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30

Cultural Studies

ARTURO ARIAS

It has become common to state that Latin American cultural studies "entered the academic scene" in the 1980s, elaborating a critique of the symbolic production and everyday living experiences of social reality in the continent. I would argue this is not entirely a new phenomenon in Latin America. On the contrary, the ideologues of Latin American independence, heavily influenced by French Enlightenment thinking, worked along these lines by default. In their attempt to elaborate a new epistemology from the perspective of the new countries then being configured, they seldom made distinctions between "philosophy," "literature," "political tracts," and other forms of written knowledge; nonetheless, given the heritage of "the lettered city," they exercised quasi total intellectual hegemony, and enjoyed enormous political respect, benefiting from the explicatory power of what Avelar calls "the traditional aura of the *letrado*" (1999, p. 12). The phrase "lettered city" was originally conceived by Uruguay critic Angel Rama (1984), of whom more is said later. *Letrados* (men of letters) were not competing with ideologues because they were the ideologues themselves, the producers of symbolic capital. Their autonomy enabled them to feel equally at home in all kinds of genres, and they covered the terrain presently circumscribed by traditional disciplines.

Letrados were for the most part *criollos*, full-blooded Spaniards born in the Latin American colonies. They were the early protagonists of national public spheres in the hemisphere. Described by Román de la Campa as intellectuals whose "lust for power" cohabited with "isolated acts of literary transgression" (1999, p. 74), they intervened to legitimize exemplary narratives of national formation and integration in the process of constructing the nation itself as a symbolic entity, constituting its national imaginaries through discourses, symbols, images, and rites. Letrados imagined themselves at the vanguard of progress, often playing a role integrating those of military leader, prophet, priest, judge, and man of letters. All of these were linked to an active political career and to political considerations. Nineteenth-century literary production, then, established an ideological hegemony that interpellated individuals and transformed them into subjects who identified with the discursive formation named by the letrado.

Following this logic, we can rightfully claim that, since the 1800s, Latin American thinkers have produced a certain kind of knowledge that articulates the collective imaginaries and symbolic codes framed in variously written cultural manifestations with their political, historical, and social context. This is the generally recognized definition

of cultural studies as we know them today. They were likewise involved in an intuitive search for a socio-semiotic reorientation of their understanding of their own selves and of their national place in the world, while also attempting to define what modernity meant for their young nations. We could argue that this process began with the struggle for independence from Spain, and cite Mexico's first novelist José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi, Venezuelan poet Andrés Bello and Central American philosopher José Cecilio del Valle as examples of its earliest exponents. They do not yet serve our purpose of identifying a Latin American cultural genealogy because, during most of the nineteenth century, *letrados* wrote primarily about national, not hemispheric or Latin American, issues. Indeed, the name "Latin America" was not even coined until the second half of the nineteenth century . . . by the French. *Amérique latine* first appeared in French emperor Napoleon III's *Lettres sur l'Amèrique du Nord*, as a goal for expansion during his reign. Therefore, we often begin with the publications of both Cuban poet José Martí's essay *Nuestra América* (1891), which appeared first in New York and then in Mexico City, and with Uruguayan essayist José Enrique Rodó's *Ariel* (1900). It is in these texts, both aiming toward political and ethical transformations, that the question of what it means to be a modern Latin American subject, qua Latin American subject, first emerges in a perspective that we could presently define as "interdisciplinary," with the caveat that it made its presence felt before traditional disciplines had been configured in the continent. The problematics and methodologies of Latin American cultural studies thus predate the generally recognized field of cultural studies. Still, they are centered on issues of colonialism and postcolonialism, although in relation to Latin American identity, and they intuitively configure a new thinking, an event, an encounter and a response long before the Birmingham model – traditionally credited with the invention of the concept of "cultural studies" in the 1950s, primarily through the efforts of Stuart Hall and Raymond Williams – or the French school of cultural studies that emerged in the 1960s – Barthes, Benjamin, Althusser, Rancière, Fanon, and Bourdieu, whose work emphasized the role of practice and embodiment in social dynamics – came into being. Roberto Rivera (2004) has suggested that one of the predicaments of neo-colonial intellectuals is to have to borrow theories that were not designed to address the problems they are most anxious to resolve. One of the unexpected consequences is that Latin Americans have often invented cultural products that greatly resemble those that Europe would only "discover" later. Rivera cites Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz's conception of Neo-Platonism and Juan José Arévalo's design of a disciplinary panopticon.

