities.

This argument, in my view, has several problems: it takes as given the standard set by discussions

of the Asian and African colonial and postcolonial experiences; it assumes too sharp a separation between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples in America; it adopts a restricted conception of colonialism derived from a homogenized reading of Northern European colonialism and an idealized image of the effectiveness of its rule; it disregards the importance of the colonial control of territories in Iberian colonialism; it pays insufficient attention to the colonial control of populations in the high-density indigenous societies of Mexico, Peru, and Central America and in plantations run by imported slave labor in the Caribbean and Brazil; and it fails to see the similarity between the wars of independence and the decolonizing processes of Asia and Africa, which also involved the preservation of elite privilege and the reproduction of internal inequalities (what Pablo Gonzalez Casanova [1965] and Rodolfo Stavenhagen [1965] have theorized for Latin America as "internal colonialism"). Rather than presenting one set of colonial experiences as its exclusive standard, a more productive option would be to pluralize colonialism - to recognize its multiple forms as the product of a common historical process of Western expansion.

An influential debate on colonial and postcolonial studies in a major journal of Latin American studies was initiated by Patricia Seed, a historian of colonial Latin America, who presented the methods and concepts of colonial and postcolonial discourse as a significant breakthrough in social analysis. According to Seed (1991), postcolonial studies' critique of conceptions of the subject as unitary and sovereign, and of meaning as transparently expressed through language, recasts discussions of colonial domination that are simplistically polarized as resistance versus accommodation by autonomous subjects. Two years later in the same journal, three literary critics questioned her argument from different angles. Hernan Vidal expressed misgivings about "the presumption that when a new analytic and interpretative approach is being introduced, the accumulation of similar efforts in the past is left superseded and nullified," which he called "technocratic literary criticism" (1993: II?). Rolena Adorno (1993), echoing Klor de Alva's argument, argued for the need to recognize the distinctiveness of Latin America's historical experience, suggesting that colonial and postcolonial discourse may more properly apply to the historical experience of Asia and Africa. Walter Dignolo (1993) for his part, argued for the need to distinguish among three critiques of modernity: postmodernism (its internal expression), postcolonialism (its Asian and African modality), and postoccidentalism (its Latin American manifestation). Yet far from regarding postcolonialism as irrelevant for Latin America, he suggested that we treat the former as liminal space for developing knowledge from our various loci of enunciation. Dignolo has developed his ideas of "postoccidentalism" (building on its original conception by Fernandez Retamar [1974], and on my own critique of "occidentalism" [Coronil 1996]) in his pathbreaking *Local Histories I Global Designs* (2000), a discussion of the production of non-imperial knowledge that draws on wide-ranging Latin American reflections, in particular Quijano's notion of the "coloniality of power" (2000) and Enrique Dussel's critique of Eurocentrism (1995).

Subaltern Studies has been widely recognized as a major current in the postcolonial field. While historians developed Subaltern Studies in South Asia, literary theorists have played a major role in the formation of Subaltern Studies in the Latin American context. Around the time of the Seed debate, the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group was founded at a meeting of the Latin American Studies Association in 1992. Unlike its South Asian counterpart, after which it was

named, it was initially composed of literary critics, with the exception of Seed and two anthropologists who soon thereafter left the group. Its "Founding Statement" offered a sweeping overview of major stages of Latin American studies, rejecting their common modernist foundations and celebrating the South Asian critique of elitist representations of the subaltern. However, unlike the South Asian Group, formed by a small group of historians organized around a coherent historiographical and editorial project centered on rewriting the history of India, this group, mostly composed of literary critics, was characterized by its diverse and shifting membership and the heterogeneity of their disciplinary concerns and research agendas. While the publications of its members have not fitted within traditional disciplinary boundaries, they have privileged the interpretation of texts over the analysis of historical transformations. The group's attempt to represent the subaltern has typically taken the form of readings of texts produced by authors considered subaltern or dealing with the issue of subalternity. In its decade-long life (I myself participated in the second half of it), the group stimulated efforts to rethink the intellectual and political engagements that had defined the field of Latin American studies.

