

Aníbal Quijano Obregón (1930–2018)

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“Nos despedimos de Aníbal, un intelectual inmenso, un ser humano generoso y bueno. Sentiremos su ausencia, seguiremos su ejemplo.” With these words, Pablo Gentili, Executive Secretary of CLACSO (Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales, Latin American Social Science Council) marked the May 31, 2018, passing of Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano, one of Latin America’s most creative thinkers, prolific writers, and committed social justice advocates. In addition, his exceptional qualities as a human being made Aníbal stand out in the ranks of prominent Latin American intellectuals and political activists. Thanks to all of these qualities, he rose to worldwide stature.

Aníbal had the intellect of a major theoretician and writer, combined with the heart and soul of a dedicated social justice activist. As described by Gentili: “Fue un luchador incansable en defensa de la democracia, los derechos humanos y la igualdad. Su obra ha inspirado no sólo varias generaciones de cientistas sociales críticos, sino también movimientos y organizaciones libertarias, emancipatorias y anticoloniales en América Latina y África.”

I first met Aníbal in Chile during my graduate studies in July 1968, while he was working for CEPAL, the UN Economic Commission for Latin America, and was a leading proponent of dependency theory. He spoke in a gentle, almost musical voice that suggested his kindness and generosity. He gave considerable time to our interviews/discussions and was interested in my views despite my youth and inexperience. Decades later, I observed that same intergenerational interest when I introduced him to my Berkeley graduate-student daughter in 2004, and watched the seamless back-and-forth cultural studies interchange between the two of them.



Aníbal Quijano, Quito, Ecuador, August 25, 2015, III Congreso Latinoamericano y Caribeño de Ciencias Sociales. Carlos Pozo / Cancillería Ecuador

In his interactions with students, as with colleagues, Aníbal projected not an iota of self-importance. A very democratic, unassuming person, he expressed openness to learning and expanding his perspectives. He was the essence of modesty, grace, graciousness, and generosity of spirit, and he emanated elegance, humor, and delight. His smile was contagious. Being in his presence and engaging with him was a real pleasure.

Aníbal’s worldview spanned the entire hemisphere. Before that perspective became widespread, he had a strong cross-border view of the Americas. Despite his criticisms of US foreign policies and domestic inequities, rather than simply and reflexively blaming the United States, above all, he wanted to understand this country. As early as 1962,

with the death of C. Wright Mills, Aníbal wrote a tribute to him, subtitled “Critical Conscience of a Mass Society.” In his initial 1968 discussions with me, he expressed a strong interest in what was happening with social movements in the United States, and what was the potential for social change here.

He requested that I send him US studies of Latin America and readings on the US New Left, and tell him when important new books or congressional studies were published. I was beginning to write for and work with NACLA, the North American Congress on Latin America, a rising leftist research collective critical of US imperial policy in the hemisphere. Aníbal asked me to send him the *NACLA Newsletter*, later renamed *NACLA Report on the Americas*. He also wanted to ensure the existence of an informational *red* or network linking the US left and the Latin American lefts. He believed that the US left should defend Latin American revolutionary movements.

Aníbal’s intuitive understanding of the United States was so astute that by the mid-1990s, shortly after the passage of California’s anti-immigrant Proposition 187 in 1994, he spoke of the specific “Latinidad” of California. He was the first Latin American I knew to use this concept and to emphasize the importance specifically of Latino culture in shaping California culture and politics. In addition, he advised me, “Don’t forget your California roots; the Latinidad of California is different from that of New York,” which he knew from teaching at SUNY Binghamton.

It was not just his thought that was pan-hemispheric, spanning both Latin America and the United States. In practice, his writings, teachings, and activism reached across borders in the Americas. Beginning in the 1970s, he contributed to a variety of US-based publications, even some that focused on the United States or were more theoretical than Latin America-specific. Among the publications in which his works appeared were the *NACLA Report on the Americas*, *Latin American Perspectives*, *Socialism and Democracy*, *Contemporary Marxism*, and *Monthly Review*—and later (2007), *Cultural Studies*. He also had articles in a number of English-language anthologies on Latin

America, edited by a variety of US-based scholars ranging ideologically from Seymour Martin Lipset, to James Petras and Maurice Zeitlin, to Ramon Grosfoguel, to Walter Mignolo and Arturo Escobar.

