

# Colonialism Now and Then

## Colonial Latin American Studies in the Light of the Predicament of Latin Americanism

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The need for a study of colonial Latin America may not require, in this day and age, a whole lot of justification. However, it may still be important to emphasize the connections between the colonial past (that is, the object of Latin American colonial studies) and the present. The idea behind this project is, then, to present the reader with studies of colonial topics and issues that, at the same time, pay attention to the consequences the colonial situation being analyzed has for the different Latin American peoples and ethnic groups of present-day independent republics.<sup>1</sup> In other words, what this volume is proposing is, following the ideas advanced by José Rabasa in the article included here, to establish a nexus between the “antiquities” we study and the current situation of the descendants of the human contingents who shared the colonial experience, between the colonial situations of the past and the colonial legacies of the present.<sup>2</sup>

In this book, then, the concept “colonial legacies” plays an important role. However, in a recent article, Ricardo Kaliman has questioned the utility of the notion of colonial legacies for an understanding of the present. In his opinion, that concept, “though it is used in the desire to reveal and condemn, is in fact limited to emphasizing the analogy that can be established between cultural elements in the past and in the present, and generally ignoring the specific form that these elements assume in practical contemporary consciousness” (1998, 263). In other words, what Kaliman sees as a flaw in the notion is that it suggests that “the colonial structures were passed on to subsequent society in a compact and stable block” (263). I am persuaded that Kaliman misinterprets the meaning the expression “colonial legacies” has in Walter Mignolo’s work, for whom the relationship between past and present is not a self-evident one: scholars need to dig in the past in order to see the connection between it and

our present (1989b, 52). In this way, historical processes can be reconstructed and traces of our shared past recovered, with the purpose of understanding the colonial legacies that continue to inform our present. The strategy of studying colonial legacies is not, in my opinion, another way of justifying mere analogies, but a tool for understanding the genesis of current situations of social injustice. By genesis I mean, in this context, the beginning of a process that led, throughout the centuries, to these social situations. This means that the expression “colonial legacies” does not simply describe an analogy between colonial and present-day social situations—something like a stable structural homology between past and present—but rather entails a notion of change and historical process, contrary to Kaliman’s belief that it ignores the workings of the mechanisms of social reproduction (1998, 263). In Mignolo’s words, the “legacies of the Spanish empire in the Americas are what connect the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries with the present” (1995 viii). That is why it is convenient, in Rabasa’s opinion, if one is embarked in the task of constructing a decolonizing agenda for the present, to elaborate, first, “an inventory of the colonial legacy of modernity, before even beginning to conceptualize ‘elsewheres’ to dominant Western rationalities (“Of Zapatismo,” 420). The way in which colonial legacies are understood in this book has, then, much more to do with the relations between the beginning and the current stage of a historical process than with mere structural analogies between past and present.

This project can be better understood if one views the research being produced in the field of Latin American colonial studies from a broader perspective: that of its position in the framework of Latin American literary and cultural studies. That is why it is convenient, first, to establish what kind of assumptions we, the practitioners of the discipline, bring to bear on the colonial texts and situations that are the object of our studies. Second, it is also necessary to trace a map of the academic and theoretical contexts within which we carry on those practices.

As regards the first issue, it is obvious that the overwhelming majority of those of us who study colonial texts come from social strata and ethnic groups that have nothing (or very little) to do with some of the historical agents of the colonial period. What I mean is that the victims of colonialism, the wretched of the earth, are not well represented in the ranks of those who study the past from an academic perspective. On the contrary, their numbers are very low. Almost nonexistent. As a consequence, the vast majority of those of us who write about the colonial period are either of *criollo* origin or *mestizos* totally integrated into the occidentalized society that predominates in most Latin American republics, or scholars from Europe or the United States. The representation of historical subjects and agents such as the Amerindians or the African slaves, then, is in the hands, most of the time, of subjects who do not belong to those ethnic groups. This situation, which could seem trivial for

many a scholar, is a crucial factor with regard to the issue of representation of colonial situations.