While centered on literary studies, Subaltern Studies has been considered a major source of postcolonial historiography in Latin America. In a thoughtful discussion entitled "The Promise and Dilemma of Subaltern Studies: Perspectives from Latin American History" published in a forum on Subaltern Studies in a major history journal, historian Florencia Mallon (1994) examines the consumption and production of Subaltern Studies in Latin America and evaluates the tensions and prospects of this field. Her account focuses on historical works, making explicit reference to the contributions of scholars based in the United States who have made significant use of the categories or methods associated with Subaltern Studies. She highlights Gil Joseph's pioneering use of Guha's work on India's peasantry in his examination of banditry in Latin America (Joseph 1990), noting that it moved discussion beyond simplistic oppositions that reduced bandits to either resisters or reproducers of given social orders.

In her review Mallon does not address Subaltern Studies in literary and cultural criticism (perhaps because she does not find this work properly historical), but she does offer a critique of the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group's "Founding Statement," noting its ungrounded dismissal of historiographical work on subaltern sectors in Latin America. She makes a similar critique of the more substantial article by Seed, the one historian of the group (already discussed here). Objecting to Seed's presentation of members of the "subaltern studies movement" as leaders of the "postcolonial discourse movement," Mallon offers ample references to recent historical work on politics, ethnicity, and the state from the early colonial period to the twentieth century that "had begun to show that all subaltern communities were internally differentiated and conflictual and that subalterns forged political unity or consensus in painfully contingent ways" (1994: 1500).

Mallon's erudite discussion expands the scope of Subaltern Studies, but it does not sufficiently clarify why certain historical works should be considered part of the "subaltern" or "postcolonial" movement. Since studies on the social and cultural history of subaltern sectors ("history from below") and subaltern/postcolonial studies share subalternity as a subject matter and employ similar theories and methods, the lines separating them are sometimes difficult to define. Yet South Asian subaltern historiography has sought to distinguish itself from social and cultural history by attaching singular significance to the critique of historicist and Eurocentric

assumptions, problematizing the role of power in fieldwork and in the construction of archives, and interrogating such central historiographic categories as the "nation," the "state," "consciousness," and "social actors." The historiographical subaltern project has been marked by the tension between its constructivist aim, which necessarily involves the use of representational strategies not unlike those of social and cultural history, and its deconstructivist strategy, which entails questioning the central categories of historical research and interrupting the narratives of the powerful with those expressed by subaltern actors.

Mallon casts the "dilemma" of Latin American Subaltern Studies in terms of the tension between (Gramscian) Marxist and postmodern perspectives (a tension frequently noted in discussions about South Asian Subaltern Studies). She proposes to solve this dilemma by placing the Foucauldian and Derridean currents of postmodern criticism "at the service of a Gramscian project" (1994: 1515). Perhaps her subordination of deconstruction- so central to subaltern history- to the Gramscian project- so fundamental to social and cultural history- helps account for her insufficient attention to the difference between these fields.

This difference is central for John Beverley, one of the founders of the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group, who in his writings argues for the superiority of subaltern perspectives over non-subalternist ones of the subaltern (1993, 1999, 2000). Deploying criteria that for him define a subalternist perspective, he criticizes Mallon's *Peasant and Nation. The Making of Post-colonial Mexico and Peru* (1995), arguing that, despite her intentions, she appears as an omniscient narrator engaged in a positivist representational project that uses subaltern accounts to consolidate rather than interrupt the biographies of the nation, re-inscribing rather than deconstructing the official biographies of these nations.

In a sophisticated discussion of Subaltern Studies and Latin American history, Ecuadorian historian Guillermo Bustos (2002) uses Mallon and Beverley as a focal point to assess the relation between these two bodies of knowledge. While sympathetic to Mallon's discussion of this topic in "The Promise and Dilemma of Subaltern Studies" (1994), Bustos notes the Anglo-centric and metropolitan focus of her discussion, and suggests the inclusion of a more representative sample of work produced in Latin America; her only reference is to Andeanist historian Flores Galindo, which Bustos complements by mentioning three related Andeanists: Assadourian, Colmenares, and Rivera Cusicanqui. Like Beverley, Bustos recognizes the need to distinguish between social history and subalternist perspectives. While Beverley, however, uses this distinction to evaluate Mallon's work in terms of the standards of Subaltern Studies, Bustos uses it to caution against assuming the superiority of a subaltern perspective, recalling Vidal's critique of "techno-cratic literary criticism" (1993).

