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## Debate

### **The Postcolonial in Latin America and the Concept of Coloniality: A Historian's Point of View<sup>1</sup>**

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A group of outstanding social scientists and cultural critics has collaborated to produce this remarkable collective publication about the reception and critique of “the postcolonial” in Latin America. The resulting volume is to my knowledge the most thorough criticism of postcolonial theory and criticism as an academic practice of North-Atlantic intellectuals and scholars. The group (which I will refer to as “the Coloniality Group”) grounds its own criticism in the work of pioneers such as Walter Mignolo, Aníbal Quijano, and Enrique Dussel, while acknowledging the influence of various strands of literary and cultural critique from Latin America dating back to the post-WW II period. The book is as much a critical engagement with post-colonial theory from the Latin American point of view as a vindication of a

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<sup>1</sup> This debate piece focuses on Mabel Moraña, Enrique Dussel, and Carlos A. Jauregui eds., *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2008).

tradition of literary criticism produced in Latin America prior to both post-structuralism and the Boom.

What happens when you think the postcolonial from Latin America? That is, how do the main contributions of North-Atlantic scholars apply to cultural representations of Latin America in the colonial, post-independence, and modern periods? Are the problems posed by Said, Spivak, and Bhabha of general validity to the Third World, or does the specificity of Latin American histories and cultural productions generate perspectives, identities, literacies, and forms of cultural resistance that cannot be found in colonial and postcolonial Asia, Africa and the Middle-East? These are the type of questions that this volume tries to address with essays that are both provocative and comprehensive. The contributions range from the reading of Aztec texts to contemporary indigenous struggles and thought, from studies of colonial discourse to liberation theology, from a critique of European modernity to discussions of *mestizaje*. The contributors' common concern seems to revolve around the concept of "coloniality," an all-encompassing category that stands for the "post-colonial" in Latin America, but without the "post."

The essays cover a wide variety of cultural representations stemming from the Spanish conquest to contemporary issues of identity and politics among indigenous communities of Latin America. The reader can find here discussions about Creole identity under Bourbon rule, Borges as pioneer of postmodern literary criticism, Moctezuma's melancholic posture in the face of Spanish conquerors, the connection between the Haitian and the Cuban revolutions in Benítez Rojo's works, the persistent role of secularism in Latin American critical thought, the geo-politics of knowledge, and so forth. This thematic variety makes the collection immensely complex and this prevents any single, reductionist reading of it. More than a common positionality, the collection delineates agreements and disagreements within a discursive field that represent different intellectual trajectories and distinct reactions to North-Atlantic renderings of "the postcolonial." Yet, from different *trincheras intelectuales*, authors tend to agree on one predicament: Latin American literary and cultural studies had been practicing the critique of colonialism's impact on culture and had been criticizing

Eurocentrism *before* Said, Spivak, or Bhabha appeared on the intellectual landscape of North-Atlantic universities.

The works of Mignolo, Quijano, and Dussel seem crucial to understand the critical stand and common assumptions of the Coloniality Group. Mignolo's view that Spanish colonization of the Americas in the sixteenth century constituted a first modernity that had "coloniality" as its darker underside has certainly influenced the writing of most contributors. So has Quijano's notion of the "coloniality of power," with its emphasis on the early racial structuring of Spanish colonial society. Dussel's works on the philosophy of liberation appears as another reference to reflections upon alternative modernities in relation to coloniality. Yet not all of the contributors refer to the work of these *maestros*, making the volume more open-ended and less conceptually coherent than initially assumed.

Some of the contributors to this volume relate their work to dependency theory, world-systems analysis, and liberation philosophy and theology. Yet the genealogy of their criticism is not simple or unidirectional and their work reflects an engagement with North-Atlantic cultural theory, more specifically with postmodern thought and postcolonial criticism. It is clear that literary criticism has played an important part in the making of the "Coloniality Group." Yet one needs to acknowledge that the group itself is remarkable in its trans-disciplinarity. Scholars coming from studies of religion, philosophy, sociology, political science, history, performance studies, semiotics, and ethnic studies are represented in this edited volume. Though historians are under-represented in the collection, the essays usually show a historically-grounded analysis of cultural production.

