

## RESISTANCE TO COLONIALISM: LATIN AMERICAN LEGACIES

University of Chicago Conference: Colonialism and Its Legacies  
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In a lecture presented to the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group meeting at Rice University in October 1996, the Indian historian Ranajit Guha, founder of the South Asian Subaltern Studies Group, refers to some of the “salient aspects of modernity’s intersection with colonialism” (Guha 2001, 41). One of these, which I think characterizes the Latin American condition just as much as the South Asian, is, in Guha’s words, the fact that “the colonial experience has outlived decolonization and continues to be related significantly to the concerns of our own time” (Guha 2001, 42). The very title of our conference, *Colonialism and Its Legacies*, is a witness to the truth of this observation. Whether in the colonized or in the colonialist parts of the world, even after political decolonization, the aftereffects of colonialism live on, inherent not only in the realm of politics but in the ordinary daily experiences of the people. This experience to which Guha alludes is specifically marked by history. In different parts of the world, historical specificities distinguish the special characteristics of colonialism’s sequels. The interpretation of history itself becomes an arena for the exercise of the will to decolonization—and then by extension, any pedagogical or policy-oriented intellectual exercise, along with other activities particularly in the spheres of culture and politics.

In this paper, I will highlight the interpretation of history launched in 1891 by José Martí in his political manifesto “*Nuestra América*.” I emphasize ideas and themes in the essay intersecting with our current critical interests regarding postcoloniality and the resistance to colonialism in Latin America. Because most of Latin America achieved independence in the nineteenth century, one historical difference vis-à-vis Asia and Africa is the greater chronological length of our postcolonial period. Nonetheless,

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<sup>1</sup> In this draft all translations from the Spanish-language texts listed in the Bibliography are my own.

nineteenth-century political thinkers such as Martí have something to teach us regarding where we wish to draw the line on the nature of postcolonial thought and its appropriate methodologies. The interpretation of history itself becomes highly contested since contemporary interests stand to gain or lose depending on its successful outcome.

One of the guideposts affecting the interpretation of history is the epistemic/methodological framework informing our discursive practices. Most Spanish American colonies attained independence during the nineteenth century, thereby antedating what the West calls “postmodernity.” For this reason, the epistemic framework that guided Spanish America’s postcolonial criticism has distinct features differentiating it from late twentieth and early twenty-first century postcolonial critique, both in Latin America itself and in other parts of the global South. In particular, arguments for emancipation from colonialism in nineteenth-century Latin America rest on an acceptance of what Lyotard called the “grand narratives” of emancipation. From Lyotard’s point of view, such grand narratives are no longer warranted or believable as of the end of the twentieth century. Yet in order to understand postcolonial critique in the global South, whether a century ago or in our own time, it is necessary to set aside the view that postcolonial critical thought must rely on a postmodern (poststructuralist, deconstructive) epistemic approach. My twenty-first century “conversation” with the nineteenth-century thought of José Martí takes advantage in part of Edward’s Said distinction, in his 1994 Afterword to *Orientalism*, that there is a significant distinction between “postcolonial” and “postmodern” thought. In particular, Said observed that postmodernism still tends to be Eurocentric and ahistoric while postcolonial critique counters these two perspectives (Said 1994, 348-49). Moreover, at least some postcolonial critics continue for valid reasons to use the grand narratives of emancipation that seemed useless to Lyotard (1979). Said’s distinction allows Latin Americans to embrace postcolonial critique without necessarily having to limit their epistemic standpoints to postmodern tenets. In this case, I think the indispensable targets of postcolonial critique are the economic, political, and cultural conditions of postcoloniality and the discussion of strategies needed to reduce or eliminate the effects of colonialism in the global South. In this regard, both Martí’s thought and the discussion concerning Cuba’s position in the aftermath of colonialism are of special interest.

