COLONIALITY AND ITS PREOCCUPATIONS

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Colonialism and Postcolonial Development: Spanish America in Comparative Perspective. By James Mahoney. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Pp. xvii + 400. $26.00 paper. ISBN: 9780521133289.

Globalization and the Decolonial Option. Edited by Walter D. Mignolo and Arturo Escobar. London: Routledge, 2010. Pp. x + 412. $49.95 paper. ISBN: 9780415638814.

A Companion to Latin American Philosophy. Edited by Susana Nuccetelli, Ofelia Schutte, and Otávio Bueno. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010. Pp. xiv + 555. $49.95 paper. ISBN: 9781118592618.

Without History: Subaltern Studies, the Zapatista Insurgency, and the Specter of History. By José Rabasa. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010. $28.50 paper. ISBN: 9780822960652.

Interculturalidad, estado, sociedad: Luchas (de)coloniales de nuestra época. By Catherine Walsh. Quito: Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar; Abya-Yala, 2009. Pp. 254. ISBN: 9789978228098.

The concept of coloniality was first articulated by Aníbal Quijano in his 1989 essay "Coloniality, Modernity/Rationality." He argues that after the end of colonialism, early instruments of social domination survived and continued to shape Eurocentric forms of rationality and modernity. For Quijano, the idea of race and the social construction of racial classification legitimated colonial structures of power depending on labor production. For him, this point explains the asymmetry of power and unequal conditions of existence that still persist today in varied forms of neocolonialism, internal colonialism, and poverty. All of these are encompassed in deterritorialization processes across the Americas.[1]

The theorization of coloniality and recognition of the central place of Spanish imperialism sit at the core of the reconsideration of postcolonial thought as it was introduced in North American universities during the 1980s.[2] At that time, the

1. Deterritorialization is a notion that needs to be understood in not only geographical or economic but also social and cultural contexts. It is a concept that cannot be separated from reterritorialization. Both terms refer to the production and reconfiguration of space and spatial relations. On the theorization of the notion of territory and these processes, see Stuart Elden, *Terror and Territory: The Spatial Extent of Sovereignty* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), and *The Birth of Territory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

2. Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories / Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 37–38.

Latin American Research Review, Vol. 48, No. 3.

field of postcolonial studies was chiefly concerned with the age of high imperialism and decolonization in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and the non-Spanish Caribbean. Yet it had one major blind spot: the material and ideological impact of the Spanish conquest of the Americas on all subsequent forms of colonialism around the world. The response of Latin American scholars to the postcolonial turn cannot be understood without considering its connection with the ongoing critical reappraisal of the history of social, racial, and cultural difference in the region. This critical reappraisal began with the pioneering work of literary scholars Ángel Rama and Antonio Cornejo Polar, which still occupies a prominent place in the canon of Latin American critical thought.[3] Influenced by Marxism and poststructuralism, their work emphasized the history of Latin American cultural imaginaries as articulations of the political, most notably in their reassessment of the work of José Carlos Mariátegui. While social approaches were nothing new in Latin American literary studies, Rama and Cornejo Polar gave increased prominence to cultural difference in the transhistorical study of Latin America's cultural production. Rama redefined the "lettered city," while Cornejo Polar traced the roots of Latin America's cultural heterogeneity. Together, they mapped out the role of power in ordering and controlling society under Spanish rule and long after independence.

Exactly how the wave of postcolonial scholarship in the United States coincided with these revisionist projects on Latin America's cultural modernity and how it influenced colonial studies more generally are questions of ongoing debate.[4] But most would agree that the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group played a prominent role in configuring these trends. Its key members (John Beverly, Ileana Rodríguez, Robert Carr, Alberto Moreiras, José Rabasa, Javier Sanjinés) set a clear agenda for academic scholarship emphasizing its political potential that has underpinned subsequent research on identity politics, diasporas, race and ethnicity, historical process, and other concerns of great significance to the humanities and social sciences. As both a moment and a movement, Latin American subalternism provided a clear alternative to postcolonial studies and as such, went on to fuel a generation of critical scholarship on the symbolic articulations of coloniality.[5]

In the wake of these interventions, five recent books provide an overview of

3. Ángel Rama, *La ciudad letrada* (Hanover, NH: Ediciones del Norte, 1984), and Antonio Cornejo Polar, *Escribir en el aire* (Lima: Editorial Horizonte, 1994).