It is not my intention to provide a full critique of the book, for any attempt to reduce this collective undertaking to a single set of propositions would be unfair. Yet it is possible to single out certain key propositions discussed in the volume and make some informed considerations about them. In particular, I will examine the group's claim to the anteriority or anticipation of Latin American criticism to postcolonial concerns, then devote some attention to the concept of "coloniality," and finally deal with the question of literary criticism in the making of the postcolonial in Latin America. I will avoid the temptation to deal with the location or the locus of enunciation of

postcolonial criticism simply because the issue is too vast and complex. Similarly, I will not discuss this question of “old” versus “new” Latin-Americanism, an issue central to contemporary discussions in Hemispheric Studies. My criticism will be selective. I will read *Coloniality at Large*—a book about which I feel more admiration than regrets—from the perspective of a historian concerned with issues of periodicity and conceptual clarity, as a scholar who works with issues of cultural production under imperial or neo-colonial situations, yet is aware that these situations have changed dramatically over time.

*The Postcolonial, in Latin American terms*

Central to the concerns of the Coloniality Group is an attempt to differentiate their work from the main current of Postcolonial criticism, associated with the work of Said, Spivak, Bhabha, Ashcroft, Young, and others. The Coloniality Group complains that Spanish and Portuguese America has remained absent from the discussion of North-Atlantic postcolonial theory and criticism, that the study of contemporary post-colonial situations (which most of them see more appropriately as “neo-colonial”) could have been enriched by a better dialogue with certain key Latin American literary critics, and that Iberian colonialism should play a greater role in the postcolonial debate, due to its prior and distinct form of European modernity. By challenging the applicability and originality of North-Atlantic postcolonial criticism, the Coloniality Group presents arguments and considerations that need the attention of scholars across the humanities and the social sciences. At stake is the question of epistemic privilege and an aura of theories enunciated from Euro-North American universities.

Postcolonial theory emerged in North-Atlantic universities as a critical practice dedicated to unmasking the colonial origins of “European modernity” and the persistence of cultural forms that accompanied and legitimated British and French colonialism in Asia and Africa. This theory and criticism related to two phenomena, one historical—the decolonization of Asia and Africa in the post-WWII—and the other contemporary—the question of the agency, claims, and identity of ex colonial subjects who migrated to the European metropolises. Yet the literatures and discourses under the scrutiny of postcolonial scholars pertained mostly to the English-speaking world, in

particular, texts and ideas produced since the Enlightenment. To this extent, the Coloniality Group claims, North-Atlantic postcolonial theory and criticism has dodged the consideration of a large corpus of literature and textualities generated by a prior and distinctive colonial enterprise: 16th-century Spanish and Portuguese colonialism.

For the contributors of *Coloniality at Large* the critique of Eurocentrism and its forms of knowledge should start not with the Enlightenment but with the Spanish conquest, for it was at that time—the 16th century—that the inception of the “modern/colonial” took place. If this premise is accepted, the American continent becomes the first contact zone and battleground for the deployment of ideas of civilization, evangelization, empire, and racial difference. Much before the world was ordered by the scientific categories and the rationality of 18th century European thought, the Spanish and Portuguese empires had consolidated ideas of racial difference, humanity, and patriarchy in relation to theological paradigms and the very knowledge produced by the Conquest and Colonization. To start the criticism of Eurocentrism with Conrad and Kipling, or even with the cultural activities of the East India Company, seems to miss the origin of modernity by two or three centuries.

The fifth centenary of the “discovery” of America found English- and Spanish-speaking authors converging towards a critical re-examination of the textualities and discourses of the Spanish conquest. By that time, the emergent subfield of “studies of colonial discourse” had generated a sufficient number of works. Major contributions by Beatriz Pastor, Margarita Zamora, Rolena Adorno, Sara Castro-Klaren, René Jara and Nicholas Spadaccini, José Rabasa and others opened new avenues to examine the nature of Spanish colonialism and to interpret the alterities implicit in colonial texts. The leading post-colonial authors (Said, Spivak, Bhabha, among others) failed to acknowledge this new type of criticism, concentrating instead on Britain, France, and their colonies.<sup>2</sup> In North-Atlantic academic circles, the key issue was the impact of British and French colonialism on

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<sup>2</sup> I am referring here to the works of Peter Hulme and Anthony Pagden and the contemporary work of Latin Americanists such as Adorno, Pastor, Zamora, and others. The mediating role of Stephen Greenblatt in connection with this deconstructive work of colonial texts done by Latin Americanists seems, in this regard, exceptional.

cultural production, identity, and theory on the colonies and its possible resonance in the decolonized world. Fanon, Césaire, and C.L.R. James were their inspiring *maestros*.