The question asked by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak a while ago—"Can the Subaltern Speak?"—is very difficult to answer. However, it is clear in the current academic situation that the present-day subaltern has not been able, yet, to write colonial historiography. The present-day subaltern has not been able, either, to have access to a discursive practice in the area of colonial literary studies. Those of us who produce knowledge in the field must assume the responsibility with which we are faced: to make sense of the universe of discourse of an era. However, this is not the only responsibility we have. There is another one, albeit a less evident one, that consists in studying the literary texts as a product of a situation of injustice that is the historical foundation of the social injustices suffered by many inhabitants of the continent in the present.

The majority of the articles included in this volume study, precisely, social situations of the past understood as the origin, or the antecedent, of present social situations. The rest focuses on some of the readings of those colonial situations produced by present-day scholars and writers. These investigations are motivated by the need to offer academic alternatives to predominant disciplinary practices. The hegemonic disciplinary practices consist of, as Alvaro Félix Bolaños points out in his contribution to this book, studying the colonial texts from a literary perspective that, in the best cases, forgets the injustice that characterizes the colonial situations that produced the aforementioned texts; in the worst cases, modern scholars end up celebrating the ethnocentric gaze of the *criollo* and European subjects—who were, more often than not, the authors of the canonical texts.

Although Walter Mignolo (1986) and Rolena Adorno (1988) stated, a few years ago, that the area of colonial studies was undergoing a paradigm shift (an expression that deserves to be discussed), it is my opinion that this is not true from a statistical perspective.<sup>3</sup> It is true that the majority of the important theoretical contributions to the field in the last years have tended to privilege the study of texts and perspectives previously repressed by the rigid criteria of colonial canon formation, yet, it is not true that the majority of the works published in the field follow the theoretical paths opened by the aforementioned theoretical contributions, as a careful examination of most of the volumes on that subject suggests. For example, among the works published in *Conquista y contraconquista* (a volume that collected the papers read at the conference on the Quincentennial of the "discovery" organized by the Instituto Internacional de Literatura Iberoamericana), only three or four could qualify as investigations produced in the framework of the so-called new paradigm, that consists of—among other things—expanding the colonial canon through the incorporation of texts produced by subaltern subjects such as Guaman Poma and in proposing reading practices capable of accounting for the discursive plurality and diversity of the colonial period. The rest of the works published in that collection

continue a critical tradition that privileges Western (or Occidental) axiologies, at the same time that it limits the research agenda to a literary or, in the best of cases, a discursive study of the texts. The same coexistence of these two modes of understanding the discipline can be found in other collective publications in the area of Latin American colonial studies (see the volumes edited by Jara and Spadaccini, Cevallos et al., and Williams and Lewis). In a significant number of the articles they contain, the colonial situations that originated the texts celebrated as cultural monuments belonging to the national patrimony of the modern Latin American nation-states are absent from the analysis.

On the other hand, scholars who could qualify as practitioners in the framework of the new paradigm, have such different research agendas that it is very difficult, sometimes, to imagine them as being part of the same group. For example, Mabel Moraña's work on the Latin American Baroque entails a revision of the previous scholarship on the topic, especially in the articles where she concludes that the Baroque esthetic trend served, depending on the authors, either the cause of the consolidation of the colonial status quo or the resistance to it (1988; 1989). Although this way of viewing a historical period is still strongly anchored in what Angel Rama called *la ciudad letrada* (the lettered city), it does incorporate a new sociological perspective when it focuses on the *criollo* elites' uses of certain esthetic means for political ends. Sara Castro-Klarén, for her part, like Rolena Adorno (1986), has dedicated some of her works to the study of noncanonical authors of *mestizo* or Amerindian descent, as examples of resistance-writing by subaltern subjects (1994; 1996), while Regina Harrison has studied, instead, some Andean oral traditions (1989). As a final example, we can see Mignolo's work, who has studied multiple aspects of what he calls "colonial semiosis" (that is, the totality of signic or semiotic interactions that take place in colonial situations), in a wide range that includes both the indigenous (mostly Andean and Meso-American) territorial representations and their "scriptural" practices (see, for instance, his *Writing Without Words*). This brief list of authors may give the reader an idea of the diversity that exists among the scholars who could be considered as part of the new paradigm.