4. The institutional history of postcolonialism in different academic fields has been examined several times. Most notable is the debate triggered by Patricia Seed's review essay, "Colonial and Postcolonial Discourses," *Latin American Research Review* 26, no. 3 (1991): 181–200, and the responses it received from Mignolo, Hernán Vidal, and Rolena Adorno. During that same period, historian Florencia Mallon provided another insightful perspective on postcoloniality that emphasized its relevance to historical scholarship; see "The Promise and Dilemma of Subaltern Studies: Perspectives from Latin American History," *American Historical Review* 99, no. 5 (1995): 1491–1515.

5. Among Latin American scholars, divergent positions have emerged in the search for a model for theorizing the sociopolitical and cultural legacies of Latin America. A critique of the limitations of Quijano's coloniality of power and decolonial thought can be found in the important contributions of Alberto Moreiras, "The Fatality of (My) Subalternism," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 12, no. 2 (2012): 229–235; Jon Beasley-Murray, *Posthegemony: Political Theory and Latin America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010); and Oscar Ariel Cabezas, *Postsoberanía: Literatura, política y trabajo* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones La Cebra, 2013).

the different approaches to the study of colonialism that have developed across disciplines. A pair of edited volumes—*A Companion to Latin American Philosophy*, edited by Susana Nuccetelli, Ofelia Schutte, and Otávio Bueno, and *Globalization and the Decolonial Option*, edited by Walter Mignolo with Arturo Escobar—assemble provocative critical essays that can serve as a starting point for anyone interested in becoming current on philosophical and theoretical debates shaping Latin American literary and cultural studies. Monographs by José Rabasa, Catherine Walsh, and James Mahoney also demonstrate how postcolonial paradigms and a concern for understanding the history of colonialism have escaped from these disciplinary confines.

In a discussion on coloniality, *A Companion to Latin American Philosophy* might seem out of place. However, this volume lucidly attends to the philosophical traditions embedded in Latin American critical thought and the study of colonialism. It offers a comprehensive and refreshing reference that finds the roots of Latin American philosophy not in the boom of nineteenth-century positivism but instead in precolonial indigenous thought and sixteenth-century scholastic debates regarding the justice of the conquest. One major accomplishment of this volume is its direct insertion of cultural studies and postcolonial debates into the history of Latin American philosophy. Key themes such as human rights, liberation, indigeneity, race, identity, the relationship between language and colonization, modernity, and globalization are discussed in broader historical and disciplinary frameworks that also recognize contributions to philosophical inquiry by Latin American scholars working across disciplinary divides. For instance, the essay by Ofelia Schutte, "Philosophy, Postcoloniality, and Postmodernity," highlights the contributions of Nestor García Canclini, Nelly Richard, and the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group.

The *Companion* has sections titled "Historical Perspectives," "Current Issues," "Disciplinary Developments," and "Biographical Sketches," which grapple with a number of concepts, contexts, and figures central to the critique of coloniality and Latin American postcolonial thought. Essays by James Maffie ("Pre-Columbian Philosophies"), Bernardo J. Canteñs ("The Rights of the American Indians"), and Luis Fernando Restrepo ("Colonial Thought") demonstrate how the beginnings of Latin American philosophy were neatly intertwined with early colonialism and the development of intellectual thought regarding Amerindian societies. For instance, Restrepo examines epistemological and ethical issues raised by pivotal colonial intellectuals who interrogated European positions on morality and ethics as they debated the horrors of the conquest. These important essays frame the whole volume by inserting the often-overlooked metaphysical reflections of native peoples and recasting colonial philosophy as a heterogeneous body of thought.