As the editors of the collective volume affirm, by eluding the vast archive of Latin American texts produced in the context of Spanish and Portuguese colonization of the Americas, postcolonial theory missed the importance of the “first modernity” in the shaping of the modern world-system and its mechanisms of economic, racial, gender, and national domination. More importantly, this first modernity produced the first articulations of a lasting anti-imperial discourse, in the works of Inca Garcilaso, Guaman Poma, Cabeza de Vaca, Bartolomé de las Casas, Alonso de Ercilla and others. In addition, the “coloniality group” complains that English-language postcolonial theory failed to take into account the contributions of Latin American cultural critics such as Angel Rama, Antonio Cornejo Polar, Fernando Ortiz, Oswald de Andrade, and others who had provided a conceptual arsenal to examine the impact of colonialism in New World cultural productions. Their notions of transculturation, the lettered city, anthropophagia, cultural heterogeneity, and *mestizaje* were ignored by North Atlantic postcolonial authors.<sup>3</sup> Their attack on Eurocentrism was, in the end, Enlightenment-centric.

The editors present their project as two-sided. First, it aims at re-examining the trauma of colonialism as it penetrated the social formations and subjectivities of the region. Second, the project entails a critique of Occidentalism, i.e. the philosophical, political, social and cultural paradigms which accompanied and supported the European colonization of the Americas. In Mignolo’s work, the critique of Occidentalism and its forms of knowledge blends quite well with the cultural marginalization of indigenous knowledge and writing. But in the other essays, the coherence of this two-sided project is difficult to

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<sup>3</sup> Within this volume, the reader will find multiple critical engagements with postcolonial theory and criticism from the perspective of Latin America. Amaryll Chanady, for instance, calls for a greater dialogue between Latin American critics and postcolonial work stemming from settler colonies such as Canada and Australia. To Chanady this conversation could be productive to the extent that British settler colonies and Latin American nations share a similar situation “between colony and postcolony.” In this conversation Latin American criticism has much to contribute: concepts such as magical realism, transculturation, and foundational fictions, originating in scholarship of the region, are being productively appropriated by scholars of British settler colonies.

see. If Spanish and Portuguese colonization created a first modernity whose underside, Coloniality, endured in the cultural forms of the Latin American republics, the reader needs greater clarification as to the nature of this first modernity to be able to relate this project to the multiple attempts to read in reverse (or to look at the subaltern dimension of) the cultural productions of colonialism.

The notion of “modernity” as understood in *Coloniality at Large* reflects a similar ambivalence as the concept of “coloniality.” Its temporality is opaque and its very nature remains imprecisely defined. Historians could agree with the effect of colonialism in Spanish and Portuguese America, but not necessarily with the view that the persistence of colonial forms and structures prevented the adoption of European modernity. One could argue that late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century modernity continued and probably intensified the marginalization and objectification of indigenous peoples in Latin America. But few would want to defend the similarity between 16<sup>th</sup>-century Spanish colonialism and the period of export economies, railroads, banks, and modernist novels. In other words, historians are likely to resist the homogenization into a single polarity (modernity/coloniality) of different types or waves of modernity.

The modernity that the ABC nations (Argentina, Brazil and Chile) evoked at the time of their first centenary was neither the first modernity of the sixteenth century, nor the second modernity of the Enlightenment. It was already a completely altered configuration that we might call a third modernity, the product of the second wave of technological innovations, influenced by currents of thought such as evolutionism, positivism, and literary modernism. This was a civilizational project in which “progress” was endowed with transformative potency greater than that granted by Enlightenment thinkers or Romantic writers. On the economic terrain this type of modernity coincided with the emergence of export-economies in the region, a process that generated an intense integration into the world economy in terms of flows of capital, labor, and technology. It is not clear to me to what extent the concept of modernity/coloniality reflects appropriately this moment of rapid transformations that some Latin American republics experienced ca.1880 and 1930.