I make reference to this methodological and theoretical diversity in order to present the reader with a portrait of the discipline as one where little consensus exists with regard to intellectual production. If to the diversity found in the ranks of those who are producing within the framework of the new paradigm we add the high number of scholars who still produce in a disciplinary framework dominated both by the notion of the Belles Lettres and *criollo* ideology, the situation in the field of colonial studies can scarcely be considered as one where "a paradigm shift" has occurred. What I mean is that, in order to be able to talk about paradigm shifts, it is necessary that a consensus (about the principles that regulate the discipline, about how knowledge is validated, etc.) exists among all the practitioners of a discipline. For a paradigm is the domi-

nant framework within which knowledge is produced at a specific time and in a certain discipline. The state of affairs of colonial studies, as we have seen, does not allow us to talk about such thing as a new paradigm. I propose, instead, to understand the practices Mignolo considers as symptoms of a paradigm shift, as academic practices that propose a new mode of intellectual production in the area. In this way, we can view that group of academic works as representative of an emergent mode of production, but not as the (statistically) dominant one in the discipline. The articles in this book can be viewed, if not as a part of that new mode of production, at least as ones that follow the paths opened by it. They represent a good sample, I believe, of the state of affairs of this field of studies, exhibiting both the most significant advances in the discipline as well as some of the theoretical and disciplinary problems we still encounter in our practice. Although there are still many needed improvements in the practice of Latin American colonial studies, the articles included in this book are important steps towards a decolonization of the production in that field.

The endorsement of this kind of disciplinary (and ethical) mode of production is necessary because, in general, what we—the majority of the scholars in the area, regardless of cultural or ethnic background—, bring to the study of the texts are centuries of Occidental education, an education that taught us to forget the oppressed ethnic groups of the continent when the task at stake is to produce a national narrative. That is why, in most of the studies produced in the traditional disciplinary framework (and, more often than not, even in the ones that inscribe themselves in the new mode of production), the critic positions him/herself in a way that resembles, suspiciously, the one held by the European and *criollo* authors of the texts under study.

Regardless of nationality, most of the critics who do not embrace the new mode of production in the field exalt the following values: the prose that prefigures the “novela del lenguaje” (or the New Hispanic American Novel, in Carlos Fuentes’ lingo) and the exotic peculiarity that would confer some value (maybe “difference”) to the studied text. Our perspective, then (even in the case of the best intentioned among us), is still a European one—a perspective that, far from showing any signs of change, seems to become more and more alien to the interests and views of the socially marginalized groups in Latin America. One of the reasons the distance between the critic and the subaltern subject is increasing can be found in the academic context of knowledge production.

As is well known, postcolonial theory is one of the most prestigious theoretical frameworks in the American academic milieu. As a consequence, its propagation to the Third World has been fast and efficient. It is not unusual to see some Latin American critics resorting to Homi K. Bhabha’s or Gayatri Spivak’s theoretical contributions to study Latin American texts. It is understandable. After all, postcolonial critics have proposed a series of readings and

critical practices that put into question the traditional readings of the cultural products of countries that suffered British colonialism. The importance and value of this theoretical paradigm are undeniable and a dialogue with it should find a place in the agenda of scholars in the field of Latin American studies.

However, as Jorge Klor de Alva (1992, and 1995), Hugo Achugar (1997), and Mabel Moraña (1997) have rightly pointed out, the social realities on which postcolonial theory is based are very different from the ones we, in Latin American colonial studies, work with. To begin with, postcolonial theory deals with situations that arose from capitalist nineteenth-century colonial situations. Experts on Latin American Colonial Studies, for their part, have to study social situations wherein the economic and political organizational principles were closer to mercantilism than to the kind of capitalism developed by the British Empire in the nineteenth century (Klor de Alva 1992, 17). Besides, the subaltern subjects defined as colonial subjects in India differ dramatically from the ones we, Latin Americanists, understand as such. The colonial subject of India is an Indian who had to tolerate not only the presence of an invader but also one who dominated the territory and the politico-economical system. In Latin America, the definition of the colonial subject is quite different. In Klor de Alva's opinion, it cannot be said that in colonial Latin America the *mestizo's* status was similar to the Amerindian's and the African's. Many of the former were able to successfully participate in the rules that organized social life in the continent, whereas the latter remained in an abject oppression that continues in the present. It is in the ranks of the latter that we can find the Latin American colonial subject, then (Klor de Alva 1995, 246–47, 255).