Latin American intellectuals undoubtedly began to focus on continental issues rather than national ones in response to the U.S. expansion into the Caribbean basin as a result of the Spanish-American War (1898). This crucial event took place 50 years after Mexico was forced to cede the present-day states of California, Nevada, Utah, and parts of Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico, and Wyoming – losing more than 500,000 square miles, or about 40 percent of its territory – in the Mexican–American war (1848), an event soon followed by the 1857 occupation of Nicaragua by confederate William Walker, who invaded that country and proclaimed himself president. The more aggressive entrance of the United States into the Latin American sphere in 1898 initiated a new era of difficult North–South relations, as the United States attempted to control the politics and economies of most countries of the Caribbean Basin, and later

began constructing an inter-oceanic canal. President Theodore Roosevelt justified this intervention with the "Roosevelt Corollary" to the Monroe Doctrine, which implied that the United States could step into Latin America at will, supposedly to prevent intervention by Europe. When Nicaragua threatened to build a competing canal, the United States occupied the country (1909), overthrowing president José Santos Zelaya and imposing a dictator in his place. The United States landed Marines in Nicaragua, who would stay until 1933, just as it had previously done in Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, and Panama.

This foreign policy poisoned U.S.–Latin America relations during most of the twentieth century. If Martí had anticipated this move in *Nuestra América* by signaling the danger of appropriating knowledges not created to solve the problems of Latin American postcolonial societies as explicatory power for thinking about turn-of-the-century postcoloniality and about the problematics of postcolonial nation-states, it was in the wake of the Spanish American War that *Ariel* (1900) emerged as an attempt to explain the cultural and metaphysical differences between North American and Latin American cultures by associating the former with the materialist and utilitarian elements embodied in Shakespeare's Prospero, from *The Tempest*, and the latter with a utopian ideal of spiritual and intellectual unity of Latin America with Spain and Europe, figured by Ariel, from the same play, a character capable of sacrificing material gain for spiritual concerns. Rodó's influence on young intellectuals up to the 1940s was enormous, and the principle of Latin uniqueness in its struggle with the United States had great resonance throughout the twentieth century. Rodó's critique, flaws notwithstanding, described an articulation of postcoloniality wherein the residues of colonial domination had seeped into the post-independence state. This also created a reclamation of anticolonial resistance, which would frame the grand narrative of Latin American cultural studies' self-constituting genealogy.

Building on this legacy of signifiers as markers of "meaning," Alfonso Reyes attempted in *Visión de Anáhuac* (1956) to reconfigure a fractured post-revolutionary Mexican identity by reconciling and blending pre-Columbian and modern-day Mexican cultures. With the Dominican critic Pedro Henríquez Ureña, and fellow Mexicans Antonio Caso and José Vasconcelos, he founded the Ateneo de la Juventud. This joint effort would pave the way both for the emerging notion of *mestizaje* ("mixed," implying mixed Spanish and indigenous ancestry) and for the elaboration of a cultural aesthetics. The first, originally articulated in *Visión de Anáhuac*, would find its highest expression in Vasconcelos's *La raza cósmica* (1925), where the idealized image of *mestizaje* as an end-of-history "cosmic race" inaugurates a contentious site of nation-building and racial politics. The second, prefigured in Reyes's *Cuestiones estéticas* (1955a), would be achieved by Henríquez Ureña's systematization of cultural production in *Seis ensayos en busca de nuestra expresión* (1928), *Literary Currents in Hispanic America* (1945), and *Historia de la cultura en la América Hispánica* (1947). In these works, Henríquez Ureña conceives of Latin American literary production, organized for the first time into a coherent whole, in terms of what Walter Mignolo (2000) has more recently labeled the history of the modern/colonial world, in an attempt to understand the historical formation and ethno-racial conformation of the continent. Thus, despite appearances, Henríquez Ureña's vast oeuvre is not strictly literary criticism, but a mapping of the "frame" of Latin American cultural production and a history of how literature becomes

the primary means for the conformation of an epistemological subjectivity within the various nations of the continent. Like many contemporary practitioners of cultural studies, Henríquez Ureña worked, in Julio Ramos's words, "in the interstitial site of the essay, with transdisciplinary devices and ways of knowledge" (Ramos, 1998, p. 39).