*Coloniality—the colonial past in the present*

To better evaluate the accomplishments of this volume, we need to first understand the meanings of “coloniality.” According to editors Moraña, Dussel and Jáuregui, coloniality encompasses “the trans-historic expansion of colonial domination and the perpetuation of its effects in contemporary times” (2). According to this definition, coloniality refers to a historical process—colonialism, its forms of governance, its representations, and its effects on colonial subjects—as well as to a “residual” effect or “persistence” of that process in the present. The condition of coloniality, as past-in-the-present, the authors claim, can help understand contemporary concerns relating to neoliberalism, globalization, international migrations, new social movements, and the cultural hybridity that impregnates most global cities. This is clearly a big claim, one that depends crucially upon the accuracy and clarity of the concept: “coloniality.”

To the extent that coloniality is defined as a persistence of the colonial in the present, the concept is faced with two challenges: the question of persistence, which constitutes its temporal dimension; and the problem of location and spatial diffusion, that is, the ways this colonial “residue” interacts with the modern in certain delimited geographical spaces. Both dimensions of the problem are interrelated. Scholars who argue for the existence of uneven development or alternative modernities suggest that there could be modernity in one city or region, and backwardness and coloniality in the next. The processes of colonization, neo-colonial domination, modernity promoted by centralist states, and the conquest and displacement of indigenous peoples had produced configurations of time-space that reproduce inequality and difference. To the extent that these processes have had a differential impact upon distinct regions and according to different moments of time, generalizations about the persistence of the modern/colonial seem to erase crucial differences among localities and periods.

Historians would probably agree that Cuzco of the sixteenth-century is not quite the same as Cuzco of the late twentieth-century, and that the predicament of indigenous peoples in Peru changed much between the Toledan reforms and today. Historians would also agree that if a comparison is made among cities such as Cuzco, Lima, and



Buenos Aires in the 1920s, there would be an ordering in economic progress, civic associations, and urban infrastructure that would put Lima behind Buenos Aires and Cuzco behind Lima. Maybe the subaltern and marginal condition of a highland, indigenous peasant would not change much if s/he migrated from Cuzco to Lima first, and then from Lima to Buenos Aires. But even in such dismal situation of subalternity, there is the possibility of historical change. Historians would be ready to entertain the idea that the condition of the Peruvian *indio* did not improve between the 1820s and the 1920s, but would reject the same proposition when applied to the comparison between the 1930s and the 1980s.

The colonial heritage has certainly produced important and lasting effects on national identity and cultural formations of Latin American nations. Nonetheless, it is evident that the persistence of the colonial has been processed differently in each nation or sub-region. Let us examine the question of persistence and regional differentiation by the Centenary of Independence (ca.1910-1920). At the time, some nations in the Southern Cone, those that experienced increased political stability and economic progress during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, had managed to create more or less successful hybrid imitations of European cultural forms, distancing themselves from the colonial heritage. The very emergence of a renewed Hispanism among the elites of these countries signaled a temporal as well as cultural distance from the post-independence moment, a time when the leadership of these republics attempted to distance its imagined communities as far as possible from backward Spain.

Argentina, where the overwhelming presence of European immigrants profoundly transformed the social and cultural landscape, was considered by contemporary commentators as a country which had successfully superseded the colonial heritage. Something similar was asserted about southern Brazil, Uruguay, and Chile. The great miscegenation created by mass European immigration produced a significant impact on culture. The presence of hybrid cultural forms, some of them linguistic (the *cocoliche* and the *lunfardo*), others musical (as *tango* and *samba*), indicated clearly that new tensions between the Creole and the European had emerged, tensions that were obviously different from those between Españoles-Americanos and Peninsulares

near the end of the colonial period. European immigration affected economic and social interactions, marriage patterns, work habits, diets, language, and gender roles, etc. The anxieties about the future “character” of the nation filled with European immigrants forced the elites to imagine programs of “Argentinization” that involved schools, military service, and public administration. This great transformation (ca. 1880-1930) brought the “social question” to the center of the public debate and stimulated forms of social commitment and labor activism unknown fifty years earlier.