Among the many differences that could be found between the situations described by postcolonial theory and the ones studied by experts on colonial Latin American studies, perhaps the most interesting one is the language in which they are usually written. Although it is true that scholarly work on colonial studies is written in several languages, among them English, it is also true that, in the case of postcolonial theory, the vast majority of the fundamental texts are produced in English by Third World diasporic intellectuals. This is not a trivial datum, as Antonio Cornejo Polar warned us in his last work, because in the hierarchies of languages in the global world, English is the privileged one.

Latin America, like any other dependent culture, reads with much attention the intellectual production originated in the First World. As a consequence, the theoretical ideas produced in English by migrant Third World intellectuals working in American universities have an impact on the academic work produced from, and by, Latin America. The privileged status of the works written in English, the better circulation they enjoy and the Europeanized education of most Latin Americanists (both from Latin America and the rest of the world), makes possible that the theoretical corpus produced to explain social realities very different from Latin American ones inform a sig-

nificant percentage of the critical production on the colonial period. The consequence of the linguistic hierarchy that dominates the circulation of ideas in this globalized world is the erasure of a series of critical traditions of Latin American origin that already proposed, before the heyday of postcolonial theory, a decolonizing agenda. This situation was denounced by Mignolo several years ago (in 1993) when he responded to a 1991 article by Patricia Seed that celebrated the adoption of postcolonial ideas and concepts by some scholars specializing in the colonial period. Seed praised, among others, the seminal book by Beatriz Pastor (which, by the way, had been published in Spanish almost ten years earlier). Mignolo, for his part, pointed out that in Latin America there was already a significant corpus of criticism of colonial legacies before the irruption of postcolonial theory. He quoted authors as influential as Edmundo O'Gorman and Angel Rama, who inaugurated critical agendas that should be considered as decolonizing ones.<sup>4</sup> In his response, Mignolo goes as far as to suggest that the omission of these Latin American scholars could be interpreted as a symptom of a certain academic imperialism.

Antonio Cornejo Polar, in the above quoted article, calls attention to one of the forms that academic imperialism takes; I am referring to the absence of English translations of Latinamericanism's fundamental texts produced in Latin America. A good example of this is the unforgivable delay in the publication of an English version of *La ciudad letrada*, by Angel Rama (a book published in the early-eighties whose long overdue translation appeared in the mid-nineties). This lack of reciprocity, this lack of equality in the intellectual exchange at a global scale, is another element that characterizes the context in which we, scholars on the colonial Latin American period, produce knowledge nowadays.

I would also like to call attention to the lack of academic prestige of Spanish nowadays. For this reason, and in spite of the fact that most of the colonial legacies that are colonial studies scholars' object of study are inscribed in that language (and in Quechua, Aymara, Quiché and Nahuatl, among many other indigenous languages), one finds the following problem: if one wants to participate in a global theoretical dialogue, one has to write in English, because Spanish does not have much intellectual currency today. As Mignolo has pointed out in his monumental *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*:

Writing in Spanish means, at this time, to remain at the margin of contemporary theoretical discussions. . . . To write in Spanish a book that attempts to inscribe Spanish/Latin American and Amerindian legacies into current debates . . . and into colonial legacies and post-colonial theories means marginalizing the book before giving it the possibility of participating in an intellectual conversation . . . dominated by English. (viii)

