

## Locating the Ephemeral South in the Latin Americanization of LASA

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Before turning to consider what I see as LASA's regional and disciplinary difference, I wish to begin by briefly commenting on what the Latin Americanization of LASA might mean. Why, I wonder, does a professional organization that is already inclusive of Latin America in both name and in the production of knowledge be interested in Latin Americanizing itself? One way to begin addressing this question is to think of LASA's "re-Latin Americanization" as it becomes more mindful of the bodies of thought from Latin America. A productive dimension of this engagement with Latin American cultural productions provides "us" with aesthetic, political, and theoretical languages that help form and negotiate regional knowledge that reifies the particular national spaces which invariably "represent," at least within the parameters of humanistic research, the various regions that make up Latin America.

In LASA's re-Latin Americanization, are we soliciting from—if not challenging—ourselves to un-Latin Americanize LASA in disentangling, as Walter Mignolo well prompts us, the very idea of "Latin" America? Another way to put this is to also ask: What is this "Latin," and furthermore, what is this "America" of which "we" speak and point to? Which "Latins" and which "Americans" do "we" notice (and from which part of the globe does this acknowledgment take place) in the recalibration of the terms and resources steering the course of LASA? Lastly, can we make sense of peoples from this hemisphere without Latin America?

I do not seek to immediately assail the reader with this sequence of preoccupations. I begin by asking the above questions to be mindful of the need to interrogate the knowledge formation and articulation of Latin American Studies as well as the academic organization investigating the field.

At the same time, it is imperative that we attend to the customary geographies that are summoned as the fundamental bases for Latin American thought. The North/South separation has been a productive measure by which to question the divisions and imaginaries in the reading and writing practices that habitually make hierarchic distinctions between the first world, "the North," and the developing nations that constitute "the South." LASA's Latin Americanization shifts that equation by attempting to form and build on a counterdiscourse through the critical engagement with—and circulation of—"local" production from South to North. By taking the "Southern" discursive location of LASA to the actual "South," we find a profoundly promising South-South exchange as well as a refutation of the expected North/South pattern.

But just as the North/South approach can be rather rigid in terms of the geography it indexes, so too can a South-South discursive remapping of Latin America. As ample scholarly approaches have demonstrated, "the North" comprises the United States, while "the South" tends to denote Mexico, South America, and the Hispanophone Caribbean. In this sense, the North/South framework is not necessarily a fixed one. While the geographic setting for the North remains unaltered, the South can presumably shift to signify any nation opposite the cartography of the United States. Generally speaking, then, it is not the North/South divide that is binaristic. If there is such a fixed duality, it would consist of the particular models that continue to locate Latin America within the four major sites identified by Román de la Campa, in his richly provocative *Latin Americanism*, as "Latin America, the Caribbean, the United States, and Europe." (de la Campa 1999, p. 3.)

Pressing concerns remain about the conditions that allow for the emergence of the four sites that become "the" voice of Latin America as a symbolically constituted space. Is "Latin America" a "given"—is its meaning readily transparent—within Latin American discourses when, as Salvadoran writer Jacinta Escudos, has noted, "the center does not exist" even in a seemingly insignificant area like Central America? Is "the Caribbean" a geographically settled region when we have yet to fully inspect how versions of "our" (Hispanophone, and to a certain extent, Lusophone) America correlate and dialogue with, for instance, C. L. R. James's Anglophone regional Caribbean thought? How would such a conception of the Caribbean be further complicated when contrasted with such Francophone theorists as Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, and Édouard Glissant? In what ways do we adequately involve the "Latin" variants and characteristics from the Hispanophone, Francophone, and Lusophone Americas, extending and relating them not only to themselves, but also to Anglophone attributes marked by "Latinity"? How do these western tongues and bodies of knowledge coexist with indigeneity and its "Latin" adaptations and/or deviations? It is not a totalizing "Latin" discourse that I seek. These questions are raised to recognize and affirm that there are other peoples, spaces, and histories that demand to be known and legitimated within the formative, and often particular, constituents of "Latin," and indeed, "America." Such a move in the quest for knowledge and its production underscores that we still have much to explore. It punctuates, as well, an undeniable urgency: that the historical actors, cultural agents, and geographies that have long been neglected should not be included simply by virtue of their exclusion. Rather, the ethico-political task is to acknowledge that there are still myriad

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“things” we ought to know and beings we should engage.