Similar types of modernity could be observed at the time in certain cities and regions of southern Brazil and the central valley of Chile, but not in Peru, Ecuador and Bolivia, where changes in land tenure, race relations, and political culture were slower to develop and more limited in scope. One must acknowledge, though, that among these effects there was a cultural amnesia about indigenous peoples and a marginalization of Creole subjects. The peoples inhabiting the interior or the backlands of these modern nations were racialized and construed as incapable of self-government and civilized sociability. Nonetheless, it would not be inaccurate to argue that the colonial was less evident in the terrain of the social and in cultural forms in Argentina than it was in Bolivia, Peru, or Ecuador. In the first decades of the 20th century, as foreign observers (business prospectors, scholars, missionaries, and tourists) pointed out, the Andean nations had retained more visible marks of “coloniality” than the countries of the Southern Cone. The persistence of aristocratic privilege, landlord despotism, labor servitude, and open forms of racism in the highlands of Bolivia, Peru, and Ecuador were a constant and sad reminder that these places had been the experimental workshops of Spanish colonialism. It was in these territories where foreign observers found that the wars of independence, liberalism, and later positivism had produced almost no change in the condition, life style, and self-awareness of indigenous peoples.

Thus, from a historical point of view, the term “coloniality” appears as describing an undifferentiated continuity of forms of governmentality, subalternity, and marginalization of native knowledges proper of Spanish and Portuguese colonization in the Americas. (Many historians have referred to this persistence of the

colonial past in the present with the term “the colonial heritage.”) We need to challenge this homogenization of a long-term persistence of the colonial. It is better to speak of different degrees of coloniality, in order to take into account the profound transformations experienced by certain regions and cities within the most progressive republics of South America. At the time of the first Centenary of independence, South America appeared as highly differentiated in terms of economic achievement, democratic sociability, political stability, and educational progress. Maybe in the Argentine northwest (Salta, Jujuy, Tucuman, Santiago del Estero, Catamarca), the degree of residual coloniality was similar or comparable to that of regions in Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia, but this was certainly not the case for the Argentine Litoral (Buenos Aires, Santa Fe, Entre Ríos, and southern Córdoba).

The same could be said of southern Brazil and Uruguay. In these sub-regions, the presence of anarchist and socialist ideologies in the labor movement, the increased participation of women in industrial workshops, the successful literacy campaigns, the expansion of the public press, the rapid modernization of cities, and the revolutionary transformations in lifestyles brought about by new technologies (railroads, electricity, tramways, etc.) signaled the wholesome adoption of North-Atlantic modernity. This “modernity,” however derivative or imitative, presented itself as the overcoming of the colonial past and its “barbaric” post-independence period. In fact, the celebrations of the first Centennial presented Spanish and Portuguese colonialism as a distant, bygone era, so little threatening that local elites came to revalorize the civilizing role of the Spanish conquest.

With time, these regions transformed by the technologies and the cultural currents of North-Atlantic modernity would gradually incorporate the indigenous past into their national histories, and for a long-time the colonial period remained as the source of proto-national forms of identity, not as an engine of contemporary problems. When Argentina celebrated its Centennial, one must recall, it did it in the midst of anarchist bombs, labor strikes, and legislative skirmishes over the question of extending the political franchise and protecting workers; admittedly, modern problems. Little space was attributed to the first conquest (to conquistadors such as Aguirre or Mendoza) or to things inherited from colonial times. The hero of the second conquest, General

Roca (who had defeated indigenous resistance in 1879) received some recognition, but not as much as that granted to the fathers of the nation (San Martín, Belgrano, Moreno, Rivadavia, among others). My point is: during the hundred years that followed political de-colonization, the republic of letters had re-processed the colonial many times and in multiple ways, so that by the Centenary the degree of coloniality in the Argentine capital was reduced to a minimum. Put in other terms, if by coloniality we understand something close to “colonial persistence” or “residual colonialism,” coloniality itself is subject to change and, as we saw, in some cases, dramatic transformations in the economy, society, and culture occluded or displaced the colonial from the center of the stage.

Present postcolonial criticism may, with good reason, re-position the colonial question in the celebration of the first Centennial, pointing to the purposeful erasure of the then recent memory of the wars among *cristianos* and indigenous nations, as well as its culmination moment, the military campaigns that removed indigenous peoples from the southern territories of Chile and Argentina. Today, we can engage this problematic past with poignant questions about indigeneity, colonial Indian treaties, land rights, the usurpation of burial places, and the transfer of indigenous skulls into national museums. Yet this cannot disarm the signs of European modernity in the streets of Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro. What was the underside (coloniality) that corresponded to these forms of twentieth-century modernity? Clearly, something quite different—more processed and transformed—than the coloniality experienced by the inhabitants of La Paz, Cuzco, Lima, or Quito. And even these cities, which were subject to more incomplete projects of modernization than Buenos Aires or Rio de Janeiro, had processed coloniality further than what was possible for Indian towns in the highlands of Bolivia, Peru and Ecuador.