In *Notas sobre la inteligencia Americana* (1955b) and *Posición de América* (1982) Reyes would return to issues of *mestizo* subjectivity by rearticulating another variable of cultural fusion of Western and indigenous values. He did not escape the "ethnocentric and reverse-ethnocentric benevolent double bind" (Spivak, 1999, p. 118) that effectively denies indigenous peoples their own "worlding," as Vasconcelos had not either, though he avoids the latter's missteps. Vasconcelos ultimately re-wove the threads of colonialism into his national narrative, whereas Reyes remained critical of European positionality and argued for an American identity constructed in opposition to what we would presently label as "Eurocentrism."

Fernando Ortiz attempted to grasp the complex transformation of cultures brought together by the power of colonialism and by imperial history. He coined the critical category of "transculturation" in 1940, in his now classic *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y del azúcar*. The term also represents a way of going around the problematical concept of acculturation, which represented an ethnocentric bias, a one-way street for non-Western cultures, whose only alternative was the assimilation of the imposed Western model. Transculturation, in contrast, became a two-way alternative, by which two cultures could influence each other despite confrontation and struggle. Important as this concept is, it did not enter mainstream debate until Angel Rama rearticulated it in the 1970s. From that time forward, it would prove to be one of the most important, durable, and most quoted categories in the continent's cultural debate.

A mention should also be made of Edmundo O'Gorman's historiographic questioning in the 1950s. In *La invención de América* (1958), O'Gorman opposed the traditional concept of the discovery of the Americas, an innovative reading of the primary sources from original perspectives. O'Gorman is often singled out as one of the pioneers of post-colonial studies in Latin America. In his best-known work, he argued – predating some of Said's latter conclusions about "Orientalism" – that America was "invented," not "discovered," as it was the result of a phantasmatic projection of Western thinking more than a chance discovery. In 2005, Mignolo would add, in *The Idea of Latin America*, to O'Gorman's conception that America was an "invention" saturated with "coloniality," that is, conceived at the intersection of the expansion of Europe over the New World.

According to the narrative memorialized by Stuart Hall, the Birmingham School emerged in the late 1950s from literature and the humanities. What is traditionally recognized as Latin American cultural studies, however, emerged primarily from the social sciences in the 1960s, when the cultural essays produced by the intellectuals I have discussed, and others, became fused with sociological and anthropological research in an attempt to account for the events then taking place in the continent. These systems of thought included dependency theory, internal colonialism, and theology of liberation, as well as the pedagogy of the oppressed, and an emerging reflection on popular cultures and on the legacy of Western thinking in a heterogeneous and contradictory continent. All these lines of thought were combined with the innovative production of literary and popular culture in the 1960s, including *boom* literature, street theater, the new cinema, or the *nueva canción* movement in popular music, to deliver

a new understanding of both symbolic production and social imaginaries on the continent, thus systematizing an original way of understanding cultural reality that would continue in the 1990s.

One of the most visible of these approaches was dependency theory in economics, which began in the late 1950s under the guidance of the Director of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America (CEPAL, in Spanish), Raúl Prebisch. Prebisch and his colleagues were troubled by the fact that economic growth in the advanced industrialized countries did not necessarily lead to growth in the poorer countries. On the contrary, their research suggested that economic activity in the richer countries often generated serious economic problems in poorer nations. That possibility had not been predicted by classical economic theory, which assumed that economic growth would benefit all countries even if the wealth was not always equally shared. Thus, dependency was defined by Theotonio Dos Santos as "... a certain structure of the world economy ... that ... favors some countries to the detriment of others and limits the development possibilities of the subordinate economics ..." (Dos Santos, 1970, p. 226).