Another consequence of the marginal position of Spanish and the Spanish-speaking intellectual tradition is the need to import theories produced in English about colonial legacies inscribed in that language. Some of the few colonial studies produced in the framework provided by the new mode of production proposed and defended by Mignolo and Adorno, among others, find their theoretical inspiration in another critical branch of postcolonial descent: Subaltern studies. This is a very attractive theoretical endeavor, because it attempts to develop new relations between scholars in the field of Latin American studies and those human beings posited as their object of study (Rabasa and Sanjinés 1994, viii). As the founding statement of the Latin American Subaltern Studies group explains, this is a theoretical practice that emerges at a moment when progressive intellectuals are disappointed in Marxism, a disappointment caused by the failure of the experiences in the countries of so-called *socialismo real*—real socialism (1994, 1). It emerges, too, amidst the globalization period. In a historical moment when everything is marketable and tends to the homogenization of differences, we should be cautious as regards our own intellectual practices. In this context, in Moraña's opinion, the subaltern enters the international market as a commodity as well as a category that levels and homogenizes regional differences (1997, 48). Whether one subscribes to her assessment of subaltern studies or not, it is reasonable to say that those who have Latin America as its object of study, should refrain from using such theoretical frameworks without subjecting them, first, to a careful scrutiny. One of the main problems with resorting to these theories originated in the center—that is, in the United States or Europe—is that such an operation may very well lead the critic—if she/he is not careful enough—to a construction of Latin America as an object of study partially shaped by a First World perspective. A good example of that kind of construction of the object of study is Román de la Campa's most recent book, where the author produces a representation of Latin Americanism that is totally dependent on First World theories. In his opinion, the corpus of criticism produced by Latin Americanists—primarily in the United States, but also in the rest of the world—is mostly based on a branch of poststructuralism: deconstruction (1999, vii). This representation of the Latin American critical tradition in the area of literary studies does not seem to be able to find room in its model for trends represented by Marxist critics such as Hernán Vidal and Neil Larsen—who find their predecessors in authors like José Carlos Mariátegui and Roberto Fernández Retamar, among others—as well as by those critics with strong ties to the social sciences—represented, for example, by Agustín Cueva. Moreover, such a representation fails to account for the influential work of more recent critics like the recently deceased Antonio Cornejo Polar—who could hardly qualify as a practitioner of deconstruction. Román de la Campa's representation of Latin Americanism is, then, an incomplete one because it is blind to any Latin Americanist theoretical enterprise that is not based on some



First World theories. Moreover, it is my contention that it is so because of the preconceived ideas he brings to the analysis. The object of study, in this way, takes shape as a consequence of the excessive importance de la Campa assigns to certain First World theories. That is why, as scholars of Latin American colonial studies, we should focus (without denying the possible usefulness of theoretical frameworks produced in the First World) on the study of the specific social situations that are the foundation and beginnings of our present. And we should do it with the tools that best serve that goal—be they postcolonial theory, subaltern studies, or any other theoretical tradition—, yet without forgetting the specificity of the colonial situations we are trying to make sense of.<sup>5</sup>

Having said that, I want to clarify that some of the Latin American Subaltern Studies group's objectives coincide with the goals pursued by the editors of this volume. The founding statement clearly calls for a theoretical practice that requires from the critic a stronger sense of social and political responsibility as well as a solidarity with subaltern subjects. In this respect, this book should be viewed as a critical endeavor that continues a tradition whose most recent avatar is Subaltern Studies, but whose antecedents include a number of scholars—such as José C. Mariátegui, Angel Rama and Antonio Cornejo Polar, to mention only three of the most influential ones—who attempted to understand Latin America and its culture from an independent, decolonizing perspective. This means that although it is true that scholars in the field of colonial studies can choose to be the bearers of a Latin American critical tradition, this choice does not rule out the possibility of entering a critical dialogue with postcolonial theory and subaltern studies—a dialogue that requires some caution, though, because of the risks one runs while resorting to theoretical constructs originating in social and cultural formations that are alien to one's object of study.

