Inequality in Latin American Literary and Cultural Studies

Introduction

by Cynthia Steele
University of Washington, Seattle
cynthias@u.washington.edu

Since its inception, through the foundational work of Jean Franco, Joseph Sommers, and Hernán Vidal, among others, and continuing into the recent presidency of Arturo Arias, literary and cultural studies have played a pivotal role in the Latin American Studies Association. While the six authors brought together in this edition of the *Forum* share a passion for literature and a commitment to democratization in the Americas, they differ widely in their views on how best to marry these two concerns.

In his provocative opening essay, Jon Beasley-Murray speaks for many of us in lamenting the reduction of the Latin American literary canon, in the United States, Canada and Europe, to Magical Realism, as exemplified by the works of Gabriel García Márquez and his imitators. As he acutely observes, the genre contained the seeds of its own obsolescence, and most literary critics long ago tired of it and turned their attention to experimental narrative and/or *testimonio*. Many of our students, however, have not followed suit, leaving us with the dilemma of either boring them with 'good' literature, or boring ourselves—and selling out—by teaching them middle-brow literature designed to compensate First-World readers for their "*over*development."

Jean Franco invites us to step outside the canon and consider an emerging body of literature that seems to defy the forces of globalization: literature written in indigenous languages. This is a literature, Franco argues, that challenges "the distinctions that placed high culture over popular cultures, literary language over dialect, metropolis over province and thus tacitly affirmed class, gender and racial inequalities." Despite the historical forces of dispersal and acculturation, "languages that were scheduled to disappear with globalization…are being reinvigorated by indigenous writers." Her two cases in point, mapuche literature in Chile and zapotec literature in Mexico, have both evolved through militant resistance to colonization by the state, and exemplify both the preservation of a rich oral tradition and its global dissemination through the Internet.

Idelber Avelar's essay provides an excellent overview of the best works of recent literary and cultural criticism, many of which exemplify globalization in their trilingual publication. Moreover, they share a refusal to limit themselves to one or two overarching theoretical debates. Rather, Avelar posits, they share a "meticulously specific, object-driven [approach]…usually anchored in one or two national traditions," and their theoretical concerns emerge inductively, rather than existing a priori to confirm a particular metacritical stance.

Ileana Rodríguez considers the applicability of the genre of Ecocriticism—which has thrived among U.S. and European literary critics in response to environmental concerns—to the Latin American context. She cautions against prioritizing concerns about the environmental over those about human exploitation—ecology over equality—, while acknowledging the common roots of both types of analysis in the political-social and against *desarrollismo*. The forces of modernization, she notes, have always regarded the natural world as exploitable frontier, in contrast to the ancient beliefs of Rigoberta Menchú and other indigenous peoples, who have often been excluded by both modernization and the environmental movement.

John Beverley, for his part, argues that the populist turn taken by many Latin American countries in recent years has elicited a neoconservative response from one sector of the Latin American critical establishment. For some critics who came of age in the Sixties, Beverley argues, the disavowal of armed struggle in middle age has entailed a retreat into the privileged space of the Lettered City of which Angel Rama spoke.

Finally, Luz Horne and Daniel Noemi Voionmaa trace the evolving representation of marginality in Latin American fiction, from nineteenth-century realism to the modernism of Clarice Lispector. They then concentrate their analysis on the new documentary literature immersed in the problem of urban violence, exemplified by Paulo Lins's *Cidade de Deus* and Fernando Vallejo's *La virgen de los sicarios*. In this recent fiction, they observe, violence does not emanate primarily from the state, which is absent or invisible, but from market forces. Moreover, "this new aesthetics of the marginal" is characterized by "spectacularization"; "Latin America has become a stage for the spectacle of violence." The authors argue that this literature has created "a new language and a new logic to talk about marginality," as in the novels of César Aira. In those of Nora Fernández and Diamela Eltit, the characters' "fragmented and corroded" bodies are assimilated into their abject surroundings.

In juxtaposing the views of three generations of cultural critics, from both North and South, and from the Spanish-, Portuguese- and English-language traditions, these essays suggest the diversity of views and approaches, and the vitality of critical debate, in the field of contemporary Latin American literary and cultural studies. I trust they will spark further debates among humanists and social scientists alike. ■

Against (In)equality
Bad Latin American Literature

by JON BEASLEY-MURRAY
University of British Columbia
Jon.beasley-murray@ubc.ca

The central concern of literature is not so much inequality, but difference. And so it should be. Literature enables an exploration of otherness, variety, and singularity. It does so by allowing readers to feel or sense other worlds, different from their own, thereby relativizing their own experience, such that they recognize that they, too, are different. Hence literature differs from film, at least as described by the Frankfurt School theorist Siegfried Kracauer: film often encourages its spectators to see themselves as the same, as part of a mass, but literature tends to emphasize either individualism or a much more diffuse sense of commonality.[1] Film constructs a mass audience of equals; literature posits a common readership characterized by diversity. Even critic Benedict Anderson's famous argument about the role of the novel and novel-reading in the construction of nationalist sentiment stresses the range of sensations to which, for instance, picaresque narratives expose their readers: a "*tour d'horison*," in the case of José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi's *El periquillo sarniento*, of "hospitals, prisons, remote villages, monasteries, Indians, Negros," whose exemplary differences combine to constitute the collectivity that will be called Mexico.[2] In short, literature is more about imagination than calculation, experience than measurement, affect than effect.

Literary *criticism*, by contrast, is all too often preoccupied with issues of equality or inequality. Traditionally, this is registered in a discourse on value, for which some books are better than others in whatever way that "better" is to be defined. Indeed, literature properly speaking, in this traditional conception, is defined by the fact that it contributes to a cultural sphere defined by the nineteenth-century British critic Matthew Arnold as the "best which has been thought and said."[3] More recently, the version of inequality that preoccupies critics has been imported more or less directly from political discourse and concerns the evaluations implicit, it is said, within literature itself. How, for instance, are women or the indigenous represented relative to men, whites, or mestizos? Or how might a literary text advance the cause of equality, more broadly conceived? Still, however, and despite the traditionalists' lament that relativism now rules the roost, in fact notions of inequality or equality, and of better or worse, remain to the fore. It is just that new standards of judgment are in force. Meanwhile, the institutional and economic apparatus of book publishing is always about calculation, measurement, and effect: costs, sales, awards, and so on. Inevitably implicated in that apparatus, literary criticism, too, is complicit in the conversion of the book as locus of literary experience into just another commodity. This is true as much of academic and scholarly commentary as it is of journalistic reviews. Literary criticism tends to side with exchange value rather than use value.

To separate out literature and criticism in this way, however, is of course an artificial exercise. Literature today is almost unimaginable without the apparatus of production, distribution, and reception that enables texts to find readers. It is hard to imagine use without exchange, although ironically that is what literature itself encourages us to do, by erasing (if only temporarily) our awareness of its own material supports. Almost as soon as we look up from the page, we too are engaged in the evaluation and calculation that we had briefly abandoned in the reading experience. Taken as a whole, then, literature and the critical apparatus that surrounds and enables it helps transform affect into effect, and packages difference as inequality. This is nowhere more visible than in the construct that is Latin American literature, by which I mean literature labeled as belonging to Latin America as a region rather than to Mexico or Peru (or wherever) as individual nations. Perhaps this visibility is because Latin American literature as such only comes into being through the process of translation, both literal and metaphorical, by which Latin American texts enter the world market. And this is a relatively recent phenomenon: for most intents and purposes, Latin American literature was invented as recently as the 1960s, with the region's so-called literary "Boom." In what follows, I retrace a brief history of the Boom, focusing first on how it came to redefine the template of what was "good" literature, and then on how it has subsequently waned in critical appreciation. Indeed, many Latin Americanist critics have practically deserted the field of literary criticism. I suggest that we should return to the study of literature, prepared now self-consciously (and self-reflexively) to embrace the "bad" Latin American literature as much as the "good.

When Latin American fiction burst onto global consciousness in the late 1960s, it was heralded as the savior of world literature. U.S. novelist William Kennedy's review of Gabriel García Márquez was particularly hyperbolic but not especially atypical: "*One Hundred Years of Solitude* is the first piece of literature since the Book of Genesis that should be required reading for the entire human race. [. . . Mr. García Márquez's] success is one of the best things that has happened to literature in a long, long time."[4] The fact that Kennedy's review was entitled "All of Life, Sense and Nonsense Fills an *Argentine's* Daring Fable" (my emphasis) shows that the specific provenance of this

salvation was immaterial: Argentina, Colombia, it was all the same. What mattered was that something new had come along to fill the gap left by a now waning First World modernism. Indeed, the Boom supplied an apparent efflorescence of vitality and inventiveness "at a moment," as critic Gerald Martin explains, "when such creativity was in short supply internationally [. . .] and critics repeatedly asked themselves whether the novel, in the age of the mass media, was now moribund."[5] In 1967, for instance, novelist John Barth published a much-discussed essay on "The Literature of Exhaustion," a disquisition on "the used-upness of certain forms or exhaustion of certain possibilities."[6] Yet the outlook is very different in Barth's follow-up essay, "The Literature of Replenishment," published in 1980. Now the Latin American Boom has saved the day! Here for instance Barth's praise of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is, critic Johnny Payne observes, "as gushy and unqualified as a back-cover blurb. It is 'as impressive a novel as has been written so far in the second half of our century [. . .]. Praise be to the Spanish language and imagination!'"[7] Or rather, presumably, praise be to Spanish *in translation*: Barth effaces the process of translation and promotion through which García Márquez's novel lands on his desk, and in which he himself participates so enthusiastically. Any hint at the workings of the market in symbolic goods would undermine those very qualities that Barth claims to find in the Latin American text: its "organic originality" that, in Payne's gloss, could "'magically' recover the conventions and artifices of the past, while at the same time cross-fertilizing U.S. writing."[8]

Latin America and its literary production was soon summarized in the two-word formula "magical realism," encapsulating both its "magical" inventiveness and the notion that it was intimately intertwined with some "real" political commitment. For Latin American literature was "good" twice over: because of its aesthetic innovation, and also thanks to a sense that it was somehow rooted in popular struggle.

The seal on the region's cultural achievement was the Nobel Prize in Literature awarded, first, to Miguel Angel Asturias in 1967 and Pablo Neruda in 1971, and later to García Márquez in 1982. The Prize citation on this latter occasion was framed as though the honor were awarded to the entire region rather than to one distinguished representative. "For a long time," it proclaims, "Latin American literature has shown a vigour as in few other literary spheres. It has won acclaim in the cultural life of today."[9] The citation then delineates the two elements that make Latin American literature so worthy in the popular and critical imagination. First, the region combines "many impulses and traditions" that range from "folk culture, including oral storytelling, reminiscences from old Indian culture, currents from Spanish baroque in different epochs, influences from European surrealism and other modernism" and that collectively "are blended into a spiced and life-giving brew." Second, however, this heady cocktail, "spiced and live-giving," is further enhanced by a committed attachment to the cause of social justice. "The violent conflicts of political nature—social and economic—raise the temperature of the intellectual climate," we are told. The citation continues, again as though proclaiming a collective award: "Like most of the other important writers in the Latin American world, García Márquez is strongly committed politically on the side of the poor and the weak against oppression and economic exploitation."[10] In short, the 1982 Nobel Prize is awarded less to an individual writer, than to a continent that has given renewed life to world culture; and less to a writer than to the *idea* of the writer as a politically engaged intellectual who transforms difference into a passionate call for equality.

