Centering the Periphery
Non-Latin Latin Americanisms

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LASA president Sonia Alvarez generously invited me to convene a roundtable at LASA2006 to explore the study of Latin America outside of the Americas. I titled the roundtable "Centering the Periphery: Non-Latin Latin Americanisms" and asked Raanan Rein, Director of Tel Aviv University's Latin American and Iberian Studies Center, to help me organize the event. Our first approach was ambitious and we invited scholars from India, Egypt, Lebanon, China and Poland to participate. Yet almost immediately the "periphery" reared its head since our colleagues in these countries were not in a position to attend a conference in Puerto Rico. We then moved on to researchers whose institutions are in fact well known although they are in national academies for which Latin America is a low priority. Our panel thus included Dr. Michiel Baud (Centre for Latin American Research and Documentation, the Netherlands), Dr. Shuhei Hosokawa (International Center for Japanese Studies, Japan), Dr. Barbara Potthast (University of Cologne, Germany), and Dr. Raanan Rein (Tel Aviv University, Israel). Each was asked to assess the intellectual and political history of Latin American Studies within the context of their national academy in order to analyze the epistemologies emerging from a de-centered geopolitical approach to Latin American Studies.

These short pieces represent the emergence of a complex framework for the study of Latin America. In each case, it is exactly the non-Americas center which influences scholars to consider non-hegemonic populations within the region and in Diasporas. From these perspectives we see how new approaches are created out of different national lenses and how important it is for scholars in the center (i.e. the Americas) to engage with colleagues in Asia, Europe and the Middle East, among other places. This engagement will help to challenge some of the least discussed assumptions of Latin American studies. It will help to expand the populations considered worthy of study, the nature of imperialism in academic exchanges, and the transnational role of human rights in broader political and social movements in Latin America.

Ambivalent Academia: Latin and Anglo-Saxon Influences in Latin American Studies in Europe

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I never thought of myself or my colleagues in the Netherlands, or even Europe, as belonging to the—or 'a'—periphery. In Latin America Europeans are traditionally considered representatives of the rich, industrialized western world; of the centre, so to speak. And that is how we see ourselves, as well. We are, however, working in a different academic and political environment than our colleagues in the United States. Thus it is interesting to ask ourselves to what extent European (and Dutch) Latin American Studies differ from those in the hegemonic center. What does it mean for the themes of our research, our methodology, our relations with Latin American colleagues, and perhaps most importantly, our conclusions?

It would be a mistake to present Latin American studies in Europe as a homogeneous field. This became clear to me when we organized the CEISAL-2002 conference in Amsterdam and CEDLA published a special issue on "Major Trends and Topics in Latin American Studies in Europe." See <http://www.cedla.uva.nl/60_publications/european_reviewIndex.html#72>.

What the conference and publication made clear was what I call the Latin/Anglo-Saxon divide. In the past twenty years the Dutch and the Scandinavian countries have allied themselves with Latin American Studies in the United Kingdom and, indirectly, with academia in the United States. More recently, some German colleagues seem to have joined this trend. On the other hand, we see a Latin world in Europe that is dominated by France and Spain and includes many Eastern European countries. For this group the English language is hardly used in academic conversations and it is even looked upon with a certain suspicion. When Spanish or Portuguese do not suffice, French is the 'international' language.

The differences are not only linguistic but methodological as well. "Anglo-Saxon" scholars tend to conform to U.S. conventions such as explicit methodology, being theoretically informed but strong on empirical research, using large bibliographies and extensive notes, and using short sentences, a sharp style, and 'standard' composition. "Anglo-Saxon" scholars have a strong critical tradition which can be seen in the large review sections in major journals. "Latin" scholars, on the other hand, use a more interpretative and essayistic approach, often with smaller and more select bibliographies. Their history writing tends to remain very close to the sources without much comparative or theoretical references.

These internal differences, however, do not mean there are not similarities, especially when we contrast European Latin American Studies with Latin American Studies in the United States and the broader Americas. The proximity to Latin America and the political relevance and urgency of what is happening there is one important difference. This means the numbers of scholars engaged in Latin American Studies throughout the Americas is large and this LASA Congress

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is a perfect example! The size and power of U.S. academia has made English the hegemonic language. Thus it is more difficult for non-English speaking Latin Americanists to be published in dominant journals and this has made the political question of language (English in contrast to Spanish and Portuguese, let alone to indigenous languages) more poignant. The positioning in Latin American itself means U.S.-based Latin Americanists are more linked to imperial power politics.