Three common assumptions were associated with most dependency theories. First, dependency theory characterized the international system as comprised of two sets of states, variously described as dominant/dependent, center/periphery, or metropolitan/satellite. The dominant states were the advanced industrial nations. The dependent states were those Latin American nations with low per capita gross national products (GNPs), relying heavily on the export of a single commodity for foreign exchange earnings. Second, they maintained that external forces were of singular importance to the economic activities within dependent states. These external forces included multinational corporations, international commodity markets, foreign assistance, communications, and any other means by which the advanced industrialized countries could represent their economic interests abroad. Thirdly, the definitions of dependency indicated that the relations between dominant and dependent states were dynamic because their interactions not only reinforced but also intensified the continual growth of unequal patterns. By repudiating the central distributive mechanism of the classical model, discounting aggregate measures of economic growth, and encouraging nation-states to pursue policies of self-reliance, dependency theory represented a uniquely original approach. The Marxist and post-Marxist view of international relations would constitute the economic, social, and political backbone of interdisciplinary cultural studies, as they congealed in the late 1970s and 1980s.

The same could be said for the concept of internal colonialism. Close to dependency theories, internal colonialism is a concept whose origins can be traced to the mid-1960s, in the work of Mexican social scientists Rodolfo Stavenhagen and Pablo González Casanova, who wanted to explore links between class and ethnicity (Stavenhagen, 1965; González Casanova, 1969, p. 33). Internal colonialism took a step away from the idea of *mestizaje* and "social integration" as vehicles of social mobility. Instead, it addressed the political inequalities between regions within a single society. The category added an indigenous dimension to the description of the uneven effects of state development on a regional basis, and to the exploitation of subalternized groups, who constituted a colonized people within the nation-state. An internal colony typically produced wealth for the benefit of those closely associated with the power apparatus of the state,

usually located in the capital city. Thus, members of the internal colonies were distinguished by cultural variables such as ethnicity, language, or religion, and excluded from prestigious social and political positions, which were hegemonized by members of the metropolis displaying Eurocentric traits. The main difference between the neocolonialism implicit in dependency theory and internal colonialism was the source of exploitation. In the former, the control came from outside the nation-state; in the latter, it came from within it. This new approach addressed the gradual racialization process with a significant non-European population.

In 1968, the so-called radical group of anthropologists of Mexico's National School of Anthropology and History, nicknamed *los siete magníficos* (the Magnificent Seven) developed a more radical take on the concept of internal colonialism that not only exposed its limits, but also conceptually buried the classical Mexican anthropological notions of *mestizaje* and *indigenismo* as originally developed by Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, thus breaking the close relationship between Mexican anthropology and official nationalism. Led by Arturo Warman and Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, they published *De eso que llaman antropología mexicana* (Warman et al., 1970; Bonfil, 1970). The group also included Margarita Nolasco, Mercedes Olivera, and Enrique Valencia as its major figures. They complained that Mexican *indigenismo* had attempted to incorporate indigenous peoples into a dominant "national" and "modern" system because Mexican anthropology had placed itself at the service of the state, thus abandoning the scientific and critical potential of the discipline. Warman unfortunately reversed himself in the 1980s. He became Director of the Procuraduría Agraria (Ministry of Agriculture) in the Salinas de Gortari government (1988–94), and provided the rationale for privatizing the *ejidos* (communal lands distributed by the Cárdenas government to landless peasants from 1934 to 1940 as a land reform program) in accordance with neoliberal restructuring in 1991. He subsequently published in praise of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), at a time when the Mexican people, intellectuals, and indigenous groups opposed it. Indeed, the way NAFTA was approved by the Mexican government, without any public inquiries or popular consent, marked the emergence of the indigenous Zapatista movement in Chiapas, and the beginning of the end for the Partido Institucional Revolucionario (PRI), which ruled Mexico since 1920, and lost power in 2000.

Despite Warman's latter positioning, the debates ensuing from the *siete magníficos* in 1968, furthered by other members of the group such as Mercedes Olivera, who lived with Maya refugees during the 1980s and helped create Maya feminist organizations in the 1990s, would impact ethnic and indigenous theory in Central America in the 1980s, as well as Chiapas and South America a decade later. These political experiences and the scholarship that evolved from them ultimately enabled Mignolo to develop the concept of post-Occidentalism in the 1990s. The latter concept, originally named in passing in 1974 by Fernández Retamar in "Nuestra América y Occidente," which will be explained further in this same chapter, questions and critiques Western paradigms (including global paradigms) at work in the interpretation of Latin American societies and cultures, including scholarship.