Even today, for most readers there is no other world literature that enjoys a similar aura of quality and even moral uprightness—except perhaps the modern notion of "world literature" itself, in which (by analogy with, say, "world music") the virtues of Latin American cultural production are extended to the entire Third World. Common conception has it that the very notion of "bad Latin American literature" is an oxymoron. Moreover, what is most remarkable about this successful branding of a continent's culture is that it is, nonetheless, a branding: it is a marketing operation, with extraordinary commercial results. As his Nobel Prize citation notes, García Márquez for instance "achieved unusual success," with *One Hundred Years of Solitude* "translated into a large number of languages and [selling] millions of copies."[11] The Nobel committee has explicitly to mark this success as "unusual" in the context of its award of its highest accolade. For once, literary value and market value here go hand in hand. Or in Martin's words, "What really confused the issue" of the Boom was that its protagonists "managed both to achieve critical recognition and to become bestsellers." The Latin American Boom involved "the wholesale conversion of literary production into a commodity process" without, apparently, the loss of its aura of exclusivity predicted by a theorist such as Walter Benjamin.[12]

It did not take long, however, for a backlash to ensue, at least in the more refined circles of cultural criticism. Perhaps most famously, the British novelist Julian Barnes declared a moratorium on magical realism only two years after García Márquez's Nobel, and at precisely the point at which this style, now

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the signature gesture of the new category of "postcolonial" writing, was sweeping all before it. Barnes's mocking suggestion is that:

> *A quota system is to be introduced on fiction set in South America. The intention is to curb the spread of package-tour baroque and heavy irony. Ah, the propinquity of cheap life and expensive principles, of religion and banditry, of surprising honour and random cruelty. Ah, the daiquiri bird which incubates its eggs on the wing; ah, the fredonna tree whose roots grow at the tips of its branches, and whose fibres assist the hunchback to impregnate by telepathy the haughty wife of the hacienda owner; ah, the opera house now overgrown by jungle. Permit me to rap on the table and murmur "Pass!"*[13]

How did Latin American fiction become so quickly a matter of ridicule? It is easy to blame its imitators. As critic Theo Tait points out, the 1980s saw "a flood of semi-supernatural sagas [. . .] released all over the world—full of omens, prodigies, legendary feats, hallucinatory exaggerations, fairytale motifs, strange coincidences and overdeveloped sense-organs."[14] Tait even understates the case when he observes that "with time and overuse, artistic style degenerates into mannerism." In fact, magical realism was very soon subject to pastiche, and from there it was but a short step to Barnes's parody. Moreover, as Tait also comments, magical realism was particularly vulnerable to such transmutations. In that "wonder and novelty were always an important part of its appeal, [. . .] the style had a built-in obsolescence: the decline into artificial gesture and cheap exoticism was inevitable."[15] Meanwhile, in Latin America itself the politics of the Boom had long been under fire, not least from the influential Uruguayan critic Angel Rama, for such failings as its exclusivity, its cult of the individual author, and for its "enslavement to the mechanisms of publicity."[16] No wonder then that Latin Americanists should have turned almost wholesale either to more challenging texts by more recondite authors such as Diamela Eltit or Ricardo Piglia, or to non-literary or para-literary genres such as *testimonio* and so (as in the title of one of critic John Beverley's books) "against literature" altogether.[17]

Yet the strange result of this conjunction of circumstances is that those of us who teach Latin American literature for a living in North America and Europe find ourselves in a peculiar double bind. We can put non-canonical works on the syllabus, but so very often dampen the enthusiasm of students attracted to our classes precisely by the prospect that they will be reading what they regard in advance as the inventive and edifying work of the Boom and its sequels. Or we can teach García Márquez et. al., and perhaps even the still more popular avatars such as Isabel Allende or Laura Esquivel, but never quite without the sense that we are, however reluctantly, embracing a "bad" Latin American literature only because the students think it will do them some good.

Let us approach bad Latin American literature a little less abashedly, first by understanding its continued appeal, and second by perhaps reconsidering its (by now) middlebrow utopianism. For it is a prime instance of what we could call liberal, well-intentioned exoticism, a means by which to recognize and negotiate difference. In the context of the rapid globalization of culture and communications technologies of which the rise of Latin American literature was itself a part (with novels written by Colombians in Mexico, published in Barcelona, translated in London, and making bestseller lists in New York), magical realism offered a way of understanding a whole new set of differences that suddenly impinged upon Western consciousness. What is more, it offered a way of relating to these novelties: it proposed that the act of reading (or, more generally, cultural consumption) could itself be a form of solidarity. Reading (or perhaps merely buying) a work produced elsewhere could be a demonstration of acceptance and open-mindedness in the midst of the postnational confusion that could otherwise overtake traditional middle-class sensibilities. Reading came to seem a political act. Hence the rise of "world" culture, as a particular variant on the global. By the late 1980s, Western consumers could face the heady onrush of globalization by wearing their Thai-style batik t-shirts, listening to Moroccan music as remixed in England, drinking free-trade Tanzanian coffee, and reading Paulo Coelho. Culture always involves position-taking, and Latin American literature, charged as it was with a sense of political engagement (the brand of the real), offered a paradigmatic market choice for those who felt vaguely ill at ease with their own self-consciousness as the economic beneficiaries of unequal trade. It is, in short, an important mode of what political philosopher Jacques Rancière would term the reconfiguration of the sensible (feeling itself) in postmodern times.[18] Or to put this another way: if, as critic Idelber Avelar argues, in Latin America the Boom's success served as compensation for economic and political underdevelopment; outside of Latin America precisely this same literature (and its successors) functioned according to a similar logic of compensation, but now to make up for *over*development.[19]

Finally, then, Latin American literature—compensation or comfort in the guise of self-improvement—has become the very epitome of middlebrow culture. No wonder it should have been so soon scorned by writers

such as Julian Barnes, and also the object of wary regard by Latin American and Latin Americanist critics themselves. Like the classic middlebrow culture of the 1950s and 1960s as described by cultural critic Janice Radway, Latin American literature provides "a kind of social pedagogy for a growing class fraction of professionals, managers, and information workers," a "sentimental education" to guide them through, now, not so much modernity and modernization as postmodernity and globalization.[20] It mobilizes an "enthusiasm for sentiment," a way of reading "completely suffused by feeling and affect."[21] At the same time, it offers a reconversion of value: if the Boom was striking originally for the way in which it transmuted aesthetic value into commercial value without, for all that, apparently destroying the aura of the work of art, perhaps the post-Boom, or the Boom's legacy, has been the magical transmutation of market value into political reassurance, the purchase of a sense of engaged solidarity through the exercise of cultural taste. But it is not, in this sense, all that different from *testimonio* as read even by the most anti-literary of proponents of Latin American cultural studies. And rather than partaking in a new round of value judgments in which some texts would always end up better than others, perhaps we can turn around the liberal desire to cast difference as (in)equality; we can examine and teach bad Latin American literature as symptom of unfulfilled desires in the global North as much as the South. At stake is a redistribution of the sensible that precedes any struggle over how what is sensed is to be evaluated or weighed.

Endnotes

[1] Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament*. Guy Debord subsequently develops a similar, albeit much broader, argument in *The Society of the Spectacle*.

[2] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 30.

[3] Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, 6.

[4] Quoted. in advertising material, *New York Times*, May 6, 1970, 40; see also Kennedy, "Socialist Realism."

[5] Martin, "Boom, Yes; 'New' Novel, No," 53.

[6] Barth, "The Literature of Exhaustion," 310. Not that exhaustion is necessarily negative in Barth's view: he champions Samuel Beckett and, indeed, Jorge Luis Borges because they "paradoxically turn the felt ultimacies of our time into material and means for [their] work" (317).

[7] Payne, *Conquest of the New Word*, 17.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Gyllensten, "Presentation Speech."

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Martin, "Boom, Yes; 'New' Novel, No," 54. See Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction."

[13] Barnes, *Flaubert's Parrot*, 99.

[14] Tait, "Flame-Broiled Whopper."

[15] Ibid.

[16] Rama, "Carta de Angel Rama a *Zona Franca*," 15. See also Rama, "Angel Rama tira la piedra . . ."

[17] Beverley, *Against Literature*.

[18] Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*.

[19] Avelar, *The Untimely Present*, 30-31.

[20] Radway, *A Feeling for Books*, 15, 17.

[21] Ibid., 29, 33.

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Overcoming Colonialism
Writing in Indigenous Languages

by **Jean Franco**
Columbia University
jf29@columbia.edu

The Argentine critic, Josefina Ludmer, recently pointed out that with globalization the parameters of Latin American literature and literary studies have totally changed. Traditional divisions between national and cosmopolitan realism, between realism and avant-garde, between pure literature and social literature have disappeared and even the difference between historical reality and fiction may disappear. The distinctions that placed high culture over popular cultures, literary language over dialect, metropolis over province and thus tacitly affirmed class, gender and racial inequalities have been challenged in many ways, the most striking of which is the continent-wide emergence of literature in indigenous languages that extends from the Mapuche in the south to the Tahahumara in Northern Mexico, from the Tupi-Guaraní to the Nahuas. Languages that were scheduled to disappear with globalization, and that had long been marginalized by imperial Spanish are not only defended by native speakers but are taught in universities and reinvigorated by indigenous writers.

It was in 1992 that representatives of 120 indigenous peoples met in Quito to organize a protest against the quincentennial celebrations of Columbus's discovery of America and called for, among other things, a defense of native languages, recognizing that the subordination of native languages to Spanish ratified the long-standing oppression of the originary inhabitants of the continent. Paradoxically this defense of native languages has occurred at a time of dispersal when emigration is creating new identities, such as the binational Mixteca in California and the urban indigenous in Mexico City and Lima. In Mexico, the colonization of the Lacandon jungle by landless peasants in the 1980s brought together Tzotziles, Tajobales, and other groups, many of whom would join the Zapatista army. In 1994 when the Zapatistas emerged from the Lacandon forest and took over several municipalities, they addressed the inhabitants in the six indigenous languages of the region.

The number of people speaking indigenous languages varies considerably: millions speak Quechua and only a few hundred puapua, a language of Baja California. Moreover, national policies have given rise to very different linguistic environments. In the worst cases, like that of El Salvador following the Matanza of 1931 in which thousands of indigenous were slaughtered in the wake of a rebellion, the native language was suppressed and is only now being relearned. Speakers of indigenous languages were made to feel inferior. In the life story of the Peruvian Gregorio Condori Mamani, transcribed from the Quechua, Condori describes himself as sightless and dumb because he did not have access to writing and did not speak Spanish even after a spell in the army where officers prohibited the speaking of Quechua. During the civil war in Guatemala in the eighties, the army tried to prohibit the speaking of native tongues and the wearing of native dress. At the other extreme is Paraguay, a country officially bilingual in Spanish and Guaraní. In Mexico, where there may be as many as 60 indigenous languages, nahua has now been incorporated into University courses and there has been official support for workshops and conferences in many of the languages. In Chile, the mapuche have a radio program in mapudungun. Peoples who, in the past, were not supposed to have writing much less a literature are now attending writing workshops, reciting poetry

at meetings and publishing in anthologies. When Microsoft recently announced a program in mapudungun, the language of the mapuche, there was a public protest not against the technology as such, but against what was termed the intellectual piracy of a project that had been carried forward without any participation by the mapuche themselves.