In addition, Aníbal was a key presence in conferences not only throughout Latin America, sponsored by CLACSO, ALAS (Latin American Sociological Association) and many others, but also in numerous conferences held by US-based associations. These included, among others, the American Sociological Association (ASA), Latin American Studies Association (LASA), and Political Economy of the World System (PEWS). In 2015, Aníbal was the featured and honored plenary speaker at the LASA Congress, where he spoke to a packed auditorium.

In reflecting on the significance of his participation in and comprehension of US intellectual, cultural, and social life, I am struck by Aníbal’s transcendence of his Peruvian and Latin American identities. Without ever losing those identities, which remained primary, he was able to grasp the perspective of the hemisphere in its totality—and ultimately to develop global perspectives on major issues. He was, in this respect and many others, a man of the world.

Aníbal’s active conference schedule had a personal side. Since our initial 1968 exchanges, what had started as my interviews with him (intellectual mentorship) became the beginnings of a friendship. That friendship grew through our encounters in a variety of cities, often at conferences, in North and South America over years and decades, with correspondence and e-mail communications in between. Our discussions were not only intellectual but also personal, about major changes in our lives. I remember, for example, spending one memorable 1986 afternoon in New York City’s Central Park, talking at length with him after one of these major changes in my life. Other encounters occurred in Mexico City’s Centro Histórico at the 1995 ALAS conference, as well as ALAS meetings in other Latin American or Caribbean cities. We met up several times in the San Francisco Bay Area for PEWS and ASA conferences. At the 2015 LASA

Congress in San Juan, Puerto Rico, we tried to find time to talk, but he was overwhelmed with the many LASA and CLACSO events in his honor.

Political activism in Peru got Aníbal in trouble with several Peruvian governments. Already during the 1940s and 1950s, he had been jailed several times for pro-socialist political activities. Under the relatively progressive/reformist military government of Juan Velasco Alvarado (1968–1975), he remained active in socialist politics (Movimiento Revolucionario Socialista, MRS) and edited several political journals (*Sociedad y Política* and *Revolución Socialista*). As a result of his critical stance toward the government, he spent the year 1974 in *destierro* (banishment/exile) from Peru in Mexico City, as a professor at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM). Aníbal returned to Peru in 1975 and continued with the journals, while teaching at the Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos (UNMSM) in Lima. His return coincided with the rightist military overthrow of the Velasco government and the consolidation of a right-wing regime that he actively opposed.

During the 1990s, he became a leading critic of the elected but dictatorial/repressive right-wing neoliberal government headed by Alberto Fujimori, in power from 1990 through 2000. Aníbal resigned from the University of San Marcos when its campus was occupied by government troops in 1995. He paid dearly for this act of protest. Giving up this stable job at UNMSM for reasons of political principle had consequences, especially in the neoliberal 1990s.

After his resignation from UNMSM, Aníbal's multiple teaching activities in the United States and elsewhere internationally became primary. In particular, his part-time affiliation with the Sociology Department at SUNY Binghamton (now Binghamton University) lasted from 1986 through 2012. He taught both graduate and undergraduate courses and contributed strategically to the department's curriculum. Nevertheless, unlike many Latin American scholars who sought and accepted full-time academic jobs in the United States, Aníbal refused offers of a permanent, full-

time professorship at Binghamton that would have required him to move from Peru to the United States or to live here for more than one semester at a time.

In Peru, he engaged in various teaching activities after 1995. Most importantly, in 2010, he founded the *cátedra* (chair/professorship) of América Latina y la Colonialidad del Poder at the Universidad Ricardo Palma in Lima.