Liberation theory embraced the premises of both dependency theory and internal colonialism, and put a moral spin on them. Liberation theology was a sequel to the Second Vatican Council (ending in late 1965), which turned the church upside down

by stating that, instead of saving people for the afterlife, the Catholic Church's role should be to improve the life of the poor on this earth. This idea led to a questioning of traditional models of pastoral work by many priests and nuns in Latin America. In August 1968 the Second General Conference of CELAM (Latin American Episcopal Council), known as the Medellín Conference, used a structure of reality/reflection/pastoral consequences to "apply" Vatican II to Latin America (Berryman, 1984, chapter two). Out of this meeting emerged the beginnings of liberation theology, with an emphasis on *concientización* (conscientization, or raising awareness), which implied an acceptance of Paulo Freire's methodology, as I will explain below. The premises of this movement, however, were not systematically theorized until the publication of Gustavo Gutiérrez's *Theology of Liberation* (1971) and Hugo Assmann's *Theology for a Nomad Church* (1971). The main methodological innovation of liberation theology is to approach theology (i.e., to speak of God) from the viewpoint of the economically poor and oppressed because they are a privileged channel of God's grace. Its main lines included the rejection of the notion of a "separation of planes" (spiritual and temporal) in favor of a single history of humankind; an ideological critique of the orthodox church; the assertion that while the definitive kingdom of God was beyond history, it needed to be built by partial realizations within history; and, finally, that conflict, even class struggle, was part of history. What was most radical was not the writing of highly educated priests and scholars, but the social organization of church practice through the model of Christian base communities. Theologian Leonardo Boff and others strove to create a bottom-up movement in practice, with biblical interpretation and liturgical practice designed by lay practitioners themselves, rather than by the orthodox church hierarchy. Leonardo Boff and his brother Clodovis state in their book that "it is *only* this effective connection with liberating practice that can give theologians a 'new spirit,' a new style, or a new way of doing theology" (Boff and Boff, 2000, p. 22). Furthermore, with its emphasis on the "preferential option for the poor," the practice (or *praxis* to use Gramsci and Freire's concept) was as important as the belief, if not more so; the movement was said to emphasize *orthopraxis* over *orthodoxy*. Base communities met in small gatherings where the Bible could be discussed and grassroots political organization could take place. Liberation theorists placed a high value on lay participation, an approach that influenced the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group, formed in 1992 and dissolved in 2000, which defined itself as a "small interdisciplinary academic 'affinity group' . . ." (Rodríguez, 2001, pp. 29–30).

Along the same line, Paulo Freire points to what he labeled a "culture of silence" in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, by which he understands that dominated individuals lose their ability to critically respond to a culture that is forced upon them by a dominant social sector. A long-time Brazilian adult educator, Freire worked to help subaltern peoples find a voice. In 1968, he published *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, an English translation of which appeared in 1970, in which he claimed that the subject's ontological vocation was to act upon and transform his/her world, and in so doing move toward ever new possibilities of fuller and richer life, individually and collectively. He added that every human being, no matter how "ignorant" or submerged in the culture of silence he or she might be, is capable of looking critically at the world in a dialogical encounter with others. His pedagogy was aimed at providing the proper tools for this encounter, so that the subaltern individual could gradually perceive his/her personal and social

reality as well as the contradictions in it, become conscious of his/her own perception of that reality, and deal critically with it. Freire's pedagogy became closely associated with the efforts of liberation theology because his emphasis on dialogue struck a strong chord with Catholic missionaries concerned with popular and informal education. His concern with *praxis*, however contradictory that might be, also led to Latin American concerns for subaltern subjectivity, and eventually allowed for a reevaluation of *testimonio* (testimony) as an anti-literary literary genre.