One cannot write in an indigenous language without calling up the whole history of colonialism, given the power relations that dictated the first and many subsequent transcriptions of Native American texts into phonic writing. The post-conquest imposition of castellano in the service of the state which controlled official history relegated orally-transmitted cultures to an inferior category outside the lettered city. The first grammars and dictionaries of native languages were instruments in the work of conversion. In the nineteenth century transcription of native languages fell into the hands of foreigners, given the lack of interest among the lettered classes; thus, for instance, Europeans disputed the grammar and transcription of the Quechua alphabet. In the last century, the evangelical work of the Summer Institute of Linguistics imposed ideological preference; it is interesting that the Zapotec dictionary it published was addressed to the needs of three groups: the indigenous needing to learn Spanish; the official who needs to know the language; and thirdly, linguists and anthropologists. There is no mention of any cultural production by the Zapotecs themselves.

Initially writing was encouraged because of the need to preserve culture that was in danger of being eroded or lost because of emigration and dispersal. The tzotzil writer, Pérez Fernández, states that one of the great preoccupations of the elders and leaders of the communities is that most of our customs, traditions and ancestral knowledge are being lost too rapidly. But there is also a new writing that goes beyond the transmission of traditions to explore the indigenous experience within modernity. In Mexico, thanks to the labor of non-indigenous intellectuals, especially the poets Carlos Montemayor and Jaimes Sabines, careful attention has been paid to the transcription of indigenous languages into phonetic script. Montemayor's anthology *La voz profunda* which has been published in a bilingual edition in Spanish and indigenous languages included essays, poems and stories[1].

Because of the extraordinary variety of indigenous languages, I will focus two of the most prolific: zapotec literature in Mexico and literature in mapudungun in Chile, both of which are rooted in a history of resistance to the state.

The zapotec spoken in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec is the only indigenous language of Mexico to have a substantial modern literary tradition, thanks in part to its political history. Juchitlan, its regional capital, is a city with a history of rebellion that goes back to the fight against Aztec domination and it has a modern indigenous intellectual tradition dating back to the twenties and thirties when a group of intellectuals living in Mexico, most notably Andrés Henestrosa, wrote some of their work in zapotec. But the contemporary renaissance surely dates from the political movement of the 1980s. In 1981, the Coalition of Workers, Peasants and Students of the Isthmus (COCEI) put into practice self-government and cultural revival. In its two years in office before being dismissed by the central government in 1983, an action that was met by widespread protest, COCEI supported a literacy campaign, a radio station, publications and a bookstore. The zapotec language became the preferred mode of communication, even among some non-indigenous citizens. Its policy exemplified, according to Jeffrey Rubin, what postcolonial development might have looked like if indigenous and Western cultures had met on more equal terms, not necessarily a rejection of the Western or the modern nor a reinforcing of geographical and cultural borders between local and outside, but rather a creation of multiple modernities by means of non-Western knowledge and style[2]. Thus even before the Zapatista army emerged from the Lacandon jungle in 1994 and addressed meetings in six indigenous languages, COCEI had already adopted the zapotec language at its meetings, using the customs and adornments of zapotec ritual and drawing on the historical memory of past rebellions. The journal, *Guchach Reza* often illustrated by the painter, Francisco Toledo and his friends, brought together zapotec writing with critical writing by foreign intellectuals, an important consideration when taking into account the often restricted notion of indigenous cultures.

Victor de la Cruz, a zapotec poet and editor of the 1983 anthology, *Flor de la palabra* (Flower of the Word), was well aware of the difficulties of anthologizing a literature that had not yet been recognized as such. In one of his best-known poems, Tu laanu. Tu lanu (Who are we? What is our name?), he represents writing as a form of alienation, as an empty house in which there is no listener and therefore no presence. The word on paper cannot reproduce voice. "Why does one write on paper/ Instead of on the earth?" the poet asks. "Whence came this paper that imprison our word/ the word our fathers carved on stones/that they sang in the night when they danced?" Describing writing as a second language which kills the native tongue, he ends the poem by asking again, "Who are we? What is our name?" What Victor de la Cruz underscores is that the community cannot be present in writing as it is in orally transmitted cultures. This

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divided self is, not surprisingly, a feature of much indigenous poetry. The Yucatecan Maya poet, Briceida Cueva Cob in a poem with the title *Yan a bin xook* (You will go to school), while accepting schooling finds her true reflection in the family hearth where the burning fire mirrors her true self. The verse "You will cross the threshold of your imagination/ and go into your own house/ without having to knock on the door" suggests the radical difference between the society which the girl needs a permit to enter and the true self reflected in the native hearth.

Like zapotec writing, the writing of the mapuche poets in Chile has been strongly influenced by the militant resistance to the state which has persistently denied the indigenous component of the nation. In the 1940s when Pablo Neruda tried to found a literary journal using the name *Araucania* (the old name for mapuche territory), he was ordered to change the title. The Pinochet government revoked mapuche land rights and at the present time there is militant resistance to government licensed dam projects which affect the environment. As recently as 1992 when Chile was represented at the World Fair in Seville by a dazzling iceberg, the country emphasizes its whiteness as if the indigenous did not exist. Textbooks mention their subjugation in the nineteenth century but tend to ignore their recent history, as if to assume their absorption into the modern state. Yet over a million people identify themselves as mapuche and half of them live in urban areas. Because they have been under attack and removed from their lands, their identity is constantly being renegotiated so that what constitutes the mapuche self (Mapuchengen) is defined in many different ways and can be quite volatile. In 1993 the state passed an indigenous law which demanded proof of mapuche identity for land claims, thus placing bureaucratic criteria on a people who identified themselves as belonging to a particular place or as participating in particular rituals but not necessarily according to purely racial criteria.

The mapuches represent a challenge to the state for several reasons—because of their language, their social organization and their land claims. "Mapu" means land and "che" people and they see as their prime mission the defense of the environment. Their language is mapudungun (or mapuchezungun). Their basic political unit is headed by the lonko (the political leader of the community) and the machi, the religious leader, who is often a woman who performs healing rituals and conducts the ceremonial life of the community. But in today's world the mapuche increasingly use modern means of communication, especially radio which serves as a way of disseminating mapudungun and, of course, the Internet.

Mapuche poetry often addresses the long resistance of the mapuches to the Spaniards and the Chilean state, the loss and recovery of language and memory after the wars of extermination and the sense of mutilation and loss that comes with the transfer of voice into writing. One of the best known mapuche writers, Elicura Chihuailaf, in his *Confidential Message to the Chilean people* which is part memoir, part history and part political tract, writes of Nvtram, the art of speech linked to historical memory. He describes mapudungun poetry as being between dream and memory—dream being an important element of mapuche culture. The machi (male or female) intervenes between the visible and invisible world and along with the lonko or Genpin Alonko, the possessor of speech, is the central figure in the community. Chihauilaf describes himself as an oralitor, underscoring the dual nature of his mission to link oral tradition and written communication and to recognize a brotherhood of world literature while bearing the responsibility of a marginalized people. The poet and musician Leonel Lienlaf in an interview described writing in mapudungun as a political challenge "…because we cannot forget that thanks to writing they seized our lands and deceived us. For us, for mapuche culture, the writing process is a two-edged sword... My work is an eighty percent turn towards orality. For this reason, my publications have less to do with books than with oral spaces for collective development. The development of my poetry has to do with the collectivity. For this reason too documentaries have been part of my work for they have to do with orality. Poetry only exists inasmuch as words can be shared[3]." He goes on to underscore that territoriality is not only the land we see and inhabit but the spirit that inhabits it. Mapuche poetry often evokes past struggles as well as the foundation myth that recounts the primordial struggle between the mountain, Tren Tren, and Kai Kai, the hostile oceanic force. One of the great contemporary poems, "i" (Song), transposes this legend into an account of her personal journey from inheriting a broken tradition to her becoming a machi. The poem is not written in mapudugun but code switches between chedungun (a variant of mapudungun spoken in the Huilliche region) and Spanish. The mixture of language, according to one critic, demonstrates the impossibility of speaking a single language...and implies readers who are willing to inhabit this plural space.

If I have stressed zapotec and mapudungun, it is because these languages have been effective in reaching beyond the community while remaining true to their history and preoccupations. Nowadays, thanks to the Internet, even the smallest linguistic community can reach an international public. The inequality that had forced the marginalization of orally transmitted cultures is being erased not only by the

transcription of languages into phonetic script but by technologies that have given a new lease of life to orally transmitted culture.

Endnotes

[1] There is a bilingual edition in English and indigenous languages: *Words of the True People*, Carlos Montemayor and Donald Frischmann, eds. (Austin, Texas: 2004)

[2] Jeffrey Rubin, *Decentering the Regime. Ethnicity, Radicalism and Democracy in Juchitlan, Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 1

[3] Both these poets are included in an anthology in English translation compiled by Cecilia Vicua and translated by John Bierhorst. See *Ul: Four Mapuche Poets* (Pittsburgh: Latin American Literary Review Press, 1998) ■

Inscriptions of Inequality in Latin American Literary and Cultural Studies

by Idelber Avelar
Tulane University
iavelar@tcs.tulane.edu

One can speak today—let us see for how long—of inequality as something that has actually been going down in parts of Latin America. The most impressive figure may be the 33 percent of all poor Brazilian families who have risen to the middle class since Lula's inauguration in 2003. Precarious as all literacy numbers tend to be, Venezuela's and Bolivia's nominal reduction of their illiteracy rates to zero deserves to be celebrated. According to Venezuela's National Institute of Statistics, 50.5 percent of Venezuelans lived below the poverty line in 1999. By 2007, that number was down to 31.5 percent. The relationship established with national patrimony by countries such as Ecuador, Bolivia, and more recently Paraguay has at least stopped the bleeding of decades-long transfers of wealth from the poor to the rich. All of these governments have their problems and some—like Chávez's—display unmistakably authoritarian features. But the gains are also real.

Recent years have made visible the extent of the devastation left by the processes euphemistically designated as neoliberalism or privatization. What stares the analyst in the face is not the modest gains of recent center-left governments, but the depth of the destruction caused by the defunding of the public sector and the deregulation of private businesses after the 1980s. Education, culture, and literature are measures of how pervasive the onslaught was. When you look at how Brazil's federal university system was treated by Fernando Henrique Cardoso's government—no expansion in the student body took place and faculty did not have any *nominal* raises between 1995 and 2002—you begin to get a sense of how damaging the privatization period was to education. Even in FHC's more socially conscious version—as opposed to, say, Menem's wholesale liquidation of Argentina or Fujimori's ransacking of Peru—privatization included an explicit attack on the concept of education as a common good that a society may choose to provide to all its members.

Privatization also affected cultural policy and Latin American Cultural Studies produced what was perhaps the definitive critical reflection on its consequences, George Yúdice's *The Expediency of Culture* (2002). Yúdice's study notes how culture has acquired a ubiquitous role as mediator, one whose "conservative" or "emancipatory" character is determined through complex social interactions. *The Expediency of Culture* is also representative of a phenomenon specific of the past decade: the trilingual publication of scholarship in Spanish America, the United States and Brazil, an editorial trend that has made of "Latin American Cultural and Literary Studies" something quite distinct from what it was a decade ago. It has established a dialogue in terms more horizontal than those viable back when some subfields in the United States were dominated by the anxiety over their own privileged position vis-à-vis the continent they studied. Other instances of this welcome editorial development are Sylvia Molloy's *At Face Value: Autobiographical Writing in Spanish America* (1991), Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2001, Argos, 2004; Doris Sommer's *Foundational Fictions* (1993), Fondo, 2004, UFMG, 2004; Julio Ramos's *Desencuentros de la modernidad en América Latina*, 1989 Spanish edition translated at Duke (1999) and UFMG (2008); my own *Untimely Present* (1999), Cuarto Propio, 2000, UFMG, 2003; and

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Josefina Ludmer's *El cuerpo del delito: Un manual* (1999), Pittsburgh, 2004, UFMG, 2002, among others.