Bustos's proposal is to turn claims about the theoretical and political superiority of any perspective into questions answerable through concrete analysis. He exemplifies this option through a subtle reading of Mallon's *Peasant and Nation* (1995) that demonstrates the complexity of her narrative, including her attempt to engage in dialogical relation with her informants and fellow historians. While distancing himself from Beverley's critique, Bustos endorses Tulio Halperin Donghi's observation that Mallon's presentation of other perspectives does not prevent her from assuming (as in common practice) the superiority of her own professional account. His point is thus neither to criticize nor to defend Mallon's work, but to

refine the dialogue between Subaltern Studies and Latin American historiography. He develops his argument by discussing other texts, including related attempts to break away from accounts organized as "the biography of the nation-state," based on the critical use of multiple voices and sources (Chiaramonti 1997; Coronil 1997; Thurner 1997). In agreement with Italian historian Carlo Ginzburg, Bustos proposes that we meet the postmodern challenge not by making "evidence" impossibly suspect, but by following, as Paul Ricoeur suggests, the "traces that left from the past, take its place and represent it" (Bustos 2002:15). Needless to say, the challenge remains how to retrieve and interpret these traces.

Postcolonial historical studies also received attention in Latin America in a book published in Bolivia, *Debates Post Coloniales. Una Introducción a los Estudios de la Subalternidad* (1999) ("Postcolonial Debates. An Introduction to Studies of Subalternity"), edited by historians Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui and Rossana Barragan and composed of translations of a selection of nine essays by South Asian authors. In their introduction Rivera Cusicanqui and Barragan make only tangential reference to the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group, and none to the work of its members. They are critical of its "Founding Statement" for reducing the contributions of the South Asian group to an assortment of ethnographic cases that "exemplify from the South the theory and the broad conceptual guidelines produced in the North" (1997: 13). They also criticize Mallon's article on Subaltern Studies both for its inattention to a long Latin American tradition of critical work on colonialism and postcolonialism, and for reducing South Asian Subaltern Studies "to a questionable Gramscian project on behalf of which one should place the whole postmodern and poststructuralist debate" (13).

Their own interpretative effort is centered on underlining the significance of South Asian Subaltern Studies for Latin American historiography, emphasizing the innovative importance of the poststructuralist perspectives informing the South Asian scholarship. Their brief discussion of Latin American work highlights three critical currents: the Argentinian school of economic history represented by Enrique Tandeter, Carlos Sempat Assadourian, and Juan Carlos Garavaglia, distinguished by its transformation of Marxist and Gramscian categories through a confrontation with the specificities of Indian labor in the Potosi area; the studies of peasant insurgency and oligarchic rule carried out by the Taller de Historia Oral Andina (Workshop of Andean Oral History) and by such influential scholars as Alberto Flores Galindo and Rene Zavaleta; and the studies of "internal colonialism" initiated by Mexican sociologist Pablo Gonzalez Casanova in the 1960s (and, I should add, Rodolfo Stavenhagen). Their call for a "South/South" dialogue at the same time avoids a dismissal of the "North," warning against the danger present in "certain academic Latin American circles" of adopting new theories and discarding "our own intellectual traditions-and Marxism is one of them - for this impoverishes and fragments the Latin American debate" (Rivera Cusicanqui and Barragan 1999: 19). Their horizontal dialogue establishes a common ground between postcolonial studies and Latin American historiography on colonialism and postcolonialism, yet presents Subaltern Studies as the product of an "epistemological and methodological rupture" (17). If Subaltern Studies is postcolonial, its "post" is the post of postmodernism and poststructuralism.