The list of individuals who, emerging in the wake of 1960s upheavals, made fundamental contributions to what became cultural studies in the 1980s includes Darcy Ribeiro. Ribeiro was a Brazilian anthropologist who brought indigenous peoples to the forefront of his country's history. Of his many books, the one about the mythology and art of the Kadiweu is considered the most important. However, he enters the genealogy of Latin American cultural studies mainly through his *O processo civilizatório* (1987), where he analyzes the emergence of sociocultural formations with the goal of understanding the causes of unequal socioeconomic development and exploring the perspectives for so-called "backward peoples." Ribeiro is convinced that theories of history do not account for these societies, given modernity's tendency to homogenize national origins. He outlines a massive amount of anthropological data about social, cultural, and economic facts regarding the formative period of hemispheric ethnic groups that points towards a new theory of culture and an alternative gaze on indigenous populations in the Americas. His insights would transform future perceptions of the indigenous subject.

The incorporation of popular cultures into cultural analysis was introduced by Mexican Carlos Monsiváis. Monsiváis's often satirical writings celebrate the marginalized popular cultures of Mexico City that, in his understanding, unconsciously decolonize themselves, as a way to criticize Mexico's high-brow cultural space and its culture/power relations. This counterpoint enables Monsiváis to analyze historical obstacles contriving to prevent Mexico's passage into modernity along the lines of high-brow/low-brow cultural tension. The majority of his chronicles were published between 1970 and 1995, though they are still ongoing, and he is best known for *Amor perdido* (1977). In them, he celebrates the beleaguered inhabitants of super-crowded Mexico City, popular energy and its transmogrification into mass-mediatic iconography, turning "the negative into sources of a compensatory pride" (Egan, 2001, introduction). His writing becomes a ritual performance allowing the reader to observe a culture of poverty that brings forth redemptive signs of emergent change.

We see another trend in Cuba, where, writing from that nation's Marxist perspective, Roberto Fernández Retamar attempted in *Calibán* (1971) to refute Rodó's idealization of a Europeanist "Ariel" by presenting the "cannibal" figure in *The Tempest* as a "proletarian" alternative. Despite its Cuban-Marxist orientation and its insistence on placing Martí at the foundation of an essentialist *mestizo* identity in Latin America, Fernández Retamar's text paved the way toward opening a discussion on the possibilities of elaborating a post-Western ideology, an issue mentioned in his subsequent essay "Nuestra América y Occidente" (1974) in *Para el perfil definitivo del hombre* (Fernández Retamar, 1981). Still, the substitution of Ariel by Caliban seems to underscore the influence of Europe, since they are both Shakespearean characters, thereby, as Spivak has pointed out, enforcing a "foreclosure" of indigenous presence in the debate on Latin

American identity (Spivak, 1999, p. 118). What Spivak did not note, as Ofelia Schutte has pointed out, is that in Latin America the indigenous subject is indeed the privileged interlocutor of the West, whereas the African descendant is not. Retamar introduced a reading that linked Caliban primarily to the African presence in the Caribbean, by way of Fanon's deconstruction of former Eurocentric readings of this Shakespearean character.

Julio Ramos has been cited for arguing that the difference between traditional Latin Americanist thinking up to around the publication of Fernández Retamar's article, and Latin American cultural studies as it evolved in the 1980s, was rooted in the fact that the former evinced a belief in the integrative capacity of national literatures and art, whereas the latter criticized the concept of a national culture as an apparatus of power (Ramos, 1998; Trigo, 2004a, p. 6). Perhaps it would be better to say that earlier essays, however heterogeneous and irreducible to the autonomous principles they might have been, were framed by a set of epistemological and metaphysical principles aimed at nation-building, a phenomenon that presupposed economic modernization, cultural modernism, and democratization, whereas Latin American cultural studies, as we know them now, emerged from the fissures, cracks, and fault lines of the failed process of nation-building and its nadir in the late 1980s. Therefore, the seminal role of Ribeiro, Freire, Fernández Retamar, or Monsiváis, among others, working on the interstices of the essay with transdisciplinary methodologies, justifies their recognition in the genealogy of Latin American cultural studies.