Auspiciously, this has not been a one-way road in which only books by U.S.-based scholars get disseminated. Works by Nelly Richard, Beatriz Sarlo, Néstor García Canclini, Gonzalo Aguilar, and other Spanish America-based scholars have also appeared in English and Portuguese, while Brazilians Roberto Schwarz, Silviano Santiago, and Flora Süssekind have seen their work appear in Spanish and English. As visible above, a notable place here belongs to the Federal University of Minas Gerais Press, which has brought much English- and Spanish-language Latin American Cultural Studies scholarship into Portuguese (along with Argos, which has published, in addition to Molloy, other leading essayists such as Graciela Montaldo). These editorial events should not go unrecorded when one assesses the state of the discipline in the United States and discusses, for example, how to "incorporate Brazil into Latin American Studies." But the fact is that they do. No matter how horizontal certain dialogues may have become, some neocolonial habits die hard.

I believe most colleagues would agree that in the United States the discipline has not been dominated by one set of debates such as those that revolved around *testimonio* vs. literature, *mestizaje* vs. transculturation vs. hybridity, or Subaltern vs. Cultural Studies. This is certainly a good thing, but it makes totalizing evaluative efforts difficult, perhaps futile. At any rate, I tend to disagree with apocalyptic assessments of the field, and among the many works of the past decade that I find deserving of note, most share an interesting feature: they tend not to replicate the ideological gesture of taking a metacritical stance as a priori lens whose validity the object would then confirm, something that was almost a tic in certain debates of the 1980s and 90s. These studies tend to be meticulously specific, object-driven pieces of scholarship, usually anchored in one or two national traditions (or in a regional one, e.g. Caribbean, Andes) rather than in some fiction of "Latin America." They are not "anti-theoretical" at all, but their theoretical concepts tend to emerge inductively, during, not before the interpretive act takes place. The ones that have been particularly inspiring to me further share the feature of devoting thought to the relations between "real" (political, economic) and rhetorical (literary, plastic) manifestations of inequality.

Jens Andermann's *The Optic of the State: Visuality and Power in Argentina and Brazil* (2007) moves that debate to an institutional terrain and shows how at the turn of the 20th century those two states constructed a visual field through museums, cartography, and other institutions. The museum's "material theater of sovereignty" (p.22) assembled practices related to the scientific project of the time as well as with state massacres and expeditions, a link also featured in a contemporary classic in the field such as Gabriela Nouzeille's *Ficciones somáticas: Naturalismo, Nacionalismo y políticas médicas del cuerpo (Argentina 1880-1910)* (2000). Andermann's work is also auspicious in exemplifying a kind of cross-national collaboration that has become more common in recent years—in this case, his sustained dialogue with Álvaro Fernández Bravo, whose *Literatura y frontera: Procesos de territorialización en las culturas argentinas y chilena del siglo XIX* (1999) and later articles are key pieces in the conversation. Some novel things have happened in this regard, with the appearance of books by scholars who venture beyond their national boundaries and end up not "making a contribution," but reshaping an entire subfield in another country. I think of works such as Argentine Gonzalo Aguilar's *Poesía concreta brasileña: Las vanguardias en la encrucijada modernista* (2003), a monumental synthesis that goes far beyond, I believe, any single study of Concretism done in Brazil in the past 50 years.

Horacio Legrás's *Literature and Subjection* (2008) will be read in years to come, as its detailed engagement with novelists such as Juan José Saer and Roa Bastos demonstrates that the only Subaltern Studies that literature may be able to offer is the mapping of the rhetoric of subalternization; in that sense it makes a nice counterpoint to John Beverley's *Subalternity and Representation* (1999), which synthesized a previous way of thinking about those problems in Latin American Cultural Studies. Legrás's book is also a healthy reminder that the effects of transculturation are never reducible to its uses by economic and political elites (p. 18), a premise that makes possible a less stifling, more open field of inquiry than the one allowed by the tired discussions over which concept (*mestizaje*, transculturation, hybridity, etc.) to privilege in interpreting cultural exchanges.

In Gender Studies, both the documentation of exclusion—be it of women or gay or lesbian or transgendered subjects—and the mapping of transgressive gestures by the excluded coexist with more multifaceted readings, where the normalizing / conservative or emancipatory / liberating components of gender practices are not given in advance. Jean Franco and Sylvia Molloy, especially, have made that qualitative leap possible, by leaving legacies of engagements with the gendering of Latin American lettered culture that are both inspired by social justice and attentive to the intricacies of the literary text. (Molloy's foremost contribution to that legacy in the past decade may well have been her novel *El común olvido*, an implacable staging of a masculine

voice.) At least two generations of Latin American(ist) feminists, from Nelly Richard to Mary Louise Pratt, from Ileana Rodríguez to Kathleen Newman, have continued that work. In the past decade, some of the important landmarks in Gender Studies have been Licia Fiol-Matta's study of Gabriela Mistral, *A Queer Mother for the Nation* (2002), the collective *Chicana Feminisms* (2003), Juana María Rodríguez's powerful *Queer Latinidad* (2003) and Arnaldo Cruz-Malavé's always sophisticated readings, as in his *Queer Latino Testimonio* (2007) or in his volume coedited with Martin Malalansan, *Queer Globalizations* (2002).

To the field delimited by luminaries such as Franco and Molloy, younger scholars such as José Quiroga and Robert Irwin have added indispensable books. Again, it is notable how nationally grounded they have tended to be. In Quiroga's *Cuban Palimpsests* (2005), gender is a realm where highly unique struggles around Cuban identity, culture, and politics take place. Likewise, Irwin's *Mexican Masculinities* (2003) tackles issues around borders, not only the geographical one, but also those separating, for example, homo- from heteroeroticism. They manifest themselves in rather specific forms in Mexico, due not only to its location but also to the singularity of its revolutionary process. Other landmarks in Queer Studies, going back to Jorge Salessi's contemporary classic *Médicos, maleantes y maricas* (1995), include Daniel Balderston's mapping of homosexuality in literature in a host of essays and edited volumes, and in his *Deseo, cicatriz luminosa: Ensayos sobre homosexualidades latinoamericanas* (2004). Important works in masculinity / gay studies have also been done for the Colonial period—see Pete Sigal's edited volume *Infamous Desire: Male Homosexuality in Colonial Latin America* as the inquiry around gender goes through as interesting a moment now as any it had earlier enjoyed. Presses such as Argentina's Feminaria and Chile's Cuarto Propio, as well as journals such as Mexico's *Fem*, have attested to the continuous vitality of feminist scholarship in Latin America.

About Early Modern Studies I am less equipped to opine, but in conversations with colleagues such as John Charles, whose own monograph on Andean appropriations of literacy will give a lot of food for thought when it comes out, I sense that the best recent studies have also displayed the same geographical and historical embeddedness, as opposed to more ideological (pan-indigenist, pan-Latin Americanist or Third Worldist) gestures. Colonial Studies can only be "political" if it is, first, rigorous in its historiography and meticulously grounded in its object. Again with the caveat that I am a distant, lay observer when it comes to Early Modern Studies, my sense is that this awareness is now more solidly established in the field than it had been in a recent past.

A few questions have stood out in monographic studies of modern literature. Crime, violence, punishment, and exclusion have represented perhaps the dominant cluster, as evidenced by excellent books such as Juan Dabove's *Nightmares of the Lettered City: Banditry and Literature in Latin America, 1816-1929* and Glen Close's *Contemporary Hispanic Crime Fiction: A Discourse on Urban Violence*, both tributary to a contemporary classic mentioned above, Josefina Ludmer's *El cuerpo del delito: Un manual.* Ludmer's is a definitive study of the historical role that—in Horacio Legrás's words—"the aesthetic representation of crime has come to play in relationship to both the consolidation of the state and the emergence of a 'people'." What sets it apart from much previous scholarship is that crime appears not a theme to be sought and explained in literature, but as something that allows literature to become a *dispositif*, an operative piece in the real relations between the state and the body politic. Again, that process is—as Ludmer would agree—highly specific to Argentina, due to the role played by lettered culture in the constitution of the country's modern state, unparalleled and unknown, say, in Brazil or Peru. Systematically, then, we find much of the best scholarship on Latin America literature not necessarily thinking in terms of "Latin America" at all. Many Area Studies programs in the United States would do well to reflect on that fact.

Revisiting the 1960s has inspired good work. For its sophistication, Diana Sorensen's *A Turbulent Decade Remembered: Scenes from the Latin American Sixties* (Stanford, 2007) deserves mention, as it produces what appeared impossible a few years ago: an innovative recasting of the Spanish American boom in ways that replicate neither its celebratory self-perception nor later critiques of it. Sorensen accomplishes it with an eye to the boom's duplicitous nature as an experience of decline and inauguration. As with most good literary criticism, her volume thoroughly thinks through the relations between the rhetorical and the social dimensions. Another set of period studies is the postdictatorial scholarship on the Southern Cone nations, the synthesis of which in the past decade was advanced by Sandra Lorenzano's *Escrituras de la sobrevivencia* (2001), *Saudades* (2007), and *Políticas de la memoria* (coedited with Ralph Buchenhorst, 2007), Beatriz Sarlo's *Tiempo pasado* (2005) and *Escritos sobre literatura argentina* (2007), and Miguel Dalmaroni's *La palabra justa. Literatura, crítica y memoria en Argentina (1960–2002*). If we go back in the period studies to the early 20th century, Rubén Gallo's *Mexican Modernity: The Avant-garde and the Technological Revolution* (2007) certainly deserves a place of distinction, for its skillful, simultaneous

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handling of aesthetic and historical questions.

In Critical Race Studies, much has been written in the past decade, but I would single out two books: Antonio Risério's *A utopia brasileira e os movimentos negros* (2007) and Eleuterio Santiago-Díaz's *Escritura afropuertorriqueña y modernidad* (2007). Risério's is a powerful challenge to the importation of binary U.S. racial paradigms into Brazil, written not from a conservative standpoint but by an essayist of a lifelong engagement with black and *mestiço* Brazilian cultures. Santiago-Díaz's monograph on Afro-Puerto Rican Vieques writer Carmelo Rodríguez Torres, the most sophisticated literary analysis of race, diaspora, modernity, and imperialism I have read in a while, documents how ellipsis has been at the center of the literature produced in Vieques' unique neocolonial conditions.

This is certainly a partial assessment, framed by my own limits, focus, and preferences, but it does suggest that the best works in the field have tended to combine social and rhetorical questions in dynamic, innovative ways. In mapping the relations between real and symbolic dimensions, they have also tended to share a local character, an object-driven embeddedness that makes some earlier—and current—debates on "Latin America" appear a bit byzantine and unfruitful. ■

Perspectivas eco-críticas latinoamericanas
Conocimientos transpuestos recuperados

por **Ileana Rodríguez**
Ohio State University
rodriguez.89@osu.edu

La eco-crítica se define como el estudio de las relaciones entre la cultura y su medio ambiente natural y social. El desarrollo de tal crítica se predica sobre el conocimiento de que todo está interrelacionado y sobre el reconocimiento de la relevancia de los problemas de la representación y administración de lo natural en relación al todo social, humano. La eco-crítica pone primero en escena los textos que hablan de estos asuntos y luego propone una reflexión teórica sobre los mismos. Mas, si la eco-crítica está hoy por hoy relacionada con los movimientos ambientalistas, las filosofías holísticas sobre la naturaleza y su relación con lo social-cultural son de larga raigambre indígena en la América Latina.