There is no doubt that the dissimilarity in geopolitical positioning is the most important difference between "European" and "American" Latin Americanists. In his analysis of Area Studies in the United States, Ravi Arvind Palat recently observed that "its constitution as a field of study was directly related to the rise of the United States to a hegemonic position in the capitalist world economy in the aftermath of the Second World War." (See Palat's "Fragmented Visions. Excavating the Future of Area Studies in a Post-American World" in Neil L. Waters (ed.), *Beyond the Area Studies Wars. Toward a New International Studies* (Hanover and London: Middlebury College Press, 2000), 64-106, citation on p. 65.) For Palat, Area (and thus Latin American) Studies research "is thoroughly impregnated with the geopolitical conditions of its conception." To this I would add that there is no doubt that most production of knowledge (in terms of quantity) about Latin America outside of Latin America originates in the United States. This may generate feelings of inferiority or rejection among some European scholars, especially those from the 'Latin tradition' who are often ignored by their U.S.-based counterparts.

Being on the periphery, however, has advantages. European scholars sometimes enjoy easier relations with Latin American colleagues since they are no longer burdened by the problems of Empire. Europeans scholars also note that U.S.-based scholars run the risk of becoming provincial. This is particularly noticeable in an extreme interest in scholarly 'fashions' that might be provocatively called the 'incestuous' nature of U.S.-centered citational behavior. Scholarly production from the United States tends to have an extreme bias towards itself. For that reason U.S. scholars are sometimes accused (including by their own U.S. colleagues) of using Latin American colleagues as informants and not taking them seriously as colleagues. Finally, there is no doubt that U.S. scholars tend to be self-reflexive (often extremely so) and for the outsider it sometimes seems that the position of the United States (and academia there) are the exclusive point of reference.

There is no doubt that Latin American Studies in the United States continues to be an important point of reference for the scholarly community in Europe. Yet from our 'peripheral' vantage point, we also see some of the dangers. Farther away from political interests, Latin American Studies in Europe is less burdened with the problems of Empire. That may lead to less urgency and (therefore) less funding but it may leave more room for reflexivity and intellectual openness. ■

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Waiting for a Second Humboldt
Latin American Studies in Germany

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Like my colleague from the Netherlands, I was somewhat surprised and amused by the idea that I worked in the periphery, since Germany normally is not considered a peripheral country within the global community. I do feel marginal, however, since many of my colleagues in Germany regard my subject as something peripheral to their research. This is the case in many other European countries as well, especially in the more eastern part of Europe and to a lesser degree in Italy or France.

Germany (and the Eastern European countries) has even less of an overseas "imperial" tradition than the Netherlands, and their relationship with Latin America is easier and less politicized in many ways. Yet the greater distance—geographically as well as politically—is one of the reasons for the marginalization of Latin America within our academic world. In Germany, national history is so important because of its problems, and until very recently it has been the main focus of historical research and teaching in most universities. Historical production in Germany since the 19th century has centered on the Nation. If there was a regional focus in historical research other than on Germany, it was on the neighboring countries, England, France, and Italy, on the one hand, and Poland and Russia on the other.

For the study of Latin American history and society this means that after WWII the first—and for a long time the only—full professor for Latin American history was Richard Konetzke, a well known expert on Colonial Latin America. He remained the

only one until the early seventies when two different political currents merged and helped to introduce Latin America into the fields of history and social sciences in Germany. Political events in Latin America created interest just as the German university system expanded dramatically. New positions were created and many of them were held by specialists on Latin America. Now, thirty years later, we see the opposite taking place. The political and economic interest is shifting towards Islamic countries and Asia, and with the crisis of the welfare systems in Europe, public universities (there is no tradition of private universities in continental Europe) are in an economic crisis. Many of the positions of the seventies are disappearing or are being redirected towards other areas, just as a generational shift means that those holding Latin America chairs are now retiring.

The situation of Latin American Studies in Germany is currently ambivalent. The interest in non-European history and society has increased for political and economic reasons. But Latin America is a rather marginal area in terms of economic and political importance. As universities create new positions which focus on non-European or global processes, Latin Americanists compete with scholars who work on Africa, Asia or even the United States. Due to economic constraints, these new positions are usually lower ranking positions.

Let me not only complain but also point out how this situation can be fruitful for Latin Americanists. Due to a different educational system, scholars in the northern and eastern European countries usually have a broader knowledge of languages—and therefore of the scholarly output in these languages—than their Anglo- or Latin American-counterparts. They also have stronger contacts with colleagues working on areas other than the Americas or Great Britain, and this is fruitful in many respects. The hegemonic discourse and theoretical or methodological approach which is dominated by the English-speaking academia is enriched by other approaches, both theoretical and topical. It might make sense to compare Early Modern Latin America with Early Modern Poland, and theoretical concepts developed for Central Europe might be helpful in order to understand colonial Latin America. This enriching perspective can be seen not only in the case of theories or historical concepts but also in the comparative approach. In order to pursue a university career, German scholars are required to produce in-depth investigation on a topic and/or area or time period different from their doctoral dissertation. It is a requirement that is interpreted rigorously for non-Europeanists who are often the only persons teaching in their respective area in the department. As a result, this has produced scholars who compare different Latin American countries, and recently some younger colleagues have conducted interesting comparative studies on Europe and Latin America.