During the late 1970s, it was Angel Rama's reformulation of the category of transculturation in *Transculturación narrativa en América latina* that provided the groundwork for Latin American cultural theory as it evolved in the 1980s, even if Rama's theorization remains within the realm of literature. As Miller states, Rama focused on the possibilities implied by transculturation as a form of narrative transitivity between cultures, even when those cultures stood in asymmetrical relations of power (Miller, 2004). However, neither the model devised by Ortiz, nor Rama's modifications, created a general theory of transculturation, thus leaving the category open to further debate and modifications by cultural studies practitioners of the 1980s and 1990s. Ultimately, the concept of "transculturation" was either replaced or fused in the 1980s by/with newer conceptual categories, such as "hybridity" (García Canclini) and "heterogeneity" (Cornejo Polar).

By the end of the 1980s most academics agreed that the macro-narratives of the 1960s were no longer adequate for explaining the fast changes introduced by emergent globalization (Del Sarto, 2004, p. 156). One of its consequences was the idea that literature and all forms of "high culture" had lost their position as the cornerstones of national cultures; that traditional intellectuals had in turn lost their ground as *letrados* guiding national communities, and that the very idea of nation-states as the only (or at least privileged) political and cultural synthesis faced serious, perhaps insurmountable challenges. This complex set of ideas led to a revision of the theoretical models of the 1960s. The reformulation of methodologies resulted in the conformation of what would come to be labeled "Latin American cultural studies." Nevertheless, Del Sarto takes pains to underline that these creative revisions, even when they ventured into new epistemological paths, were done in dialogue with the continent's tradition of critical thinking: in her own words, they were "not the product of epistemological

ruptures but instead of concrete historical continuities" (2004, p. 157). Needless to say, what some people consider a new epistemological path, others consider a rupture.

Hybridity was popularized by cultural anthropologist Néstor García Canclini in *Culturas híbridas* (1989), shortly before an analogous concept was introduced to the English-speaking world by Homi Bhabha. Both conceptualizations were problematized together in U.S. academic institutions. Mixing anthropological analysis with art criticism and references to Bourdieu's symbolic relations, García Canclini's book became, as has been pointed out by many critics, a turning point in the emergence of a field of Latin American cultural studies. García Canclini argues that tradition and modernity became articulated through mutually dependent needs. Within his logic, there is interplay whereby modern symbolic representations are woven in the fabric of traditional cultural production and vice versa, rendering new identities through cultural difference. Hybridity thus focuses on the ambivalence of cultural authority. It shifts away from ontological authenticity – that is, away from the idea that there is a stable, coherent, knowable self that is conscious, rational, autonomous, and universal, so that no physical conditions or differences substantially affect how this self operates – as a political articulation of contradictory identities struggling for hegemony within nation-states as well as in transnational spaces. We are done here with the Enlightenment notion that the self knows itself and the world through reason, or rationality, posited as the highest form of mental functioning. García Canclini's definition of culture as a field of production, circulation, and consumption of symbolic goods and signs has framed the concept of culture as a necessary and inevitable transformational practice that precludes all essentialisms. As Del Sarto stated, hybridity became a central paradigm during the 1990s as a descriptive category, forcing most theorizations on the field to allude to it (2004, p. 181).

In this same period, Antonio Cornejo Polar's concepts of heterogeneity and contradictory totality, as framed in *Escribir en el aire* (1994), also had significant theoretical impact, relocating theoretical debate within the problematic of ethnic issues. Derived from his understanding of Peruvian ethnic conflicts and his re-reading of Peruvian political philosopher José Carlos Mariátegui's (1894–1930) *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality* (1928), Cornejo's conceptualization implies the existence of conflictive historical processes that cannot be solved within a diversity of homogeneous ethnic cultures. He argues that multiple inter-crossings do not lead toward syncretism, but instead emphasize "aporetic conflicts" (that is, conflicts that represent a final impasse) and alterities. His theory of culture thus refuses synthesis and fusion. He urges recognition of the complexity and difficulties of this process as a colonially-produced space of extreme ambiguity and contradictory meanings, thus pointing toward the emergence of the notion of the "coloniality of power," which entered the lexicon of Latin American theorists in 1991 through Aníbal Quijano's seminal article "Colonialidad y modernidad/racionalidad" published in *Perú Indígena*.