Nadie puede dudar que los estudios críticos de la cultura latinoamericana siempre han puesto en escena las relaciones entre lo humano y lo natural, pero el tenor de los mismos estudios cambia de ángulo de visión según las urgencias de época. Yo me atrevería a decir que los estudios coloniales primero y los estudios postcoloniales recientemente pueden bien entenderse dentro de la rúbrica eco-crítica, como también pueden bien serlo los estudios sobre la modernidad latinoamericana y su tránsito hacia la postmodernidad. Digo esto porque ¿quién no ha oído siquiera hablar del animismo de las culturas indígenas y quien no recuerda el arduo trabajo de los exploradores a principios de los enfrentamientos euro-americanos en su denodado esfuerzo primero por recorrer los paisajes humanos y naturales, y después por clasificar y controlar las especies que hicieran primero veedores y oidores y más tarde naturalistas y geógrafos? ¿Quién que haya leído los ya clásicos libros de Antonello Gerbi puede dudar del lugar central que la naturaleza ocupa en las relaciones conflictivas entre los europeos y los americanos? ¿Y qué decir del libro de Michel Foucault *El orden de las cosas* que nos habla de las crisis de las nomenclaturas europeas en su contacto con las especies naturales de este continente que vinieron primero a desordenar y luego a reorganizar todo el conocimiento europeo precisamente sobre lo natural? De la misma manera podemos recordar todos los textos sobre la pampa, la selva, la llanura, los campos de caña de azúcar, las bananeras, las tabacaleras, la explotación del caucho, que marcaron toda la literatura social de la modernidad temprana en nuestras incipientes repúblicas. ¿Y quién puede ignorar, hoy por hoy, la importancia de la coca en las literaturas y culturas del presente? El corpus letrado en su totalidad está marcado por esta preocupación no llamada eco-crítica pero que puede bien subsumirse en ella.

Es posible considerar que muchos críticos culturales, sobre todo aquellos afectos a aferrarse a las tradiciones imperantes en la era de las formaciones nacionales, consideren la eco-crítica como una moda más de las academias norteamericanas, a pesar de que los ejemplares trabajos contemporáneos de bolivianos, guatemaltecos, y colombianos demuestran lo contrario. No voy a negar que el sesgo es diferente, que la eco-crítica está más ligada al ambientalismo que a la explotación del trabajo humano, pero eso no quita que el ímpetu sea el mismo, lo político-social. Y en esto, los trabajos de los latinoamericanistas coinciden con los de la eco-crítica en el análisis de los conflictos y tensiones creados por la modernidad a nivel de lo natural-social. Creo que bien podríamos argumentar que la eco-crítica es una posición contra el desarrollismo, contra los aspectos negativos

de la modernidad, contra la destrucción de medio-ambientes naturales para favorecer las industrias extractivas, contra el uso y abuso de las plantas para producir estupefacientes. El trabajo de Arturo Escobar, para mencionar sólo uno, es ejemplar en este aspecto. Mi propio trabajo es de este tenor puesto que ciertamente pone en escena la relación entre naturaleza y sociedad, naturaleza y conocimiento, naturaleza y política y mis estudios se apoyan en enormes genealogías conformadoras de grandes campos disciplinarios.

La eco-crítica nos permite re-evaluar los diferentes proyectos transcontinentales, valorar los recursos naturales como recursos sociales, y evaluar epistemologías alternas, tal las indígenas y sus contratos culturales con lo natural. Estas constituyen paradigmas contrarios a la explotación irrespetuosa de los recursos naturales. Si se quiere, con la eco-crítica hay un retorno a formas animistas del pasado, a tradiciones pastoriles, virgilianas, que, no obstante, responden a necesidades humana inherentes, a mecanismos de admonición y de supervivencia. Idealizar las comunidades orgánicas del pasado, relevar lo prístino, natural, impoluto, responde a imaginarios sociales inexistentes en lo real pero posibles a nivel simbólico; son propuestas proféticas, si se quiere, entendiendo lo profético en el sentido de Richard Rorty, esto es, un universo de convicciones fluidas, herramienta de persuasión, imaginación, poesía y valor. Lo profético significa predecir lo que todavía no es y por eso las nuevas ideas, aunque parezcan irrealizables, tienen que entrar a formar parte del debate público y persuadir. Los movimientos liberadores son atractivos no precisamente por sus exactitudes de diagnóstico sino por su imaginación, el valor de sus propuestas, y el asumir que el espacio público es flexible. Ideas opuestas al sentido común constituyen el locus de lo profético, esto es, el lugar de posibilidades no realizadas cuya fuerza radica en crear nuevos lenguajes, lógicas, tradiciones—utópicas por el momento en la medida que sólo existen en la imaginación. El envés de estos imaginarios es apocalíptico y profetiza el fin del planeta—holocaustos nucleares, calentamientos globales, contaminaciones sin retroceso, destrucción de capas de ozono, lluvias ácidas, tierras yermas, aguas contaminadas, especies en extinción, uso de alimentos como combustible. Por eso las diferentes disciplinas vuelven a la idea del respeto a la tierra, a la madre naturaleza, y proponen un desarrollo respetuoso. Así lo vemos en las escuelas que hablan de desarrollos alternativos, de modernidades periféricas, de las tensiones de la modernidad.

Mi trabajo ciertamente bordea los marcos de tal crítica. En mi libro, *Transatlantic Topographies*, la naturaleza es la protagonista principal en la medida que es su apreciación, la interrelación que los procesos culturales tienen con ella, lo que va moldeando las formaciones sociales. La tierra, la naturaleza, los recursos naturales, ciertamente constituyen el trasfondo que apoya las formaciones sociales coloniales y modernas. Cuando yo emprendí esta investigación, mi propósito era justamente replantearme no sólo una visión y una representación sobre la naturaleza sino una manera de articular las visiones y las representaciones específicamente culturales a los proyectos de investigación y desarrollo que habían empezado desde los primeros conflictos globales que se suscitaron a partir de la llegada de los españoles primero y después de los europeos al continente americano. Propuse ahí que la idea moderna de la naturaleza siempre significó un movimiento que se alejaba de la noción 'de lo natural' hacia significados económicos—explotación, extracción, acumulación primaria de capital, desarrollo. Desde el principio de las confrontaciones euro-americanas, la naturaleza deviene empresa, frontera, en el sentido inglés de la palabra, esto es, tierra virgen, tierra de nadie, libre de explorar. Por eso propongo que los documentos primarios y secundarios de la colonización constituyen genealogías de los proyectos de investigación para el desarrollo que podemos leer en las universidades y agencias que propician tales empeños.

Este proyecto me enseñó a ver la naturaleza desde una multitud de articulaciones. Pude constatar la importancia que la tierra/lo natural tenía para la cultura en general. Aprendí cómo la guerra obstruye la producción de alimentos y cómo la destrucción de la tierra y la alteración de los ciclos de producción y el cambio en el tipo de cosechas es central al proyecto de subyugación colonial. El hambre es pues una manera de subyugar. Imposible no ligar esta idea con la producción de etanol en el presente y el uso del maíz con propósitos energéticos. Cómo no ver la producción de distopías culturales, ciencia ficción en la que alimentar máquinas es primario y antecede la alimentación de las personas. Y cómo no articular estas ideas distópicas a las de Miguel Ángel Asturias y su personaje Machojón, quien, en un arranque de desesperación quema sus campos de maíz.

Y en mi nuevo libro, *The Limits of Liberalism,* uno de los momentos cruciales del debate sobre estas filosofías ecológicas es la discusión sobre 'culturas milenarias' y 'creencias' que emprende Rigoberta Menchú y ante las cuales uno entra de lleno en esos diálogos postergados y conocimientos despreciados, como bien viene argumentando desde hace tiempo Walter Mignolo. Y ¿no es acaso Menchú quien informa que los ambientalistas les han robado sus ideas sin darles crédito? ¿No es ella acaso la que pone en escena la exclusión indígena de los movimientos mundiales en aras de la salvación del planeta? Hay

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segmentos de su texto, *Rigoberta, la nieta de los Mayas,* que son directamente útiles a la eco-crítica. Por ejemplo cuando habla de su madre. El signo madre, en ella, significa entidades biológicas y culturales, vehículo que acarrea el sentido de la cultura milenaria. La madre de Rigoberta es partera, curandera, vidente. Conocía el *xew' xew* que curaba dolores, los tiernos tallos de las hojas del chilacayote que curaban las heridas de los pies causadas por el lodo, el *k'a q' eyes* que curaba los resfríos, el *saq ixoqto* para los dolores de estómago causados por el hambre. La naturaleza era para ella un texto donde leía signos tales como la fortaleza de los vientos, el sonido de los animales, su presencia en lugares inesperados, el movimiento del tiempo, la luz y la oscuridad. Entendía el canto de los pájaros, y por eso supo predecir la muerte de su hijo Patrocinio. Ella vivía en Chimel, lugar mágico, encantado, tierra rica en toda variedad de árboles, pájaros, flores, un bosque de nubes, los pulmones del planeta. Cuando leo a Rigoberta, pongo en perspectiva las habilidades del rastreador en Sarmiento, que siempre me fascinó con su magia detectivesca que ahora encuentro estaba relacionada a la lectura de lo natural, al rastro dejado en los caminos, de ahí su nombre de rastreador. Ya no digamos el relato de Don Segundo Sombra, conocimiento de lo natural en el momento de su desvanecimiento en lo lírico al ser absorbido por lo industrial.

El trabajo de naturalistas y geógrafos que recorren a pie las llanuras con sus instrumentos de medir inmensidades, de contar, de almacenar, de clasificar, de interceptar y tratar de domeñar lo natural encanta. La lectura de *Rápido Tránsito* de José Coronel Urtecho nos pone al tanto de todos estos viajeros que recorrían el río San Juan en busca de la manera más expedita de atravesar el continente lado a lado y cómo, en su travesía, se iban maravillando ante el silencio cautivo de lo natural. El verdor convertía de nuevo el proyecto de desarrollo en paisaje, en literatura, al desembocar en el gran lago, lago de tiburones de agua dulce, a poca distancia del océano, casi estrangulando la cintura de América y convirtiéndola en pasaje natural—ahora totalmente poluto. Los niños de Nicaragua aprenden que su geografía es su historia y la historia natural, su historia social.

De la misma manera podríamos hablar, con escritores, poetas, ensayistas y desarrollistas sobre las otras regiones de América. Por ejemplo, podríamos hablar con los agrimensores y poetas Euclides de Cuna y Wilson Harris sobre la inmensidad pasmosa de la amazonía. Sitio archi-explorado, lugar de tránsito de todo investigador, de todo desarrollista. Libros como *The Fate of the Forest* nos hablan de los desarrollos fallidos. Y toda la literatura de fronteras termina en sus orillas, José Eustacio Rivera y Rómulo Gallegos en Venezuela, Vargas Llosa en el Perú, Wilson Harris en Guyana. La selva es un gran tropo literario, desarrollista y medioambientalista. En sus bordes termina la sabana, la civilización, y empieza lo desconocido, primero y último día de la creación según el novelista cubano Alejo Carpentier, punto de cambio y lugar de límite de las ambiciones de la familia Rockefeller.

Y así podríamos hablar no sólo de lo que se ve y se mide sino de lo que se come, el banano, la fruta más limpia puesto que la envuelve su propia cáscara, el azúcar, para Sidney Mintz, la gran contribución de América a Europa—energía para trabajadores y soldados. Para ya no hablar de la coca, la hoja milagrosa, que cura, calma, embriaga, enloquece, produce gran acumulación de capital y grandes cambios en la articulación de los grupos de poder. Con ella rigiendo al centro de las narrativas de acumulación de capital y criminalidad hoy, cerramos este artículo. Para la perspicaz analista cultural, Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, la hoja de coca no es droga, no es cocaína—los indígenas de Arguedas y Alegría la mascan sin cesar para descansar y calmarse. Para los testimonialistas y novelistas colombianos, como Alfredo Molano y Fernando Vallejos, la cocaína envenena los cuerpos—de las mulas que las cargan en sus estómagos, de los que la absorben por la nariz. La coca corrompe gobiernos, transforma a los niños en sicarios matones, traspasa fronteras y produce toneladas de documentación.