Questions about methodology and theory bring me to the problem of Area Studies, which in Germany is a product of the development of new careers and institutions in the seventies. In continental Europe, these studies are not burdened by political hegemony, and for that reason are less problematic than in the United States. On the other hand, there is a strong and sometimes polemical discussion about the usefulness of Area Studies in Germany. Germany is the home of Alexander von Humboldt, who is praised for his interdisciplinary approach to Latin America. The German university system, however, is the work of his brother, Wilhelm von Humboldt who relied on the European classics and believed in the importance of methodology and in the "unity of research and teaching." In contemporary research, interdisciplinarity in the tradition of Alexander von Humboldt has become more and more important, and even a necessity for funding. In teaching, however, such an approach is seen with mistrust. People fear that students get no comprehensive knowledge and training in theory and methods. In a situation where the curricula in the European Union are being transformed towards the Anglo-American model of the BA and MA, this discussion becomes crucial to less traditional careers such as Area Studies, and the new system puts so-called "small disciplines" with only two or three professors in danger since they cannot provide enough classes for a BA or MA program. On the other hand, this pressure has led to closer communication with colleagues who work on other continents and here I see a chance to open up the field.

In conclusion, Latin American Studies in Germany, and in some other European countries, is in a much more difficult position than in the United States because of its peripheral position. This situation, however, impedes narrowness and can lead to the incorporation of valuable concepts developed in other regional contexts. This is a counterbalance against hegemonic discourses and fashions and therefore is useful for the study of Latin America, be it in Europe or in North and South America.

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The Antipodal Passion

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After four days of attending a LASA Congress for the first time, I feel myself exotic rather than peripheral. Many Japanese Latin Americanists may be asked "why do you study Latin America?" The subtext of this curiosity is a sort of naturalized research motivation among Latin Americanists from the Americas: it is an interest in "my" country/culture or "my" neighboring countries, "my" quest for roots. The biological, geographical, national, and ethnic identities thus legitimatize the research. But research interests can come from elsewhere. Books, travel, music, friends and other personal experiences can trigger intellectual excitement. This curiosity, the interest in the things "elsewhere" and "over there" is very close to exoticism and I feel myself exotic precisely because Latin American Studies in Japan is often motivated by exoticism in a large sense.

What Japanese Latin Americanists are doing is little known to LASA because of their language of publication. Why do the scholars publish in Japanese, a "minority" language in Latin American Studies, instead of Spanish, Portuguese or English? Japanese academia is large enough to maintain its integrity with Japanese publications and language education in Japan traditionally places reading over writing and speaking. In other words, Japanese scholars can engage with materials written in Spanish, Portuguese or English but they can rarely produce in those languages. They hear the foreign voices but they cannot reach outside the language boundaries. They can use the resources in English, Spanish and Portuguese yet the majority of LASA members cannot use their ideas. The relationship is absolutely unilateral.

Over the four days of the LASA Congress I have sensed the subtle difference in the interaction between the speaker and the audience when talks are delivered in English, in Spanish or in Portuguese. I do not know if my intuition comes from academic code-switching that may occur concomitantly with linguistic code-switching, or from the dissimilar degrees of my (restricted) understanding of those languages (here the "academic code" includes the technique of argumentation and persuasion, the tone of address and the engagement in interpersonal response as much as the gestures, facial expressions and other modes of communication). It seems to me that each paper presenter needs to consider the nature of the target audience. Certainly, choosing a language is a privilege of a non-monolingual speaker and writer. The linguistic conduct is basic to (mis-)recognize "the other's" cultures. Here I have learned about Latin American Studies as much as I have about Latin America.

More than post-something concepts, the post-Babel, or the question of translation, is crucial for understanding the globalized yet asymmetrical relationship in Latin American Studies. While I will not demand that you study Japanese or that my compatriots publish in international languages, it is my intention to make you aware of the existence of rich yet unexploited literature on the exotic fringe of Latin American Studies. As many LASA members know, every translation needs footnotes to accommodate itself with an audience that may have different knowledge. I have come here to footnote to the worldwide (read multi-lingual) Latin American Studies. ■

Re-Discovering the "Hidden" History of Latin American Jews

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Latin American Studies in Israel has undergone a transformation in recent years. This is the result of two major trends. On the one hand, the traditional study of Jews in the region, with its ideological and Zionist bias, is experiencing a crisis. On the other hand, general Latin American Studies in Israeli universities is growing rapidly and this provides a new impetus to the study of Latin American Jews as well. These trends in Israel are a particular refraction of a more global academic trend that relates to scholarly tensions between the national and the transnational, the emphasis on the unique and particular versus comparative approaches, and the role played by Latin Americans who live outside the continent in the development of Latin American Studies in various countries.