In the early 1990s, the recently constituted Latin American Subaltern Studies Group called into question the role of the academy in reading and representing the subaltern. For these scholars, academic work should have focused on making subaltern voices heard in academia (Rodríguez, 2001, p. 9). The popularity of Rigoberta Menchú's *testimonio* provided them with an anti-literary literary genre with which to make their case. However, as Trigo has pointed out in "Why do I do cultural studies?" (2000,

p. 78), they failed to realize the epistemological fetishization of the text as the ground of unmediated truth and the consequent political fetishization of the poetics of solidarity that enabled the critic's identification with the testimonial subject. The ongoing debate that subalternism generated put into question the very nature of "cultural studies." Nevertheless, by understanding the latter category as a mechanism for problematizing cultural and cross-cultural practices, scholars could work across linguistic, national, ethnic, and cultural borders, not to mention differences in social class. In this transition, the object of study shifted from the formal aspects of given cultural genres, usually within specific national frameworks, to the portrayal of everyday cultural detail, non-traditional or alternative knowledge producers, and the conditions and effects of sedimented linguistic turns. In this sense, Latin American cultural studies allowed for the exploration of imaginary, ex-centric representations of otherness, underlining both the creative energy of subaltern events and their attempts to create more just and egalitarian societies in the face of globalization.

After peaking in the first half of the 1990s with subaltern studies and its debates on *testimonio*, Latin American cultural studies seemed to enter an epistemological and institutional crisis by the end of the century. Some critics believe that a hyper-deconstructive dynamic and a theoretical saturation led scholars to lose sight of the object of study. A will on the part of critics to identify with the subject also contributed to a reification of abstract categories. Nonetheless, Walter Mignolo and Aníbal Quijano's concept of the "coloniality of power," conjoined with their corollaries, colonial semiosis, border gnosis, geopolitics of knowledge, and post-Occidentalism, operating sometimes as epistemic metaphors deployed to move thinking beyond Western and Eurocentric conceptualizations, provided a new way of framing the issues of cultural production and agency. Mignolo framed these issues, while recognizing Quijano's contribution, in his book *Local Histories/Global Designs* (2000). The popularity of those concepts can be attributed in part to the reemergence of indigenous issues in the Americas, as exemplified by the Nobel peace prize awarded to Menchú in 1992, the emergence of the Zapatista movement in 1994, and the election of Evo Morales as Bolivia's president in 2004 after years of grassroots agitation in the Andes.

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, the effects of globalization have further modified the concept of culture. Besides its economic impact, globalization produces symbolic goods generated by a libidinal economy, in Trigo's understanding, which enables the circulation and consumption of many other material goods (Trigo, 2003/2004, p. 269). Thus, to understand the role of culture, and the role of transculturation, one has to understand the interrelationships between political economy and libidinal economy, between the exchange value of merchandise and the exchange value of cultural signs, between work and desire, and between producers and consumers. Along similar lines, George Yúdice has theorized how diverse social groups, whether hegemonic or subaltern, have come to see culture as a resource to be negotiated within powerful transnational, globalized contexts, shaping the meaning of contemporary cultural phenomena and transforming both identity politics and cultural agency "relating to the international pacts, interpretive frameworks, and institutional conditionings of comportment and knowledge production" (Yúdice, 2003, p. 4).

The divergent lines chosen by Mignolo and Yúdice illustrate the broad, heterogeneous space covered by contemporary Latin American cultural studies. Both point to

alternative paths that lead to a similar end: that of transformation, of changing the terms of Latin America's present conundrum. A "Washington consensus" coined in reference to the neoliberal economic reforms championed by U.S. experts in the 1980s – reforms that generated a U.S.-centric perspective and style of governance – have recently been subjected to deepening dissent and outright refusal in Latin America. We could very well conclude that cultural studies and cultural approaches in general are presently elaborating a critique of the web of signs that might make it possible to break away from the subordinate, neocolonial role assigned to the continent under the present system. In this sense, we seem to have come full circle, back to the concerns that launched cultural critique at the beginning of the twentieth century in the first place.

Related chapters: 12 Marxism; 13 Liberation Philosophy; 20 *Mestizaje* and Hispanic Identity; 21 Liberation in Theology, Philosophy, and Pedagogy; 22 Philosophy, Postcoloniality, and Postmodernity; 23 Globalization and Latin American Thought.

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