Digamos, para terminar, que si la eco-crítica está íntimamente asociada a los movimientos ambientalistas en los países ricos, en América Latina está asociada a la colonización y a la modernización, a la explotación y a la opresión. En América Latina, los recursos naturales, sean tierra, paisaje, cultivo, o explotación y opresión han sido tropo fundamental de lo cultural pero su énfasis no ha recaído en la protección de la naturaleza solamente sino también y muy particularmente en la protección de lo humano.

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¿Existe un giro neoconservador en Latinoamérica hoy?

por **John Beverley**
University of Pittsburgh
brq@pitt.edu

Se habla mucho estos días del retorno de lo político. Conjuntamente de la necesidad de un cambio de paradigma que pone nuevamente el énfasis en el estado en vez de la sociedad civil y los movimientos sociales. Esto es en parte porque, en casos como Bolivia o Venezuela, los movimientos sociales se han vuelto el estado (para pedir prestada una frase de Ernesto Laclau), o se están prestando activamente a proyectos políticos para ganar el poder de estado. Pero este retorno de lo político también trae en su secuela una serie de nuevas preguntas e incertidumbres. En particular, quiero sugerir aquí que en la actualidad se está produciendo un giro neoconservador en el pensamiento socio-cultural latinoamericano que busca intervenir en esta nueva coyuntura. Este giro es doblemente paradójico: primero, porque ocurre en el contexto del resurgimiento de la izquierda latinoamericana en los últimos años; segundo, porque se manifiesta principalmente *desde* la izquierda.

La idea de un giro neoconservador, y el concepto en si, se refieren a historia conocida en los Estados Unidos que lleva a un grupo de intelectuales desde la izquierda eventualmente a una posición de apoyo para Reagan y sus seguidores en el partido Republicano. Ser "neo"conservador entonces implica que no eran conservadores inicialmente—eran liberales, social demócratas, trotskistas, aun en algunos casos estalinistas. Son "nuevos" conservadores como los "nuevos cristianos" del siglo XVI en España, sin el elemento de coerción.

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El giro neoconservador en Estados Unidos aparece inicialmente sobre todo como una crítica generalizada de la Nueva Izquierda y la contra-cultura de los sesenta, y de las nuevas formas de "identity politics" como el feminismo o los movimientos de afirmación étnica. Similarmente, implícita en el giro neoconservador latinoamericano hay una variante de la distinción ya bastante difundida entre izquierda respetable e izquierda "retrograda", para usar la caracterización de Jorge Castañeda ("Morning in Latin America," *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2008). En Chile o Brasil, la izquierda respetable está en el poder. Pero en Argentina, Bolivia, o Venezuela la izquierda "respetable" forma a veces parte de la oposición política a los gobiernos de la izquierda "retrograda" en el poder.

La pregunta subyacente es por lo tanto sobre la naturaleza de lo que se ha entendido convencionalmente como "izquierda". En otras palabras, la "izquierda" intelectual tradicional en América Latina hoy, o una parte significativa de ella, ¿sigue siendo de izquierda? ¿O se está volviendo como en el caso norteamericano una especie nueva derecha?

Para comenzar una respuesta, sería útil hacer una distinción entre neoconservadurismo y neoliberalismo, una distinción banal pero quizás necesaria, ya que estas posiciones a menudo se desdibujan entre si. Los neoliberales creen en la eficacia del mercado libre y en un modelo utilitario de agencia humana, basado en la maximización de la ganancia y la minimización de la pérdida. Como se sabe, el neoliberalismo en principio no propone otra jerarquía de valor a más que el deseo del consumidor en si y la efectividad del mercado libre y la democracia formal como mecanismos para ejercitar la libertad de elección. Esta desjerarquización implícita en la teoría neoliberal entraña por lo tanto un fuerte desafío a la autoridad de las élites intelectuales tradicionales para determinar los estándares de valor cultural.

Por contraste, los neoconservadores sí creen que hay una jerarquía de valores epistemológicos, estéticos y morales imbuida en la formas de la alta cultura y las disciplinas académicas—una jerarquía vinculada esencialmente al paradigma de la Ilustración. Piensan que es importante defender e impartir esos valores pedagógica y críticamente contra la fuerza desterritorializadora de la sociedad de mercado y la globalización. Este papel requiere de la autoridad del intelectual tradicional, en el sentido que Gramsci le da al concepto—es decir, el intelectual que habla en nombre de lo universal y que opera en la universidad y el mundo del arte y la cultura, y en el debate de las ideas en la esfera pública.

Con afán ilustrativo podríamos decir en un contexto latinoamericano que los Vargas Llosa (padre e hijo) o los así llamados escritores "McOndo" o Manifiesto Crack, o la tendencia en los estudios culturales que pone primordialmente el énfasis en las operaciones del mercado de bienes culturales, o la mencionada celebración de la "sociedad civil" en sectores de las ciencias sociales (incluyendo a veces los estudios subalternos), constituyen una aceptación, implícita o explícita, de una posición neoliberal. Pero esas tendencias—y otras que se relacionan con ellas—son algo diferente del giro neoconservador. En cierto sentido el giro neoconservador está dirigido *contra* estas tendencias de la teoría social y cultural, que tendían a dominar la escena en el período anterior. Usando una conocida distinción de Raymond Williams, podríamos decir que el neoliberalismo es la tendencia *residual* y que el neoconservadurismo es, o está tratando de ser, la tendencia *emergente* en el pensamiento socio-cultural en Latinoamérica. Surge precisamente en el momento en que el neoliberalismo ha perdido su hegemonía como ideología.

Se pueden vislumbrar elementos de una posición neoconservadora en, por ejemplo, las posiciones actuales de Beatriz Sarlo, uno de los intelectuales públicos más importantes de Argentina. He hecho referencia antes a Jorge Castañeda. También podría sugerir los casos de Sergio Ramírez en Nicaragua, Elizabeth Burgos y Teodoro Petkoff en Venezuela, o (en ciertas formulaciones) Héctor Aguilar Camín en México. (El modelo del intelectual neoconservador en América Latina de otra generación es Octavio Paz). Pero no hay espacio aquí para considerar casos particulares. Y, por supuesto, existen variantes de lo que denomino aquí el giro neoconservador en cada país de América Latina. Generalmente, esas variantes expresan una especie de pliegue o escisión dentro del campo intelectual de la izquierda. Consciente del peligro de generalizar demasiado, porque es evidente que hay marcadas diferencias de situación y posiciones involucradas, me atrevo a sugerir seis temas entrecruzados que caracterizan el giro neoconservador:

1) Un rechazo generalizado a la autoridad—la "razón subjetiva", según la fórmula de Sarlo—de una "voz" y experiencia subalterna o popular. Relacionado con esto, un escepticismo frente no sólo a las políticas identitarias multiculturales sino también ante las nuevas formas y sujetos de protagonismo popular informal, como las turbas chavistas, o los cocaleros de Evo Morales, o los piqueteros, o los comuneros mapuches en Chile. La idea subyacente es que los nuevos gobiernos neo-populistas de la izquierda "retrograda" movilizan esta "razón subjetiva" de una forma demagógica y aventurista.

2) Una defensa del académico, el artista profesional, o el escritor-crítico y de sus procedimientos metodológicos y su función cívica-pedagógica. Involucrado en esta defensa hay el auto-reconocimiento de una generación de intelectuales y profesionales de izquierda que asumieron riesgos considerables durante tiempos difíciles en sus respectivos países, pero que ahora están en proceso de ser desplazados por nuevas fuerzas políticas y actores más jóvenes. En lugar de identificarse con estos nuevos actores, que muchas veces no provienen de la clase intelectual (o, como en el caso de Álvaro García Liñera en Bolivia o Marcos en México, se salen de esa clase), el giro neoconservador los ve sin simpatía, como si les faltara legitimidad, o como si de algún modo fueran demasiado ingenuos.

3) A pesar del rechazo explícito o implícito de las políticas identitarias, se reafirma paradójicamente una posicionalidad "criolla" latinoamericana contrapuesta a lo que es percibido como el carácter "anglo" de las nuevas modalidades de la teoría postmoderna. Este énfasis en "lo nuestro" o lo "local" hace del giro neoconservador una variante del Arielismo: el supuesto de que los valores y la identidad cultural de Latinoamérica están vinculados de una manera especialmente significativa a su expresión literaria y artística.

4) Una resistencia notable a reconocer las demandas de autonomía y las nuevas formas de agencia desarrolladas por los movimientos identitarios indígenas o afro-latinos, o de las mujeres y las minorías sexuales—movimientos que de una forma u otra involucran aspectos de lo que Aníbal Quijano ha llamado la "colonialidad del poder" en América Latina. Se trata en cierto sentido de un enfrentamiento de intelectuales y artistas tradicionales e intelectuales orgánicos de los movimientos sociales.

5) Un rechazo general del proyecto de la izquierda latinoamericana de los años 60 y 70, y en especial (pero no sólo) de la lucha armada, a favor de una posición política más cautelosa, con la advertencia de que una equivocación "voluntarista" similar acecha en el corazón de las nuevas políticas identitarias y nacionalistas de los gobiernos neo-populistas. Este rechazo conlleva un paradigma implícito de desilusión personal, similar al modelo autobiográfico de la picaresca barroca, en que se asocia la juventud con las ilusiones del período revolucionario de los 60 y 70, y la madurez con una posición más desengañada y sensata.

6) Una reterritorialización y defensa de las disciplinas académicas, contra los disturbios de lo que Néstor García Canclini solía llamar en el *heyday* de los estudios culturales "ciencias sociales nómadas". En el caso de la literatura en particular, esto involucra una afirmación del llamado "valor estético" y del canon, un canon moderno-vanguardista, pero también normativo, disciplinador, jerarquizador. En este sentido, aunque es sobre todo un fenómeno de la esfera pública latinoamericana, el giro neoconservador atraviesa también el campo académico de los *Latin American Studies*.

¿De donde surge el impulso detrás del giro neoconservador? Creo que representa un efecto superestructural de la integración de Latinoamérica a los procesos actuales de globalización. Registra por un lado la crisis de sectores de las clases media y alta afectadas de manera negativa por las políticas neoliberales de ajuste estructural, la reducción del apoyo estatal a la educación superior (y a la educación en general), y la proliferación de la cultura de masas comercializada. Por otro lado, surge del debilitamiento de la hegemonía ideológica del neoliberalismo. La "marea", al igual que la elección de Obama en Estados Unidos, muestran que cada vez más la ideología neoliberal es percibida por todos lados como insuficiente para garantizar la gobernabilidad. Las consecuencias de las políticas económicas neoliberales produjeron una crisis de legitimación tanto del estado como de los aparatos ideológicos, incluyendo la escuela, los museos, la familia, las instituciones religiosas, el mundo del arte y la cultura, y el sistema tradicional de partidos políticos. La tendencia libertaria implícita en el modelo de "elección racional" a través del mercado no puede servir como plataforma para la imposición de una estructura normativa de valores y expectativas sobre poblaciones. La combinación de privatización y proliferación de cultura de masas desestabilizó la autoridad cultural de un sistema previo de normas, valores, y jerarquías representado por los intelectuales. Al mismo tiempo, la fuerza innovadora de las medidas económicas neoliberales empieza a descrecer y/o producir efectos perversos. En esta nueva coyuntura, el giro neoconservador se ofrece como una ideología de profesionalismo y disciplinaridad centrada en la esfera de las humanidades, que fueron especialmente desprestigiadas y perjudicadas por las reformas neoliberales en la educación, una ideología implementada por y a través del estado y los aparatos ideológicos para contrarrestar la crisis de legitimidad provocada por el neoliberalismo.