The presumed fixity of “the North,” for example, dissolves for Central Americans, when Mexico, despite power dynamics with its own North American neighbor, becomes a Northern border. As we examine the components of the “North,” can we afford to continue projecting a “North” without Canada, given the role this nation has in both NAFTA and as the United States’s largest trading partner? And how would we situate the ever-expanding mechanisms of Latinness when approximately one million Latinas and Latinos now make Canada their own “South,” or for that matter their own “North”?

Largely informed by an emergent Latina/o Studies project that is comparative and heedful to additional groups outside the Cuban American, Mexican American/Chicana/o, and Puerto Rican/Nuyorican triad as well as by Central American cultural productions that are discursively dismissed, yet marked in the U.S. academy as in hegemonic Latin American thought by well-worn signifiers of “underdevelopment” or “non-existence,” I conceive LASA’s Latin Americanization as an overdue undertaking that seeks to reevaluate how one becomes both a regional and disciplinary entity. How, in other words, is the move made from the social and the national to the textual and the discursive settings that resist the crossing of geographic and disciplinary borders? In what ways are those ambivalent shadows of the South, as it were, informing and advancing “our” contemporary Latin American thought, if at all? To paraphrase—and to intellectually resituate—Martin Heidegger’s project in *Being and Time*, the “thatness” and “whatness” advancing and determining the particular ideas and discourses of Latin America also erase the “whoness” of how

that construction, that disciplinary way of being, has come to “be,” emphasizing, in the process, the incompleteness of what we “know.”

Marked by a type of a secondary U.S. Latina status (Salvadoran) as well as by a secondary form of “being” Latin American (Central American), I am repeatedly perceived as a latecomer to such disciplinary conversations, and consequently, as someone who lacks a genealogy. Perhaps this is why I ground my understanding of LASA’s Latin Americanization as one of dispersal, or being enduringly unfixed. By dispersal, I mean all that the term evokes: disintegration, departure, disappearance, dissemination, and accumulation. These designations call for an adjustment of all that is “known,” a knowing that paradoxically necessitates to be “re-known,” or resituated within the dimensions of how “Latinness” travels and is localized.

But Latinness here does not exclusively apply to the hemispheric mapping of Latin America. It becomes the terrain through which encounters from and across the Americas scrutinize and reassess, in their continuous re-appearance, a pan-Latinism that falls outside the national. Migrations from rural spaces to urban centers—consider a handful of instances where many defy “sticking” to one space, such as Mayas in California and North Carolina, Mexicans and Latinos in the “new” global South, Chileans and Central Americans in Canada, Dominicans in Antigua, Nicaraguans in Costa Rica, Bolivians in Argentina, Hondurans in El Salvador, Colombians in Venezuela—illustrate the “new” features of and dwelling arenas for Latinity. These dispersals point to a regrouping, rethinking, and in Mignolo’s phraseology, delinking of Latin America and U.S. Latina/o ideology as practiced and institutionalized. Specificities and differences in this context should be, of

course, maintained. In taking another look at the South, however, we attend to new formations and interactions that take us to the growth and accumulation of a new knowledge. A new knowledge that continues precisely because of its interruption in our “common” understanding of Latin America, and of what (and who) we see, know, and interact with. This form of diffused Latin Americanization pushes us to relational perspectives that shape and constitute “Latin American” knowledge.