I hope the reader understands that to have some reservations with regard to subaltern studies does not entail a denial of the need to concede an epistemological privilege to certain social agents; it does not mean, either, a return to certain *criollista* conceptions that John Beverley calls, in his new book, “neo-Arielism” (1999, 18–19).<sup>6</sup> In order to respond to such suspicions, let us point out that any form of *criollismo* would, precisely, rule out those analyses of colonial situations—like the ones included in this book—that criticize its national project. Besides, *criollismo* is the type of intellectual and social movement more prone to embrace, acritically, the theoretical contributions generated in the “civilized” First World. For a thorough portrayal of *criollismo*'s modus operandi, it should suffice to remember Domingo F. Sarmiento's (or any other leader of a Latin American independent republic's) project, based on a narrative that attempted to erase from the face of the earth the local knowledges of marginal ethnic groups and, in some cases, the human groups themselves. What this book does is, precisely, the opposite of *criollismo*: an in-depth study of the peculiarities of Latin American colonial situations that take into account its consequences for the situations of social injustice of the present; a

study that holds the historical agents that created that social injustice responsible and that does not forget the memories of the colonial subjects demonized or repressed by hegemonic power. In other words, what this book offers is a study of Latin American roots that lays bare the domination strategies used by the *criollo* national project.

Finally, the reader should not get the impression that I am advocating a Latin Americanism produced by Latin American subjects who live in Latin America. A passport does not give one privileged access to the right tools to account for a given object of study. On the contrary, some of the theoretical frameworks produced today in Latin America by Latin American scholars can also be subject to criticism from the disciplinary perspective of the new mode of intellectual production in the field of Latin American colonial studies. Two examples will suffice to illustrate the point. One of the most popular theoretical tools today in Latin Americanism is the notion of hybridity as developed by Néstor García Canclini. Reading both his *Culturas híbridas* (1990) and *Consumidores y ciudadanos* (1995) one gets the impression that there is something missing from the analysis. For example, the way in which he seems to marvel at—and, often, celebrate—the hybrid practices of the subaltern, seems to leave in the shadows—as Neil Larsen has pointed out—the constitutive violence that lies at the origin of the social situation that serves as the framework for the aforementioned hybrid practices. That violence started, as is well known, with the cultural clash that some call, euphemistically, the colonial encounter.<sup>7</sup> The colonial violence that is the origin of Latin American hybrid cultures is, then, absent from García Canclini's analysis.

The most recent work by another critic from the periphery, the Argentinean Beatriz Sarlo, is perhaps the most perfect incarnation of the “neo-Arielism” (or neo-*criollismo*) mentioned by John Beverley (and by other colleagues at the aforementioned LASA conference in Chicago) in his new book: she proposes a critical agenda that should focus on a return to the study of the cultural production typical of the lettered city—that is, an agenda that proposes to privilege the study of literature and other elite cultural manifestations promoted by the narratives of nationhood (1997, 36, 38). Such a critical project (which entails an utter rejection of cultural studies—a theoretical endeavor that Sarlo now considers as very detrimental to Latin American studies), is definitely unacceptable to those of us in the area of colonial studies who adhere to a project like this book, because—among other reasons—it proposes to limit our research *only* to, precisely, the cultural production that erased the subaltern or oppressed subjects from the universe of meaning created by official national narratives. However, it should be pointed out that there are, in Latin America, other kinds of research projects that are closer to this book's than to Sarlo's. I am referring to, for example, Zulma Palermo's (1997) and Gladys Lopreto's (1996) work, which focuses on the retrieval of marginal nar-

ratives of the colonial period. The idea behind their respective agendas is to understand the present through the study of the stories that have been erased by the official Argentinean national narrative.

As can be seen, the location in which theory is produced neither guarantees nor precludes its explanatory value. I am stating this truism because of a certain fictional dialogue authored by Alberto Moreiras in one of his most recent interventions:

Take your average non-Latin American Latinamericanist: he (sic) must hear, as a constant background murmuring, that his (sic) efforts to think Latin America from his (sic) location in the cosmopolitan university have, as a damning condition of possibility, his (sic) all too comfortable installation in the methodological trends and fashions of world-hegemonic university discourse. (1997, iv)

. . . the Latin American Latinamericanist finds his (*sic*) dubious legitimation in the positing of location as final redemption. But then location was precisely what always already delegitimized his (*sic*) out-siding other. How can location function simultaneously as a source of legitimation and as its opposite? The apparent answer is: “proper” location works, improper location does not. (1997, iv)