Si este hipótesis es correcta, el giro neoconservador puede ser visto como un intento por parte de una intelectualidad criolla, progresista, profesionalizada, en su mayoría blanca o blanca-mestiza, de clase media o clase media-alta, de capturar, o

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recapturar, el espacio de autoridad cultural y hermenéutica en Latinoamérica de, por un lado, el neoliberalismo, y, por otro, de las nuevas formas heterogéneas de gestión política de los movimientos sociales, representado sobre todo por los nuevos gobiernos de la "marea populista". Despliega para ese fin una doble estrategia de interpelación: hace un llamado a crear una nueva forma de hegemonía cultural, entendida en el sentido de lo que Gramsci llama "el liderazgo moral intelectual de la nación", que incorpore sus propios criterios disciplinarios de autoridad, profesionalismo y especialización; al mismo tiempo, hace un intento de redefinir (o limitar) los proyectos emergentes de la izquierda latinoamericana dentro de lo que continúan siendo parámetros dominados por esos criterios.

Se podría argumentar que la operación crítica y política representada por figuras como Beatriz Sarlo es algo completamente distinto del tipo de neoconservadurismo propugnado en las "guerras culturales" en los Estados Unidos. Más bien, se podría decir de esa operación, o dice de sí misma, que no sólo viene desde la izquierda, sino que es también en cierto sentido una *defensa* de la izquierda contra lo que se percibe como un relativismo postmodernista cómplice con el neoliberalismo y un neopopulismo demagógico post-neoliberal. Sin embargo, si bien mi propia posición no es completamente desinteresada, no creo estar exagerando el caso. Estoy tratando de captar una tendencia emergente que todavía no ha tomado total conciencia de sí misma y que, como tal, podría desplazarse en distintas direcciones. Creo que el giro neoconservador continuará siendo una tendencia dentro de la izquierda y la intelectualidad progresista en América Latina, y en el campo de los Latin American Studies. Pero también es posible que si, en contextos concretos, la situación política se polariza más, esta tendencia se alinee políticamente con posiciones más explícitamente conservadoras o de centro derecha, como sucedió en los casos de los *New York Intellectuals* en los Estados Unidos (muchos de los cuales terminaron en el Partido Republicano de Reagan) o los llamados Nuevos Filósofos o el historiador Francois Furet en Francia. Los ejemplos de Jorge Castañeda en México o Elizabeth Burgos en Venezuela hacen alusión a esta posible consecuencia en un contexto actual latinoamericano.

El giro neoconservador de los 70 y 80 en los Estados Unidos comienza en el campo de la crítica cultural, pero pasa rápidamente a la órbita de la política. Esa crítica dividió tanto a la izquierda como al Partido Demócrata, muchas veces sobre líneas raciales y generacionales, inhibiendo así la gran promesa de los sesenta en los Estados Unidos: la formación de un nuevo bloque histórico popular-democrático pluri-racial y potencialmente mayoritario en el corazón de la sociedad norteamericana. En este sentido allanó el camino para la restauración conservadora de los 80, un período de "larga duración", como dicen los historiadores económicos, del cual solo comenzamos a salir con Obama. Si mi diagnóstico de un giro neoconservador en Latinoamérica es correcto, y enfatizo su carácter tentativo, mi temor es que actúe también como inhibidor o límite a los objetivos y posibilidades de la izquierda y el pensamiento progresista latinoamericano en el período venidero. ■

Notes Toward an Aesthetics of Marginality in Contemporary Latin American Literature

by **Luz Horne**
Cornell University
lh257@cornell.edu

and **Daniel Noemi Voionmaa**
University of Michigan
danielnv@umich.edu

In the first pages of *Berkeley em Bellagio* (2002), by Brazilian writer João Gilberto Noll, the narrator—an invited writer at Berkeley University very similar to the actual author—reflects about the contradictions of studying third world misery from the comfortable position that the first world provides:

> eu me preguntava quem estava ali de fato interessado por esses quadros de miséria afastados de seus cotidianos quase principescos. O que fariam com essas imagens que para eles deveriam reverberar como *campos de refugiados* de todo o azar do planeta? –azar que eles nunca iriam constatar fora de suas embaixadas, de seus hotéis de segurança eletrônica ou desarmados de suas fantasias de ajuda às populações de onde eu viera (para lhes ensinar em vão) (18, our emphasis).

In spite of the narrator's cynicism about his students' interest and about the impossibility for them to establish a direct contact with third world poverty, following this quote the narrator clarifies that his own position is not better: his images of misery don't come from "reality" either, but mainly from cinema. He is also distanced from the "reality" he is supposed to talk about and explain. Thus, through this reflection, one of the main problems involved in the representation of marginality comes to light: the problem of mediation. This is a problem with several

sides. On one hand, it relates to the subject and his/her class position: to talk about the marginal from a certain economic and social well being may derive in or create exoticism, paternalism or a didactical perspective (the one who feels entitled to teach the other). On the other, mediation appears unavoidably in cultural representation: in film or in literature, as in art and politics, representation—the attempt of 'bringing back' something that is not there—implies a distance from/to the subject or object being represented. This distance—and mediation can be understood as the effort to traverse that trajectory—will always remain. No matter what we do we will always require mediation if there is anything we want to re-present.

In fact, as we know, the problems involved in the representation of marginality are multiple and have always been a matter of controversy. However, the old question, implicit in Noll's novel: "How must professors, researchers, writers or artists in general, 'depict' the reality of social marginality?" is still pertinent and relevant today. In order to understand some of the main forms and versions this question takes in Latin American literature today, we need to make a brief (and necessarily partial) review of the ways in which the answers (as well as the questions themselves) have changed through time.

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During the second half of the 19th century, the narrative that prevailed had a romantic-realist approach. The marginal characters, i.e. belonging to lower social classes but rarely to its very extremes, tend to be comical and dumb; they speak 'funny' and are tricksters without being evil, as we can see in *Martín Rivas* (1863). Hardly is the social structure put into question; on the contrary, most of the time it is reproduced or reinforced. A few decades later, as we can see through many of the naturalist novels written during the turn of the century, even though this aesthetic broadens the artistic field and directs the reader's gaze towards the marginal aspects of society (Cambaceres' novels or D'Halmar's *Juana Lucero* [1902] are interesting examples), it tends to reproduce the exclusion through a representational system of classification and normalization. Then, in the first decades of the past century, we witness the emergence of a literature that tries to engage with Latin American *reality*, and particular, its *nature*, *su tierra*, in a different way.

Mundonovismo, as it name implies, creates a vision of Latin America as something new and different (to/from Europe). In some of Horacio Quiroga's short stories, in *La vorágine* (1924) by Colombian writer José Eustasio Rivera or in *Doña Bárbara* (1929) by Venezuela's future president Rómulo Gallegos, marginality acquires the meaning of brutality, anti-civilization, and madness. Nature, which symbolizes everything outside *ordem e progreso*, must be tamed. But that perspective was not enough for many young writers and intellectuals who saw in the events of 1917 a real possibility of change, and believed that literature had a more concrete (social and political) function in society. So, the late 1920s and 1930s see the appearance of the most significant movement, until then, that attempts to represent the reality of the marginal. Social Realism, with its shocking language and sometimes pedagogical plots and monotonous rhetoric, brings marginal characters into the 'center' of literary creation. They are now the protagonists; they use their own expressions and are far from being turned into comical figures. The collection of short stories, *Los que se van*, published in 1930 by the Ecuadorian writers Joaquín Gallegos Lara, Demetrio Aguilera Malta and Enrique Gil Gilbert, is an excellent example of this and of all the contradictions that Social Realism entails.

However, Social Realism was rapidly dismissed as second rate literature. Other more "elaborated" literary forms took stage. *Vidas Secas* (*Barren Lives*) (1938) by Brazilian writer Graciliano Ramos and *El llano en llamas* (1953) by Mexican Juan Rulfo are part of this change. Even though these texts have elements from Social Realism, the straightforward political rhetoric that characterized this aesthetics disappears. Also, the new urban reality of the continent was one of the main problems that affected the representation of marginality at this time. Migration from the countryside had created a new reality of poverty and marginality. An urban Critical Realism tries to acknowledge and represent this new situation and the system that produces it, but always keeping in mind that what is being written is literature.

So, as it aims also to artistically express the structural causes of social injustice, the representation of marginality becomes more and more complex. The position, the locus of enunciation, from where the writer "speaks," becomes a key issue for which we find different kinds of answers. Magical Realism seems to constitute an escape from this: it produces an allegory of marginality that appears to exclude the voice of the marginal. On the other side of the spectrum, *A hora da estrela* (1977), by Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector, makes the problem of how to speak on behalf of the *other* the central aspect of the novel. During the 1970s and 80s, *Testimonio* constitutes a serious—and controversial—attempt to end with the privileged position of the writer. In fact, mediation persists as an unresolved problem.

Certainly, the marginal can be understood in different ways and perspectives. Racial, gender and economic inequalities produce

different definitions of the marginal and different ways of thinking about it. Nevertheless, given that Latin America is the most unequal region of the world in terms of income, when thinking about "marginality," the economic factor continues to be the most important and determinant one and this is certainly reflected in the themes addressed by literature. (See Centeno and Hoffman 2003.)

Therefore, in order to understand the literary representation of marginality in the present, we must link it to the social and economic conditions where that marginality is happening. In the case of today's literature, the crucial moment in which the theme of social marginality seems to reemerge as a recurrent topic is related to the establishment of neoliberalism in Latin America in the late 1980s and 1990s. In this sense, the question "How does literature represents marginality today?" could be rephrased as "How do literature and neoliberalism dialogue?"

So, in the midst of this complex and plural scenery, we would like to propose a series of characteristics, problems or themes that we believe are frequent in the current literature and in its treating of marginality. Obviously, we have no pretension of being exhaustive. This is just a (very) preliminary attempt to understand how marginality manifests itself in the representation of situations, spaces, and subjects, and to propose a set of questions that we believe are crucial to think this topic today.

I. Realism and the Marginal

Clearly, one of the privileged concepts used to refer to the various attempts of representing marginality has been *realism*. Although not exclusively, the last decades offer us a plethora of texts that choose a clear, incisive, objective, and legible prose and a preoccupation for the creation of verisimilar worlds in the representation of marginality. Reified human relations, lack of solidarity, and an increasing feeling of loneliness appear to be recurrent topics that result from the new conditions imposed, mainly, by neoliberalism's laws. Closely related to this, there is a type of literature that could be said to take a documentary form. As we can see in Paulo Lins's *Cidade de Deus*, Luiz Ruffato's *Eles eram muitos cavalos*, Rafael Courtoisie's *Tajos* and several of the Colombian sicario's novels—just to name a few examples—the lines demarcating fiction and reality, and literature and document, are distorted or, on occasion, almost fully erased. This, of course, has certain consequences and problems. For instance, the reception (and the selling and buying) of these fictions as if they were depicting the "real" Latin America, the "only" reality, thus creating a turmoil of new stereotypes and reinforcing older ones. Remarkably, this phenomenon repeats what happened before with Magical Realism, although now the reality depicted is far from magical.