For those of us who, despite living in the North, find ourselves in a South of irrelevance, invisibility, and postponement, the Latin Americanization of LASA is a push towards the formation and conservation of intellectual dwelling spaces. This Latin Americanization demands, to explicitly borrow from Lewis Gordon, a “disciplinary decadence” where we have more than symbolic communication at academic and professional gatherings. Could such Latin Americanization lend itself to projects where university presses would be more receptive to “new” knowledges from “unexpected” and hence “unmarketable” locations in the Americas? Would U.S. academics be willing to translate literary works without, or minimal, retribution, given the need to circulate significant work that is currently being produced, but that is frequently tossed aside because many cultural workers do not have the material means to compensate others for their work? Would academics from “the North” be willing to host more figures from “the South” not just for talks, but for visiting professorships in the interest of advancing an understanding of the epistemic project of “Latin America,” given that some of these intellectuals and cultural agents do not have postgraduate degrees?

How, I insist, do we make this Latin Americanization long lasting?

## LASA y la conciencia de lugar

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¿Existe un vínculo entre la mayor presencia de intelectuales con sede en Latinoamérica y el debate sobre la politización de LASA? Llegué a esta pregunta gracias a la invitación a participar en las discusiones sobre el significado y el posible abordaje de la latino americanización de LASA, pues veo una estrecha relación entre una y otra cosa. Considero que la cultura organizacional de LASA, como lo expresa Charles Hale (véase Hale, 2007), ha sido interpelada por los cambios en la composición de sus afiliados y que la dicha politización de alguna manera refleja las novedades que enfrenta la organización. También me parece que la respuesta por la que se opte, determinará el rumbo de la Asociación.

El que el 30 por ciento de los miembros de LASA resida fuera de los Estados Unidos y crezca la participación de académicos desde Latinoamérica, implica pensar en los efectos múltiples de este hecho. Van desde la afirmación de perspectivas plurales de investigación, hasta el replanteamiento de las habituales formas de diálogo, participación y organización. Cabe entonces preguntarse si el lugar de proveniencia de una porción en crecimiento de los afiliados no hace necesario replantear acuerdos establecidos, tales como el sitio seleccionado para los congresos y si no subyace en la discusión un sentido *político*.

A primera vista esta formulación parecería optar por el compromiso político de la Asociación y su llamado "partidismo" creciente, tal como lo señalan con preocupación algunos comentaristas en *LASA Forum* (véase Madrid, Armony, Stokes, 2007). Pero más bien argumento en otra dirección, me gustaría poner de presente que el lugar desde el cual se investiga o el lugar de encuentro son mucho más que accidentes geográficos que se desvanecen en la interconexión global, y

que el lugar adquiere un significado particular en este caso.

Escobar (2003) ha señalado que la perspectiva de lugar es importante para comprender a los participantes en movimientos sociales con reivindicaciones territoriales y ecológicas, tales como los de la costa pacífica colombiana. Esto es así, puesto que éstos tienen una conciencia social basada en el lugar, dada la relación entre lugar, cultura y naturaleza. La perspectiva de lugar, por supuesto, no agota su relevancia en estas investigaciones. Parece interesante explorar la idea de Escobar en el sentido de la conciencia de lugar como fuente de hechos políticos. En el caso de LASA la conciencia de lugar apunta a la relación compleja entre entorno social, creación científica, jerarquía sociopolítica y jerarquía en el conocimiento. Tomo la expresión *hechos políticos*, no en el sentido partidista ni en el de activismo militante, sino *política* en el sentido de quien interviene o desea participar "en las cosas de gobierno", en este caso el gobierno y la orientación de LASA. Así, la perspectiva de lugar le da un sentido preciso al término des-centralizar, tal como lo pide Stokes (2007).

Descentralizar adquiere el sentido de considerar puntos de vista, investigaciones y elaboraciones realizadas desde la perspectiva de los distintos lugares sociales de los investigadores, algunos distantes de Norteamérica. ¿Hace esto perder el carácter universal que reclama el conocimiento a favor de un relativismo de "lugar" un tanto dudoso? No lo creo; más bien me inclino a pensar que permite tomar en cuenta los matices, las modalidades de interpretación, las formas variadas de relación con los sujetos de estudio, las condiciones diferenciales de trabajo y consolidación institucional, y las relaciones diversas que los académicos sostienen con