A variant of this view is presented by philosophers Santiago Castro-Gómez and Eduardo Mendieta in their thoughtful introduction to an important book of essays written by Latin Americanists published in Mexico under the Latin American postcolonial, studies and global

decolonization title *Teorías sin disciplina: Latinoamericanismo, postcolonialidad y globalización en debate* (1998) ("Theories without Discipline. Latino Americanism, Postcoloniality and Globalization in Debate"). Focusing on the relationship between critical thought and the historical context of its production, Castro-Gómez and Mendieta seek to determine the specific character of postcolonial studies. They draw a distinction between "anticolonial discourse," as produced in Latin America by Las Casas, Guaman Poma de Ayala, Francisco Bilbao, and José Enrique Rodó, and "postcolonial discourse," as articulated by Said, Spivak, and Bhabha. For them, anticolonial discourse is produced in "traditional spaces of action," that is, "in situations where subjects formed their identities in predominantly local contexts not yet subjected to intensive processes of rationalization" (as described by Weber and Habermas). They argue that postcolonial theories, in contrast, are produced in "post-traditional contexts of action," that is, "in localities where social subjects configure their identities interacting with processes of global rationality and where, for this reason, cultural borders become porous" (16-17). For them, this distinction has political implications: while anticolonialist discourse claims to speak for others and seeks to dismantle colonialism deploying colonial categories, postcolonial discourse historicizes its own position, not to discover a truth outside interpretation, but to produce truth effects that unsettle the field of political action. It follows that radical politics lies not in anticolonial work that defines struggles with the categories at hand, thus confirming the established order, but in intellectual work that deconstructs them in order to broaden the scope of politics. From this perspective, the "post" of postcolonialism turns out to be an anti-anticolonial "post" at the service of decolonizing decolonization.

This position has the merit of offering a clear definition of postcolonialism. In my view, it raises several questions. Its distinction between anticolonial and postcolonial discourse risks reproducing the tradition/modernity dichotomy of modernization theory, turning the convulsed and rapidly changing social worlds of Las Casas, Guaman Poma, or Bilbao into stable "traditional" societies of limited rationality, in contrast to the globally rational worlds that engender postcolonial theorists and their superior discourses. By treating deconstruction as a theoretical breakthrough that supersedes previous critical efforts -now relegated to less rational traditional contexts- this position also risks becoming an expression of Vidal's "technocratic literary criticism." Spivak's dictum that "Latin America has not participated in decolonization" (1993: 57) is perhaps an extreme expression of this risk. While Castro-Gómez and Mendieta acknowledge the "irritation" of those who recognize that Latin American thinkers have "long shown interest in the examination of colonialism," they seem to accept this risk as an inevitable consequence of the radical theoretical and methodological novelty of post-colonial studies (1998: 20).

By contrast, Cuban public intellectual Roberto Fernández Retamar's discussion of Latin American decolonizing struggles, originally offered as a lecture for a course on Latin American thought in Havana, can be seen in part as a response to Spivak's dictum, which, according to him, wins the prize for epitomizing the problem of Latin America's exclusion from postcolonial studies (1996). It is impossible to summarize his already tight synthesis, organized around thirteen interrelated themes identified by key phrases or ideas that embody political and intellectual movements, such as "Independence or death." Suffice it here to indicate that his presentation links together political struggles and intellectual reflections as part of a single

process of decolonization. Thus he joins the Haitian revolution, wars of independence, the Mexican revolution, the Cuban revolution, and the movements of the Zapatistas and the "Madres de la Plaza de Mayo" with such diverse intellectual struggles as literary modernism, theology and philosophy of liberation, dependency theory, pedagogy of the oppressed, Latin American historiography, and testimonio. His wide selection of authors and texts celebrates the originality and heterogeneous sources informing self-critical reflections from the Americas. His examples are too numerous to mention here, but they include Venezuelans Simon Rodriguez and Andres Bello, Mexicans Leopolda Zea and Octavio Paz, Brazilians Oswald de Andrade and Darcy Ribeiro, and Cubans Jose Marti and Fernando Ortiz. He highlights the contemporary importance of Rigoberta Menchu and Subcomandante Marcos as articulating in new ways the decolonizing projects of indigenous and national sectors in Guatemala and Mexico. Fernandez Retamar is not concerned with defining or erasing the boundaries between Latin American and postcolonial critical thought, but with appreciating their shared engagement with decolonization.