#### *Literary Representations and the Postcolonial*

The complex and variegated set of critical interventions found in *Coloniality at Large* still rest too much upon the search for national identity informed by literary criticism. Though the collection presents contributions from philosophers, linguists, sociologists, scholars of religion, and historians, at the core of the project is a concern with

literary representations of Latin America and the question of the national imaginary. In the enormous landscape of representations, the importance attributed to “literature” seems disconcerting to the historian. Particularly coming from cultural critics who had proclaimed to go beyond literature to embrace all kinds of “texts,” and who had systematically attacked the *ciudad letrada* and searched for alternative voices and texts about modernity and neo-colonialism.

The same could be said about forms of narrating or representing the national, or the “Latin-American” as different from the European or the metropolitan. The impetus to examine the sub-regional, the local hybrid, and the multiplicity of voices within the national seems at times overshadowed by a fascination with the search for truer or novel representations of *Nuestra América*. There are gestures to the sub-regional and to the indigenous but much less than one would expect of a critical work that is supposed to undo or challenge the homogenizing work of colonialism and nation-building. In the same vein, while the volume presents critical reflections on Latin-Americanism and Latin American studies, the existence of a territory called “Latin America” seems to have eluded the discussion of the post-colonial.

The emphasis placed on the question of “literature” seems at moments to obfuscate the inquiry about subaltern forms of self-expression and native knowledge. The members of the *ciudad letrada* appear as the translators between the indigenous and the European/colonial. Hence, Martí, Rodó, Arguedas, Asturias, Carpentier, and Rulfo still figure prominently in the reflections of the Coloniality Group, much more so than expressions of Afro-Caribbean, Mapuche, Aymara, or Nahua thought. The historian wonders whether we should depend so much on these outstanding literati to interpret the voices of the subaltern in relation to regional, national, and transnational power formations. Save for rare exceptions, in the essays contained in this volume the voices of workers, women, the poor, and other marginalized groups in the region appear “represented” by literati—if they appear at all. This obsession with canonical literature is at least odd. A resilient subalternist historian (like myself) finds more useful to read the works of literary figures *in relation to other texts* produced by the state in which subaltern voices appear, however misconstrued or disfigured.

The essays included in the collection show an impressive understanding of cultural and literary criticism but little reference to recent social and cultural history. Latin American, European, and United States historians have produced a mass of new historical studies on subaltern cultures, narratives, and experience. Some of these historical studies use methodologies suggested by the Subaltern Studies Group, others continue the tradition of British Marxist social historians (“history from below”), while still others incorporate approaches associated with micro-history, gender history, and race and ethnic studies. We know much more about subaltern subjects (slaves, indigenous peoples, poor women, peasants, industrial workers, etc.) than in the 1980s and early 1990s when Subaltern Studies and Postcolonial Theory emerged on the academic scene. This historical knowledge has produced narratives much more interesting and complex than Martí, Rodó, or Arguedas could have imagined. Here we have a more solid ground for decolonizing Eurocentric knowledge than in the self-referential Republic of Letters.

Román de la Campa’s essay focuses on the question of the relationship between postcolonial studies and literature. The author poses as crucial the need to understand literature in order to “continue to snare the inner workings” of the postcolonial. Yet, at the same time, he presents the postcolonial as inhabiting a loosely defined period after colonial rule, or during neo-colonial hegemony, or at any time since the onset of late 19th-century modernity. Historians would argue that this “sense of time” is no periodicity at all. The postcolonial, argues de la Campa, contributes to the erosion of more historically grounded terms such as “colonial” and “neo-colonial.” To support the claim of the contemporary or long-term persistence of the colonial (coloniality), de la Campa resorts to the authority of literary critic Angel Rama. Similarly, the author presents the thematic sphere of postcolonial criticism as the multiple failures in the making of modern nation-states, citing José Martí as key authority. Though there is much talk of a plurality of voices and multiplicity of cultures, literary critics continue to draw on the well of canonical literature for examples of alternative voices to progress, civilization, and development. To understand the dark side of the modern, it seems like one needs to go back to the library of the *ciudad letrada*. This is methodologically puzzling, not only

because the subaltern had left its traces in History's archive, but, more importantly, because literature has appropriated, used, and distorted the voice of the subaltern.