II. Marginality and Violence

One of the main marks of the current literature dealing with the representation of marginality is the exacerbation of violence. A type of violence that is also, as it occurs with the situations mentioned above, described with a very incisive and graphic language. We are confronted with violence of all kinds—violence that produces marginality, violence that is produced by marginality: we face a never ending vicious cycle of violence. Yes, violence has become a trademark of Latin American literature. Instead of women flying to the skies wrapped up in white sheets, they are now being raped and gunned down.

De Castro Rocha, in his study of Brazilian contemporary culture, provides us with a general view of our problematic. He argues that there has been a shift from a "dialectic of malandroism" towards a "dialectic of marginality which is mainly based in the overcoming of social inequalities through confrontation instead of reconciliation, and through the exposition of violence instead of its concealment" (2). Now it is not about neglecting differences, but rather bringing them "to the fore, refusing the uncertain promise of social reconciliation" (15). Violence, he emphasizes several times, is at the core of what is a "new form of relationship between social classes" (15) and, the ways in which it is approached and its representation, determines the "symbolic [and aesthetic] battle" (16), that the new productions are fighting.

Violence, in many cases, does not come from ominous totalitarian states (hence a difference from *testimonio* or the literature *de denuncia* from the 70s or 80s). Now that the state is (supposedly) almost invisible, or has been transformed into a system that, like god, is everywhere but nowhere to be seen; now, under these circumstances, state violence is not only reproduced through its presence but also, and perhaps more so, through its absence and abandonment towards its subjects.[1] The marginalized, the "refugees," as Noll calls them, the people "without a state" have become what they are not only for the lack of citizenship (as Arendt used to think) but mostly because the state does not get to them (they are left out, they become leftovers). The "Market," of course, terrible and appealing, becomes the expression of this non visible force. The market, unbeatable and autotelic since it (tries to) explains itself, is the "cause" of inequality and marginality and the source of the violence that is fought with more violence. Literature—not only the texts but

also itself as an institution—has entered a new phase in its relation to the market.

In fact, it is very interesting to notice that most of the criticism that a work like *McOndo*[2] received, remarked the *absence* of marginality (the short stories depict a middle or upper middle class way of living). This can be read, at least, from two perspectives: the dangerous insistence that the "marginal" *belongs* to Latin American culture and therefore must be present in every cultural production (to some extent this recalls the controversy between the Florida and Boedo groups in the 1920s). But another reading is possible. Without suggesting that all literature has to address the issue of marginality, the absence of it and the insistence in the social class of the protagonists (as said, middle or upper middle) can be interpreted as another way in which it—marginality—is present. In fact, invisibility constitutes a powerful way of exerting and showing violence.

III. Marginality as Spectacle

Parallel to this absence of the marginal, we have what seems to be the opposite: the overly explicit, almost naturalistic description of marginal people and their lives. However, in contrast with classic naturalism, now, in this new aesthetics of the marginal, we ought to consider *spectacularization*. In general terms we can affirm that Latin America has become a stage for the spectacle of violence. Violence, poverty, marginality at large, becomes a commodity to be written about, and, naturally, to be sold. Recent Colombian literature is perhaps the foremost example of it: the literature of the *sicario*, the epitome of violence and marginality, has had a tremendous commercial success, and expands much beyond the mere literary realm. Let us just mention *Rosario Tijeras*, by Jorge Franco; *La virgen de los sicarios (Our Lady of the Assassins)* by Fernando Vallejo; *Satanás* by Mario Mendoza (not a *sicario*'s novel but one that has violence at its core); or, again, *Cidade de Deus* (City of God), by Paulo Lins. The problems that arise from this "success" are various and not to a lesser extent determine the ways in which marginality is conceived. Simultaneously, the role of literature, and our role as critics, is at stake. The problem is not one-sided. On one hand, marginality has become a commodity, but as such it sparks discomfort, especially among the most progressive sectors. On another, it has also turned into an intellectual and theoretical token, scorned by many who see in that the repetition of what is being criticized (the commodification of marginality). Following the steps Clarice Lispector took in *A hora da estrela*, some of today's literature decides to include this problem within itself and express its contradictory position.

IV. The New World of Marginality

As we can appreciate in the literary production that engages with marginality, the exclusion that characterizes it—which should be understood in dialectical terms since exclusion implies a way of belonging as well—contributes to the formation of a particular world. In fact, it would be possible to talk about the creation of a *new world*, a *world of marginality* with its own rules and characteristics; one that provides a distinctive *Weltanschauung*.

There is an exclusion from the symbolic realm that generates a new kind of language and a new logic to talk about marginality (as seen in many of César Aira's novels, or in the works of João Gilberto Noll, Sergio Chejfec, Diamela Eltit, Nona Fernández, or Caio Fernando Abreu). There is an exclusion from law that creates a new set of rules and even a particular Law (as it is the case in César Aira's *La villa* or in Eltit's *Mano de obra*); there is also a spatial exclusion that allows the establishment of a different space (*topos*) for marginality (Rodolfo Fogwill's *Vivir Afuera* or Nona Fernández's *Av. Diez de Julio Huamachuco* could be thought as reflections about marginality's space), and a different time in which marginality occurs that is the base for a different time (*chronos*) to address the marginal (Sergio Chejfec's *Boca de lobo* constitutes a remarkable example).

V. Marginal Subjects and Bodies

The excluded and marginal subject is repeatedly represented as a fragmented and corroded body. There is almost always a connection to monstrosity (teratology, as seen in *Fetiche y fantoche by* Ecuadorian writer Huilo Ruales); and sickness and madness (Diamela Eltit and Paz Errázuriz's *El infarto del alma*). The marginal subject is therefore presented as completely desubjectivized; s/he has lost all humanity except for his/her (fragmented and/or mutilated) body. There is a process of assimilation between this "destroyed" subject and the abject surroundings. So it occurs in *Onde andará Dulce Veiga* (1991), by Caio Fernando Abreu, in *El aire* (1992), by Sergio Chejfec or in *Los años inútiles* (2002), by Peruvian writer Jorge Benavides. In these texts, the subjects and the spaces of misery get confused: the subjects *become* trash, rubbish, literal and literary leftovers. However, this confusion doesn't occur only between subjects and spaces. In its recurrence, the "garbage scenes" show the similarity of marginality and its traces in different parts of the world.

As mentioned, Noll uses the term "refugee" to refer to the marginal. This becomes

highly significant if we think about the delocalization that, notwithstanding their referentiality, these narratives seem to project when dealing with marginality. In fact, although in several occasions the texts do refer to concrete spaces or historical moments which allows us to establish with precision the when and where of the narration, the repetition of the topics, problems and situations presented make us think that there is no great difference between what happens in a *Favela* in Rio or in a *Comuna* in Medellín, or to the subjects who live there. As Silviano Santiago suggests in *O Cosmopolitanismo do pobre*, marginality acquires a singular and quite frightening cosmopolitanism. In *Retrato de una infancia havanaviejera*, Zoe Valdés's young narrator connects the Brazilian favelas, the shantytowns in Caracas, and the poor neighborhoods in Havana, creating a Latin American *map of marginality* and a *transnational dialogue*. (This mirrors and mimics a not so imaginary map of richness and the transnational circulation of capital.) Marginality crosses borders and becomes a new marker in our global times. The marginalized subject is the subject that migrates in order to follow the flow of capital: the marginalized subject becomes the new nomad.

Final Remarks

At its best, one of the fundamental aspects in the literary representation of the marginal is its ability to suspend and defer some conventions that the reader is expecting to find. There may be a dislocation of the perspective, a viewing from an unexpected standing point: the reader, then, will be able to 'discover' what has always been already there.

We should expect—if we dare to ask—that the exhibition of individual bodies that have been transformed into leftovers and rubbish, instead of provoking a feeling of guilt and/or condescendence, would show how the individual (considered only as a living body) becomes an object of power, becomes what Foucault calls "docile bodies." Therefore, it is about trying to maintain the power existing in the marginal: to recuperate marginality's rebelliousness. Thus, getting rid of condescendence, we would be capable of showing dehumanization in a way that gives humanism back its political dimension—a humanism that is not longer exotic, picturesque, or charitable.

Marginality and its representative attempt allow us, precisely, to imagine a new politics: a politics of openness and inclusion where there are no prophecies to be fulfilled or sentences to be carried out. Thinking about marginality and its representation emerges today as an alternative to think a different future.

Endnotes

[1] The presence of the state, its participation and relevance, has never been actually completely erased. In other words, its invisibility or plain disappearance is a neoliberal ideal that has not occurred. Given the current circumstances of the world crisis, and specially if we see the cases of the governments in Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador—where the state participation has increased in the last years—this notion of an invisible state is, certainly, more than dubious.

[2] An anthology of short stories by "young writers," published in Spain in 1996, and edited by the Chileans Alberto Fuguet and Sergio Gómez.

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Report from the Program Chairs

by **Evelyne Huber** | University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill | ehuber@unc.edu

and **Cynthia Steele** | University of Washington-Seattle | cynthias@u.washington.edu

In the months since our last report, LASA sent out acceptance notices to some 7,000 individuals. Many of the proposals consisted of entire panels, but many proposals were for individual papers. The individual paper proposals were handled in a two-stage process: The track chairs made decisions about acceptance and grouped the papers into panels with the greatest possible thematic coherence. Proposals that were accepted but could not be placed in this way were forwarded to us, with the charge to look across tracks to combine paper proposals into panels or accommodate them in already existing panels. In order to accommodate as many proposals as possible, we had to make frequent use of established LASA practice and ask many panel chairs to accept additional papers to their panels. The great majority of panel chairs graciously granted these requests, and we trust that these new papers will make excellent panels even better by offering additional perspectives.

The LASA Secretariat added Melissa Raslevich to its staff in order to deal with the extraordinary workload generated by the Congress. Despite great efforts of the highly efficient and committed staff, response time to emails sometimes remained longer than potential Congress participants would have hoped. We thank everybody for their hard work and their patience.

The planning of special panels and sessions has made much progress: The latest high-profile acceptances have come from ex-President Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Nobel Laureate Joseph Stiglitz. There will be special panels on Rethinking Welfare States and Inequalities; on What Constitutes "Good Research"? Perspectives on Research Practice, Research Ethics, and Research Standards of "Truth" from the North and South; on Publishing Your Research in Academic Journals; on Inequalities in New Latin American Cinema; and on Literature and the Left Turn in Latin America. After much negotiating, the receptions will be held at the university after the last panels of the day in order to make it as easy as possible for Congress participants to join them.

The Preliminary Program is on line at the LASA website <http://lasa.international.pitt.edu/>. Preregistration is required for all participants. Names of participants who fail to preregister will not appear in the Program book. Thus, this is a preliminary program in the true sense of the word. It happens before every Congress that some accepted participants fail to preregister and consequently some sessions are left with only a couple of papers. In those cases, we shall do our best to find panels for these remaining papers where they can be presented to an interested audience and stimulate dialogue with the other scholars on those panels.

The hotel information is available at the LASA website as well. We would encourage all participants to make their hotel reservations soon, to ensure that you get space in the hotel of your choice. All U.S. participants also need to keep in mind that Brazil has visa requirements, so it would be a good idea to get started on those *trámites*.

The next report from the Program Chairs will appear immediately after the Congress. We hope that all planned events will occur with all preregistered participants, regardless of the dark economic clouds upon us. And we trust the intellectual excitement generated by the Congress will do justice to the preparatory work and the collective efforts of all the participants and the LASA staff. We are greatly looking forward to seeing you all in Rio. ■