The difference between Mendieta/Castro-Gómez and Fernandez Retamar, like that between Ashcroft and Young, reveals the difficulty of defining the relation between postcolonial and Latin American reflections on colonialism and its aftermath. As in Bustos's discussion of the Mallon/Beverley exchange, a dialogue between these intellectual traditions requires not only clearer classificatory efforts, but also closer reading of texts, in order to refine the criteria that define these fields. A treatment of authors who are not considered part of the postcolonial canon as postcolonial thinkers may help us appreciate different modalities of critical reflexivity, as Castro-Klaren has done through her subtle reading of Guaman Poma and of the Inca Garcilaso de la Vega (1999, 2001). Or perhaps, as Hulme suggests, "the real advantage of considering

distant figures like Ralph Waldo Emerson or Andres Bello as postcolonial writers is that this leads us to read them as if they were new" (1996: 6). A particularly productive option is to engage the postcolonial debate through studies of specific postcolonial encounters, as in the pioneering integration of theoretical reflection and detailed historical case studies of US-Latin American relations in the collection edited by Joseph, LeGrand, and Salvatore (!999).

Latin American Elephants in the Americas?

This discussion has made evident how difficult it is to define "Latin American postcolonial studies." As in the well-known parable of the elephant and the wise blind scholars (each of whom visualizes the elephant as a different creature by the part he or she feels), this field, like the wider field of postcolonial studies itself, can be represented in as varied a manner as there are different perspectives from which it can be "seen." If this parable shows that knowledge of reality is always partial and inconclusive, its use to reflect on Latin American postcolonial studies raises two more fundamental points.

First, the peculiar object of postcolonial studies is not a natural entity, like an elephant, or even a social subject regarded as sharing the cultural world of the observer, but one formed as a colonized object, an inferior and alien "Other" to be studied by a superior and central "Self." Since the "elephant" can speak, the problem is not just to represent it but to create conditions that would enable it to represent itself. From the perspective of postcolonial studies, analysis should involve not just self-reflection (an inherent dimension of any serious intellectual enterprise), or granting subjectivity to the social subject studied (as anthropologists and cultural historians have typically sought to do), but the integration of these two analytical endeavors into one unified intellectual project directed at countering this unequal, colonizing relationship. Its epistemology is not just representational but transformative; it uses representational strategies to counter the hierarchies and assumptions that turn some subjects into objects of knowledge for allegedly superior subjects.

Second, insofar as postcolonial studies appears as the most evolved critique of colonialism, it tends to invalidate or diminish the significance of reflections on colonialism developed from other locations and perspectives. If the wise scholars were to act wisely, they would not privilege their respective views of the elephant or isolate it from other creatures. As a reflection on the relationship between postcolonial and Latin American studies, the parable appears as a literal story, the absence of indigenous elephants in the Americas justifying the identification of postcolonial studies with scholarship on Africa and Asia.

If we take the parable literally, since the only elephants that exist in the Americas are imported ones, artificially confined in zoos or circuses so as to protect them from an inhospitable terrain, we may have the desire to see only those rare creatures who have managed to mimic their Asian or African counterparts- our Latin American "elephants." Refusal is another option. Following thinkers who justifiably object to the ease with which metropolitan ideas become dominant in

Latin America, or who unjustifiably see Latin America as a self-fashioned and bounded region and argue in defense of its autochthonous intellectual productions (but doing so typically in metropolitan languages and with arguments supported by theories which were once considered "foreign"), one could reject the attempt to define Latin American postcolonial studies, restricting postcolonial studies to other continents and regarding it as an imperial "import" that devalues "local" Latin American knowledge.

In my opinion, the view that restricts postcolonial reflexivity to certain currents of Western intellectual theory, as well as the position that treats postcolonial studies as another foreign fad that undermines local knowledge, reinforces both the field's theoretical and ethnographic provincialism and its de facto exclusion of Latin America. These two sides of a protected parochial coin prevent us from taking advantage of the global circulation of postcolonial studies as a potent intellectual currency for the exchange and development of perspectives on colonialism and its legacies from different regions and intellectual traditions.

The problem is not simply, as some Latin American critics of postcolonialism have suggested, that Latin Americanists should be drawing on Kusch or Jorge Luis Borges as much as on Said or Derrida, but that knowledge should be global and acknowledge the world-wide conditions of its production. Just as Kusch drew on Heidegger, and Derrida was inspired by Jorge Luis Borges, Said and Ortiz developed independently of each other, fifty years apart, a contrapuntal view of the historical formation of cultures and identities that disrupts the West/rest dichotomy (Coronil 1995). Critical responses to colonialism from different locations take different but complementary forms. While from an Asian perspective it has become necessary to "provincialize" European thought (Chakrabarty 2000a), from a Latin American perspective it has become indispensable to globalize the periphery: to recognize the world-wide formation of what appear to be self-generated modern metropolitan centers and backward peripheries.