Philosophically engaged literary works have long contributed to the development of metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, aesthetics, and other philosophical domains. Moreover, as Jesús H. Aguilar points out in his essay, individuals devoted to literary theory and criticism have played a significant reciprocal role in the development of philosophical thinking in Latin America. For example, the central essay by Arturo Arias underscores the contributions of *letrados* belong-

ing to national literary cultures, who made no distinction between philosophy, literature, and "political tracts." Arias goes on to offer a provocative analysis of an emerging crisis in the increasingly heterogeneous field of Latin American cultural studies, as it has been further challenged by globalization and neoliberal politics. Yet, A. Pablo Iannone's essay problematizes the concept and phenomenon of globalization, which has been traditionally framed as an issue of international relations mainly concerned with economic development. He approaches the notion of globalization, one of the thorniest concepts, from an ethical and sociopolitical philosophical perspective. The essay rightly points out the relative lack of engagement of liberation philosophy and postcolonial scholarship with some of the major consequences of globalization, "from poverty, to dislocations in people's self-conception, to environmental degradation, to oppression" (330). As seen in this sample of essays, *A Companion to Latin American Philosophy* serves as a crucial introduction to the history and theoretical concepts underpinning coloniality and its legacy for the Latin American philosophical tradition.

Scholars of the early colonial period have also been concerned with the dilemmas of globalization—including much earlier forms of globalization. But for some of us, a major challenge has been how to reconsider our object of study in transhistorical terms. It is well known that coloniality far outlived the temporal bounds of formal colonial rule. Colonial violence continued through the wars of independence, survived industrialization, and has taken new forms in recent globalization projects. The path laid down by the *subalternistas* also serves as a point of departure for José Rabasa's *Without History.* This compilation of twelve essays authored since the mid-1990s demonstrates Latin American scholars' debt to postcolonial thinkers from South Asia, such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and Ranajit Guha. Rabasa's most important contribution to colonial studies has been his framing of colonial historiography in terms of dispossession and violence. In this book, he moves away from the narrow lines of colonial historical writings to focus on historical process, especially the Zapatista indigenous insurgency in Mexico, as captured in a wide set of cultural products, events, and legal policies from precolonial times to the present. By doing so, he validates the main thrust of subaltern and postcolonial studies, which is to analyze political history in cultural articulations of the subaltern subject. Rabasa's work sheds new insights on the agency of postcolonial subjects (individuals, indigenous organizations, and local communities) that have survived outside of the Eurocentric conception of history. From the Mendoza Codex to documentary films on the Acteal Massacre of members of the pacifist organization Las Abejas in 1997, Rabasa presents an alternative version of a history that has developed beyond the margins of official history as maintained by state apparatuses. His preoccupation with Nahuatl historians and anonymous indigenous voices reveals an alternative history centered on indigenous communal temporality, which draws bounds linking the ancestral past to the conflictive present. In terms of method, Rabasa's work emphasizes the importance of returning to the archives and the interpretation of cultural products to understand coloniality and indigenous agency. His work is part of a broad-based, pluriversal approach where different critical projects are taken into account in the study of Latin American cultural production.

Rabasa's emphasis on indigenous historical agency links his work to other scholars, including those who contributed to the volume *Globalization and the Decolonial Option*. These essays were originally published as a special issue of *Cultural Studies* (vol. 21, no. 2–3, 2007). They forcefully take on recent debates on globalization and contextualize revolutionary shifts in Latin America to articulate a theoretical move toward "epistemic decolonization." As Mignolo explains in his second essay in the volume, the "decolonial option" seeks the decolonization of knowledge via "the constant double movement of unveiling the geo-political location of theology, secular philosophy and scientific reason and simultaneously affirming the modes and principles of knowledge that have been denied by the rhetoric of Christianization, civilization, progress, development, [and] market democracy" (317). Several essays comment directly on the ramifications of Quijano's propositions on the coloniality of power to reassert the significance of decolonial thinking. More important, some of these essays expand the critique of coloniality toward other geographies and themes that postcolonial and subaltern studies have left unexplored, such as violence toward nature, gender and sexuality, and other subjectivities. Key examples are María Lugones's "The Coloniality of Gender," José David Saldivar's "Unsettling Race, Coloniality, and Caste," Agustín Laó-Montes's "Decolonial Moves: Translocating African Diaspora Spaces," and Zilkia Janer's "(In)edible Nature: New World Food and Coloniality."