Although Moreiras describes this fictional dialogue as “a staged fight, a wrestling match between jokers” (1997, v), it could be better described as a counterpoint between a non-Latin American Latinamericanist (like himself) and a Latin American Latinamericanist who sounds like Hugo Achugar (1998, where he grants epistemological privilege to those critical discourses that come from the periphery—) [97]<sup>8</sup> or, to some extent, Nelly Richard (when she gives locality an important role in the elaboration of theory—) [1997, 346]. This staged dialogue is the platform from which Moreiras advances his very well-founded argument against locational thinking. However, I think his argument leaves the ground on which some critical strategies stand—those that put emphasis on the issue of the situation of enunciation—untouched. In other words, his argument does not invalidate the claims of those who, like Mignolo, believe that what matters is “who is talking, about what, where and why” (Mignolo 1993, 122). According to him, although one must pay attention to locality because local circumstances have an impact on the politics developed by a given subject, this does not mean one should give it an ontological status that determines the production of knowledge (1993, 122). If scholars are not totally determined by their circumstances, then, their positioning does not depend so much on geographic location (although it should be taken into account), but rather on the ideological interests they choose to defend or embrace. Alberto Moreiras is right when, echoing Walter Mignolo, he points out that “no thinking exhausts itself in its conditions of enunciation”

(1997, vi). However, it is also true that no thinking comes from a vacuum. In this light, the strategy he proposes to replace critical practices focused on the situation of enunciation (vi), a strategy which he calls “dirty” (in the sense that no thinking proceeds from disembodiment) atopianism, looks more atopian (that is, anti-locational) than dirty (an embodied thinking). In the case of the field of colonial studies, there is no room for non-positional thinking. The ideological position one assumes is crucial for the outcome of one’s research, for there are no third spaces or third ways in the study of the colonial past: one either embraces the winners’ (the European’s or *criollo*’s) world view or sides with the subjects who still live in subalternity. One can do this from any location. What cannot be done, at the risk of being complicit with hegemony, is to pretend one does not speak from a certain position.

As we have seen throughout this preface, we are, in the present, far from being free of colonialism in a broad sense. First, we saw the existence of a neo-colonialism in the production of the modern scholars that adhere to the world views promoted by the *criollo* or European authors of the colonial period. Later, we saw that there is an academic colonialism exerted upon those who write about a culture whose language, Spanish, is far from being considered hegemonic in the present. The fact that the author of this preface, a Spanish-speaking Uruguayan, is writing this introduction in English is—as we saw in Mignolo’s quote on the lack of intellectual currency of the Spanish language today—a confirmation of the predicament of Spanish-speaking intellectuals from the periphery trying to make themselves heard in the framework of an English-dominated academic world. Moreover, that colonialism imposed on non-English speakers manifests itself, also, in the origin of the tools—which come, more often than not, like postcolonial theory and subaltern studies, from the capitalist center—we use to account for our object of study.

There is still another kind of colonialism that needs to be avoided. I am referring to the uses of indigenous pasts in order to create discourses of Latin American identity. Amaryll Chanady, in her study on authors such as José Martí, Mariátegui, and Fernández Retamar, has already warned against the perils of those discourses in which the Amerindian tradition is appropriated in order to differentiate between a national or supranational (that is, regional) identity and an external hegemonic power (1990, 36, and *passim*). Those discourses represent the Indian as a pretext for a discursive practice of resistance, but deny him/her “the status of subject in the elaboration and conceptualization of the collective enterprise of promoting a national identity” (Chanady, 36). As the author points out, her critique of those Latin American major authors (who are part of the decolonizing tradition I mentioned above) does not propose a general rejection of strategies of collective self-affirmation, but the need to adopt a critical stance with respect to monologic strategies of identity (1990, 46). In the same spirit, and as an attempt to be alert about our own tradition and practice, I would like to call attention to a similar intellectual oper-