Aníbal Quijano's intellectual agility was boundless, the scope of his writings vast, especially if viewed as he evolved over time. Primarily a dependency theorist during his years at CEPAL in Chile in the 1960s and early 1970s, he had been strongly influenced by Peruvian Marxist José Carlos Mariátegui, and by his own extensive contact and involvement with Peru's indigenous communities. Unlike some leftist Peruvian social scientists, who have viewed Peruvian rural indigenous communities solely as "peasant," that is, only in class terms, he built a complex analysis of race/racism, focusing on indigenous ethnicity and identity. During those years, he also wrote sharp critiques of imperialism, de-capitalization of Latin America through foreign investments, and Peruvian/Latin American state promotion of foreign monopolies' interests. Other themes included urbanization, marginalization, class struggle, and social movement resistance.

By the late 1980s–1990s, Quijano had deepened his analysis, with the turn to decolonial studies and his comprehensive theorization of *colonialidad/coloniality*. Race and racism became the basis for understanding the relations of domination throughout the entire world-system and its regions and the racial division of labor. In his words, "The idea of 'race' is surely the most efficient instrument of social domination produced in the last 500 years. Dating from the very beginning of the formation of the Americas and of capitalism (at the turn of the 16th century), in the ensuing centuries it was imposed on the population of the whole planet as an aspect of European colonial domination." ("Questioning 'Race,'" *Socialism and Democracy* 21, no. 1 [2007]).

Quijano developed a sharp critique of the two dominant European models, ideologies, and development strategies: capitalism/modernity/modernization and really-existing statist socialism. In his view, both of these models were based on an underlying Eurocentric worldview, an epistemology that had imposed itself throughout the globe. As he wrote in that same essay, “Coloniality became the cornerstone of a Eurocentered world.” Quijano set himself the task of epistemological deconstruction and decolonization of that scheme.

A central theme of coloniality emerged from the masterful essay, “Americanity as a Concept; or The Americas in the Modern World-System,” that he coauthored with Binghamton sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein, founder of world-systems theory. It was published in 1992, the five hundredth anniversary of the Conquest, in UNESCO’s *International Social Science Journal* (no. 134). This essay shows the contribution of the Americas and “Americanity” to the creation and structure of the world-system, most particularly the emergence of race and racism. In addition, it illuminates the divergent paths taken by North America and Latin America over several centuries, the result of different processes of colonization by Britain and Spain/Portugal (internal market vs. world market development strategies).

By the early 1990s, Quijano’s writings had evolved into a theoretically comprehensive approach, a major contribution to the field of decolonial studies for which he became best known. The entire coloniality paradigm came together in his capstone monograph, *Colonialidad del poder, eurocentrismo, y América Latina* (2000), with an English version in *Nepantla*, Duke’s cultural studies journal, also in 2000 (vol. 1, no. 3). He continued to develop the central concepts over the course of many subsequent years.

Even as the laser-sharp critic, Quijano was also forward-looking, a visionary who could conceptualize a world different from the existing one characterized by relations of domination and hierarchy. His writings included reflections on utopia. One alternative to Eurocentric models, for example, was derived from and inspired by popular resistance struggles in the *barriadas* or

shantytowns of Latin American cities, and the efforts of the urban poor to build reciprocity, social solidarity and direct democracy. In his powerful conclusion to the English translation of one article (published by NACLA in its February 1991 issue), he wrote, “The liberation of society is more than an enlightened vision of utopia; in Latin America, its weft is already apparent in the threads of our daily life. The tapestry may be unraveled, perhaps even destroyed, but new hands will return to the ancient loom.”

Many of Quijano’s writings were compiled in a 2014 anthology published by CLACSO (edited by Danilo de Assís Clímaco), *Cuestiones y horizontes: Antología esencial; De la dependencia histórico-estructural a la colonialidad/descolonialidad del poder*. These writings have had worldwide impact, far beyond the Western hemisphere. Quijano contributed to various European anthologies and journals and theoretically influenced scholars in Europe, Africa, and Asia. Many of his works were widely translated. The breadth and depth of his scholarship place Aníbal Quijano at the forefront of world sociology.

Aníbal Quijano (1930–2018) is survived by his wife of over 60 years, Dr. Carmen Pimentel Sevilla, their two sons, Piero and Rodrigo, and two grandchildren. With his passing, we have lost a truly exceptional human being.

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