As it has been defined so far, the field of postcolonial studies tends to neglect the study of contemporary forms of political domination and economic exploitation. Recognized by many as one of the field's founders, Edward Said has distanced himself from it, saying that he does not "belong to that," and arguing that "postcolonialism is really a misnomer" that does not sufficiently recognize the persistence of neocolonialism, imperialism, and "structures of dependency" (2002: 2). Said's concerns, so central to Latin American thought, highlight the importance of expanding postcolonial studies by building on Latin American critical traditions.

If the relationship between colonialism and modernity is the core problem for both postcolonial and Latin American studies, the fundamental contribution of Latin American studies is to recast this problem by setting it in a wider historical context. The inclusion of Latin America in the field of postcolonial studies expands its geographical scope and also its temporal depth. A wider focus, spanning from Asia and Africa to the Americas, yields a deeper view, revealing the links between the development of modern colonialism by Northern European powers and its foundation in the colonization of the Americas by Spain and Portugal. This larger frame modifies prevailing understandings of modern history. Capitalism and modernity, so often assumed both in mainstream and in postcolonial studies to be a European process marked by the Enlightenment, the dawning of industrialization, and the forging of nations in the eighteenth century, can be seen instead as a global process involving the expansion of Christendom, the

formation of a global market and the creation of transcontinental empires since the sixteenth century. A dialogue between Latin American and postcolonial studies ought not to be polarizing, and might range over local histories and global designs, texts and their material contexts, and subjective formations and structures of domination.

This dialogue should bring to the forefront two interrelated areas of significant political relevance today: the study of postcolonialism itself, strictly understood as historical transformations after political independence, and the analysis of contemporary imperialism. Ironically, these two areas, so central to Latin American thought, have been neglected by postcolonial studies. At the juncture of colonialism's historical dusk and the dawn of new forms of imperial domination, the field tends to recollect colonialism rather than its eventualities. Building on a long tradition of work on post-independence Latin America, I have argued for the need to distinguish "global" from "national" and "colonial" imperialism as a phase characterized by the growing abstraction and generalization of imperial modes of political and economic control (Coronil 2003). Drawing on postcolonial studies, I have proposed to understand what I call "occidental" representations of cultural difference under global imperialism as involving a shift from "eurocentrism" to "globalcentrism." I see globalcentrism as entailing representational operations that: (a) dissolve the "West" into the market and crystallize it in less visible transnational nodules of concentrated financial and political power; (b) lessen cultural antagonisms through the integration of distant cultures into a common global space; and (c) emphasize subalternity rather than alterity in the construction of cultural difference. In an increasingly globalized world, US and European dominance is achieved through the occlusion rather than the affirmation of radical differences between the West and its others (Coronil 2000: 354).

This dialogue should also redefine the terms of postcolonial studies. Postcolonialism is a fluid and polysemic category, whose power derives in part from its ability to condense multiple meanings and refer to different locations. Rather than fix its meaning through formal definitions, I have argued that it is more productive to develop its significance through research into and analysis of the historical trajectory of societies and populations subjected to diverse modalities of imperial power (Coronil 1992: 101). In the spirit of a long tradition of Latin American transcultural responses to colonialism and "digestive" appropriation of imperial cultures, I thus opt for what I call "tactical postcolonialism." While Spivak's notion of "strategic essentialism" serves to fix socially constructed identities in order to advance political ends, tactical postcolonialism serves to open up established academic knowledge towards open-ended liberatory possibilities. It conceives "postcolonialism" not as a fenced territory but as an expanding field for struggles against colonial and other forms of subjection. We may then work not so much within this field, as with it, treating it with Ortiz as a "transcultural" zone of creative engagements, "digesting it" as Andrade may playfully do, approaching it as a liminal locus of enunciation as Mignolo suggests, in order to decolonize knowledge and build a genuinely democratic world, "a world which would include many worlds," as Subcomandante Marcos and the Zapatistas propose.

NOTE

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