One key issue has to do with language, and in this respect Israel is like Japan. Few people are fluent in the language of the Bible, and since Israel is a very small country the market for scholarly monographs in Hebrew on Latin American topics is tiny. Yet unlike in Japan, most Israeli Latin Americanists publish their work either in English or in Spanish. While this makes us less visible in Israeli public-intellectual circles, we are often better integrated in the international community of Latin Americanists than our colleagues in some European or Asian countries, who enjoy more attractive publication venues at home and consequently publish less in English or Spanish. In Israel, publications in English and in Spanish are *sine qua non* for tenure and promotion, whereas academic publications in Hebrew on Latin America

are regarded as manifestations of a scholar's cultural debt to his/her research location or as a means to provide material for undergraduate students.

Israel's geographic and political positions are as important in defining our Latin American studies profile. We have tried to serve as a bridge between the Latin American academic community, the North American one, and European scholars. While Israelis in general (including university professors) are often criticized for the continued occupation of Palestinian territories, in some respects Israel might be considered an "ideologically neutral territory" for those studying Latin America. Israel thus provides a setting conducive to fruitful dialogue among academics from various parts of the world. As far as Latin America is concerned, Israel has never harbored imperialist ambitions in this area—unless one believes the Argentine version of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, according to which Jews aspire to control Patagonia—so in this sense we are different from the United States and a number of European countries. Cuban scholars, for example, sometimes prefer to publish articles in the Israeli journal of Latin American Studies instead of in North American publications even though Cuba and Israel lack diplomatic relations.

One area of real difference is that Latin Americanists in Israel often take advantage of the Jewish Diaspora in order to boost their programs, both academically and financially. Many Latin Americanists in Israel are of Latin American origin, the founders of all the Latin American programs were Israelis born in Latin America, and many graduate students have a Latin American background. External funds come mainly from Spanish and Portuguese-speaking countries.

Important research is being conducted in the study of Latin American Jews and a handful of members of AMILAT (Asociación Israelí de Investigadores del Judaísmo Latinoamericano) tirelessly invest time and effort in organizing events and publishing works on the topic. The World Congress of Jewish Studies always has sessions devoted to Latin America's Jewish communities and a selection of these papers are published in AMILAT's Judaica Latinoamericana series. Even so, the momentum in Israel is toward general Latin American Studies. When Professors Haim Avni and Yoram Shapira published their article on teaching and research on Latin America in Israel in the *Latin American Research Review* a quarter of a century ago, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem was the major center and most research focused on Jews. Nowadays Tel Aviv University has taken a leading role and academic production has shifted to Latin American Studies in the broadest sense.

This new dynamism is reflected in various ways. The internationally recognized journal *Estudios Interdisciplinarios de América Latina y el Caribe* (*EIAL*) is already in its seventeenth year and the electronic edition, which includes the full text of all 34 issues published to date, enjoys tremendous success. The decision to have open and free access to *EIAL* was an ideological one. It allows Latin American scholars and students, whose university libraries often cannot subscribe to international journals, to consult innovative research while establishing an academic bridge between various communities of Latin Americanists. Tel Aviv University also publishes a series of books in Hebrew on Latin American topics and organizes a large number of conferences, international colloquia and similar academic events.

The situation, however, is far from perfect. Since many scholars who study Latin America focus on the Jewish Diaspora, their work is categorized as part of "Jewish Studies," considered in Israel a different discipline than, for example, "General History." In Jewish History Departments, Latin America is simply not important. That said, there has been a relative decline in the attraction of Jewish Studies in Israel. Many Israeli youngsters are tired of lessons in Jewish history which in high school often focuses on catastrophes that supposedly confirm the necessity of Zionism.

The specific nature of Israeli society and higher education is precisely why the expansion of *general* Latin American Studies holds promise for the regeneration of Latin American Jewish studies as well. The growth of academic events and publications on Latin America in Israel has created new fora for the publication of research on Latin America Jewry. Such is the case of *EIAL*, which is *not* devoted to Jewish topics but does include Jewish themes, thus reversing the traditional tendency of "relegating Jews to a space in which they were not real Latin Americans." When the study of Latin American Jews is presented alongside general Latin American Studies it creates a richer dialogue among scholars. This encourages the academic treatment of Jews as an integral part of the societies in which they live. Latin American Studies today is encouraging interest in Jewish topics and thus ensuring the resurgence of Latin American Jewish and non-Jewish Studies in the Jewish State. ■