ation in contemporary colonial studies practice. It is my impression that although a number of studies (often the most interesting ones in the field) pay special attention to the cultural traditions marginalized by the *criollo* national narratives that dominate the ideological landscape of the continent, some of them seem to seek, primarily, the legitimation of the scholar's situation of enunciation. That is, some scholars (in many cases, of Latin American descent) study the marginalized cultures in order to represent themselves as producers of knowledge in a globalized world that privileges other producers of knowledge (for example, those who come from cultural traditions more in fashion in the context of the current global geopolitical situation) and other objects of study (for instance, the former colonies of the British Empire). Most of the time, however, that intellectual operation is not accompanied by a vindication of the situation of enunciation of, and knowledge production by, the indigenous or subaltern cultures that made the investigation possible. The appropriation of those knowledges marginalized by the West, of those forgotten traditions, may become—if it does not go hand in hand with a clear validation of those local knowledges as equal in rank with the one produced by Western scholars—another form of intellectual colonization. This is why we, Latin American colonial studies experts, must be permanently alert in order not to fall into the trap of such (appropriating) academic strategies.

As John Beverley has pointed out repeatedly, literary studies and other humanistic disciplines have contributed to the promotion and perpetuation of domination of subaltern subjects both in Latin America and the world (for example, 1999, 1; 1993, x). That is why it is necessary not only to revise the theoretical tools we bring to the analysis of our object of study, but also to permanently question our role as practitioners of a discipline that has traditionally been at the service of the dominant ideology—that is, at the service of the values and practices of the dominant groups. I hope that this preface contributes to a discussion that eventually leads to the decolonization of our field of studies—that is, a discussion of an ethical program for a disciplinary practice that does not need to appropriate the knowledge produced by the colonial subjects of the past and the oppressed subjects of the present. Let us try, then, not to become accomplices of the powers that be. Let us try, in other words, not to be the colonizers of the present.

## NOTES

1. I am using the expression colonial situations in the sense given to it by Walter Mignolo:

the situation in which an ethnic minority, technologically advanced and practicing Christian religion, imposed itself upon an ethnic majority, technologi-

cally less advanced and practicing non-Christian religions. Colonial situations are shaped by a process of transformation in which members of both the colonized as well as the colonizing cultures enter into a particular kind of human interaction, colonial semiosis, which, in turn, contributes to the formation of the colonial situation (1989, 94).

2. Later in this introduction, I will refer again to the notion of colonial legacies (the living consequences of colonial situations) as developed by Mignolo.
3. It should be pointed out that although there are differences between their respective research agendas, both Walter D. Mignolo and Rolena Adorno announced the advent of a new paradigm in Latin American colonial studies.
4. Since then, several important scholars in the field of Latin American Studies have called attention to the postcolonial critics' ignorance (which at this point one assumes is a conscious choice) of the Latin American critical tradition: Sara Castro-Klarén (1994, 230; and in Zevallos-Aguilar 1997, 969), John Beverley (1994, 272), and Hugo Achugar (1997, 61), among others.
5. This case could be supplemented by Ricardo Kaliman's critique of the cultural studies paradigm (another theoretical construct originated in the center) which, in his opinion, does not consider "interesting"—and, therefore, pays little attention to—many of the cultural practices currently taking place in Latin America (1998, 262). He goes so far as to suggest that cultural studies, as a critical project, is strongly influenced by the orientation imposed on it by the institution on which it depends for its existence (262).
6. And as it could be heard in the hallways during the Latin American Studies Association (LASA) Conference in Chicago (September 1998).
7. Moreover, García Canclini's claim that one of the most efficient ways to resist globalization and neo-liberalism is to organize civil society so that its members can exercise their right to citizenship through consumption, leaves his argument open to some objections. For instance, one could argue that such a plan fails to recognize that the situations of social injustice are the consequence of economic and hegemonic structures that perpetuate the domination of the ruling classes; that consumption itself, no matter how oppositional and organized it can get, does not challenge—cannot challenge—the deep roots and strong structures of economic domination and exploitation. Again, those domination structures are the colonial legacies of our present.
8. Hugo Achugar's position, that can be synthesized in the following sentence: "the periphery is a privileged place from which to think the world" (1998, 97), has been recently criticized by Abril Trigo, who—like Moreiras—is wary of locational politics (2000, 85–87). He ends his criticism of Achugar's and Nelly Richard's positions—which are not identical but, to say the least, share some concerns and views—with the following statement: "The epistemological borders don't disappear because the intellectual happens to write from Montevideo instead of Pittsburgh" (87).

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