"Interculturality" is a major thrust within the decolonial option, for it is within this notion and its concern with the individual and collective well-being (*el buen vivir*) that the global, democratic future resides. Catherine Walsh's essay "Shifting the Geopolitics of Critical Knowledge" reasserts the value of critical thought articulated by indigenous and Afro-descendant intellectuals whose lives, values, and ideas have been undermined by what Edgardo Lander calls the "universal narrative of modernity and progress" (226).[6] For Walsh, understanding the history and logic of coloniality is essential to contextualizing current debates, community organizing, and knowledge produced by subaltern intellectuals in Ecuador and Bolivia. These ideas are elaborated further in her book *Interculturalidad, estado, sociedad*. Walsh's examination of indigenous modes of thought together with that of Afro-descendants represents a distinct contribution to the understanding of subaltern cultural agency. Her project describes the efforts of social organizations and analyzes their political critiques and perspectives on the future. Interculturality is articulated in decolonial terms, the social, political, ethical, and epistemic project and process responding to the legacy of colonialism (14). In Walsh's view, these "other knowledges" capture the depth of ideas shaping their worldviews and assert a consciousness liberated of mental colonialism.

One of the major contributions of Walsh's project is that it moves beyond theorization to propose practical alternatives for education, economic development, and social reconfiguration that will improve the lives of poor and marginalized communities in Latin America. Her discussions of the destruction of nature pro-

6. Quoted by Walsh; Edgardo Lander, "Eurocentrism and Colonialism in Latin American Thought," *Nepantla: Views from South* 1, no. 3 (2000): 521.

duced by past and present forms of colonialism also represent an urgent line of inquiry and social action. Walsh suggests that the quest for a better future and el buen vivir requires not only the conservation of nature for its use value but also advocacy for the protection of Earth, "*la madre tierra*," as a spiritual entity. One of the best examples of this mode of thinking is provided by indigenous communities in Ecuador that have made strides to protect their water resources against neoliberal policies proposing their use for economic development. As a decolonial option, el buen vivir for them postulates an integral vision rooted in ancestral cosmological traditions premised on the interdependence of nature and culture (169).

Political scientist and comparative historical scholar James Mahoney takes a starkly contrasting approach toward assessing Latin America's colonial legacy in *Colonialism and Postcolonial Development*. This book provides a sweeping analysis of economic development based on qualitative and quantitative data that provide a meticulous analysis of these regions. In this study, *colonial* and *postcolonial* refer to historical periods, not to particular modes of consciousness. Nevertheless, scholars concerned with coloniality should not dismiss this project for its lack of engagement with current trends of colonial and postcolonial theory. Mahoney marshals empirical evidence to shed light on the historical basis of unequal patterns of economic and social development that differentiate regions subjected to different forms of colonialism. This is an issue assumed by scholars engaged in the critique of coloniality.

One of the main assets of Mahoney's project is its comparative approach to understanding the bounded histories of political economy in the region. During the first three centuries of colonialism, European competition for territorial and commercial expansion underpinned administrative agendas and legislation designed to secure metropolitan power across empires. Mahoney's concern with colonial development in the Spanish Empire and its legacies also takes into account the force, influence, and competition of Portuguese and British powers. He makes a clean distinction between liberal and mercantilist colonialism and convincingly uses it to explain different outcomes in the transformations of territories between empires. By doing this, Mahoney demonstrates that the colonial/imperial machine did not operate in a homogeneous fashion across the continent, a perspective often lost in discussions of the pervasive nature of colonialism in Latin America. The manner in which the colonial past is bound to the present is precisely what makes this book relevant to scholars across disciplines engaged in debates and critiques on coloniality.

The historical memory of colonialism and its epistemological, social, economic, and political legacy is the central subject that connects the books under review here. As demonstrated, transhistorical approaches to the study of colonialism and its consequences and countereffects have become central to critical scholarship and have contributed to the development of new interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches to the study of Latin America. A cornerstone of postcolonial and subaltern studies, the critique of coloniality as an intellectual and political project for scholars is bound up with the study of cultural products and the man-

ner in which their producers respond to the economic and social conditions that evolved from the violent experience of colonialism. However, as these projects reveal, confronting the history of colonialism and its cultural and political meanings is not only significant because of what it reveals of the past but also because it continues to demarcate identities, borders, and strategies for survival, and designs for a decolonized future.