By posing literature as the ultimate reservoir for deciphering the dual nature (modern/colonial) of the postcolonial, the "coloniality group" fails to address the standing question of representation implicit in literature. How and to what extent does literature have a claim to represent the subaltern? Why is a new selection of books added to the canon endowed with the privilege to speak in the name of certain popular, ethnic, racial, national, or gender sensibilities?

### *Conclusion*

The volume's title—*Coloniality At Large*—underscores the idea of long-term persistence. The editors believe that certain forms of Spanish and Portuguese colonialism pervaded Latin American societies in profound and lasting ways. Implicit in the title is the notion that the persistent effect of colonialism is now "unbound" under the aegis of globalization. Coloniality is no longer limited to the former territories of the Spanish and Portuguese empires, but a force that has expanded into the globalized space. Rather than being contained and transformed by later European modernities (the Enlightenment, the Industrial Revolution), Coloniality remains a constitutive moment of contemporary philosophy, history, literature, and the social sciences. It is in this sense, I understand, that Coloniality is "at large." If this is so, the long-term influence of Iberian colonialism should be an important dimension of contemporary discussions about knowledge and the configuration of the humanities and the social sciences in the university. This is, indeed, an important claim; one that deserves close scrutiny and ample reflection.

*Coloniality at Large* is a book that should interest multiple interpretive communities in the humanities and social sciences. Scholars (like myself) doing work on empire and its representations will be tempted to relate their work to this long-term view of cultural production under changing regimes of colonial domination. Those whose research deals with the various dimensions of modernity will find here poignant criticisms of modernity, its theorists, and its cultural production. Historians of ideas, students of social thought, and

philosophers will find the idea of an autonomous Latin American thought and criticism refreshing. Students of race and ethnicity will encounter in this book insightful propositions about *mestizaje* and indigeneity. Also important are some essays relating to the question of the reconfiguration of Latin American studies in the recent past. Yet at the center of the propositions of this book is the notion of a long-term colonial persistence in culture (coloniality) that is bound to provoke intense debates. With a complexity and depth rarely seen in collections of this type, *Coloniality at Large* will provide food for thought for generations to come.

My reading of this book has produced some minor criticisms. One relates to the question of persistence of the colonial into the present. Perhaps the Coloniality Group over-emphasizes the continuities between the colonial past and the neo-colonial recent past, and to this extent fails to acknowledge the works of modernity in some regions and cities of Latin America. So much has changed since the sixteenth century that historians would be rather skeptical of using the same polarity ("modern/colonial") to events and processes of the last five centuries, even if our focus is the condition, subjectivity, and self-fashioning of indigenous groups. The second refers to the question of the anteriority of both colonialism and the criticism about the colonial and the neo-colonial. I think that the Coloniality Group is right in pointing out the existence of critical works dismissed or overlooked by Euro-American post-colonial critics. Yet the works of Rama, Cornejo Polar, Ortiz, Carpentier, Benítez-Rojo and others should be used in dialogue with the works of Said, Spivak, Guha, and Bhabha, and also in connection with the new criticism coming from Chicano and Latino Studies.

Finally, I have suggested that, in relation to the dominance of literary criticism in the discussion of the postcolonial in Latin America or Coloniality, the conversation envisaged in this book with philosophers, sociologists, and students of religion should extend even further to embrace economists, legal scholars, economic historians, students of communication, and political scientists interested in questions of colonial persistence and cultural production. Only a wider dialogue across disciplines would help us calibrate the usefulness of the concept of coloniality and, in particular, its applicability to the current



conjuncture of empire through globalization, extended poverty, deep inequalities, marginality of indigenous peoples, and the banalization of popular-mass culture. I hope these minor criticisms raised will be taken as intended: as an attempt to promote a trans-disciplinary discussion of the concept of “coloniality” and its implications for cultural and historical studies of Latin America. To my fellow historians I have only one piece of advice to give: read this remarkable work and let us know what you think of it.