## JOSE MARTÍ'S LEGACY OF "NUESTRA AMERICA" OR WHOSE NATION? WHOSE CULTURE?

Cuba is one of the most interesting countries in the Western hemisphere when it comes to the analysis of colonialism and postcoloniality. Unlike most other "Hispanic-American" nations, which obtained their independence from Spain in the earlier parts of the century, during Martí's lifetime (1853-1895) Cuba was still a colony of Spain. A fervent partisan of Cuba's national independence, Martí lived abroad for most of his adult life, often engaged in projects aimed at liberating his native island from colonialism. Martí lived in New York City during the last period of his short life, from 1881 to 1895 (and prior to departing to fight for Cuba's independence, where he was killed in May 1895 by Spanish troops). It seems that in addition to sharpening his keen political sense and his love for that part of the Americas that he called "our America" (*nuestra América*) – a term to which I will return in a moment – Martí's sojourn in the United States allowed him to conceptualize colonialism as a recurring political system in modern times. He had a double sense of vision as he envisioned Cuba's liberation from colonial status. On the one hand, there was the evident necessary war to be fought against the colonial power, Spain. But on the other hand, there was the diplomatic struggle to prevent what Martí foresaw as an emerging economic and political colonialism of the government and business interests of the United States toward the Hispanic Caribbean, Mexico, Central, and South America. In the case of Cuba, this meant fighting for Cuba's independence on two separate fronts: one, against Spain's past and current dominance; the other, against the United States' emerging and projected future dominance. In the case of the Hispanic American republics, the struggle Martí proposed was to resist U.S. economic and political hegemony on political and diplomatic terms. In fact, it seems to me that Martí probably saw the latter goal as a necessary condition for helping to maintain Cuba's independence in the long term. So, while he gave his life for Cuba's actual independence from Spain, he was also preparing the ground for a united Latin America resisting the expansion of U.S. economic and political power over the entire hemisphere.<sup>2</sup> Martí

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<sup>2</sup> Surely Martí did not imagine that – as the twentieth century demonstrated – Cuba would undergo a political revolution that would attempt to resist U.S. hegemony on its own or with the help of an extra-continental power such as the Soviet Union, without the backing of the majority of Hispanic American republics.

envisioned a united front emerging from Latin America itself, against a second round of colonialism, this time instigated not by Europe but by what he denominated “la América europea” [European America] (Fernández Retamar 1979, 13). The name of the collective entity Martí wished to safeguard from U.S. interventionism and expansionism is what he called “nuestra América” [our America]. For Martí “our America” was made up of the indigenous, black, and mestizo populations along with all the peoples whose cultural and political priorities were to the “natural” and creative humanity found in America rather than the norms and values imported or received by force from abroad (Martí [1891] 1979, 39). Such peoples would overcome “the hierarchical constitution of the colonies” by the “democratic organization of the Republic” (Martí [1891], 40). But, at the same time, the new republics were frail when compared to the huge economic power of the United States, which he believed was intent on preventing their full development to suit its own expanding economic interests.

In a famous passage dated from November 1889 at a time when the government of the United States had organized the first hemispheric congress of American states, Martí wrote:

From the tyranny of Spain, Spanish America knew how to save itself; and now, after seeing with judicious eyes the precedents, causes, and factors of the invitation [to the aforementioned congress], it is urgent to state – because it is the truth – that for Spanish America the hour has come to declare its second independence. (Martí [1889-90] 1979, 152)

What is the second independence to be from, if not another form of colonialism? Martí foresaw a hemispheric pattern of economic domination for the primary benefit of the interests of the more powerful party. But Martí’s analysis of the economic dependence to which the Hispanic American countries would be subjected is also based on a cultural analysis of what he sees as the driving spirit behind the United States’ will to dominance: “a people that begins to look at freedom, which is the universal and perennial aspiration of the human being, as its own privilege, and [begins] to invoke it [freedom] in order to deprive other peoples from it” (Martí [1889-90] 1979, 159). Martí prefaces this analysis by stating that “one should not see dangers when they are on top of one, but when they can be prevented. The first [thing] in politics is to make clear and foresee [aclarar y

prever]” (Martí [1889-90] 1979, 153). Surely, he was able both to foresee and clarify what was happening, but the political resistance he hoped to see from the Latin American governments invited to Washington was not to take place. This raises for me at least two kinds of questions: what is the cost of decolonizing political power, and are people willing to pay the price? This is somewhat of an existential question, although it is also subject to disagreements about what one means by “decolonizing.” With regard to this question, if the cost is too high, and people are not willing to take a stand or make the sacrifices required for colonialism to be defeated, the legacy of the status quo will prevail. The second type of question that arises is one of strategy (or political strategies). Granted that those who benefit from the legacies of colonialism will do all they can to hold on to and expand their political power, what strategies do they employ to disengage and defeat their opposition and what strategies, on the other side, can be effective for the opponents of colonialism and its sequels? In other words, postcolonial political criticism needs to have both a vision and a strategy if it is to succeed. When we focus on resistance to colonialism, it seems that a large component of this resistance must be strategy.

#### “NUESTRA AMERICA” AS A POLITICAL STRATEGY

Given the fact that Martí had already articulated his view that a “second independence” was needed for the nineteenth-century Hispanic American republics, based on his detection of what I would call a “colonial intentionality” on the part of the U.S. expansionist political and economic interests to use Our America primarily to suit their own benefit at Our America’s expense, let us look at the text “Nuestra América” as a rhetorical strategy to rally the unified sentiment of his Latin American readers against U.S. hegemony in the region. It is in embracing the vision of “Nuestra América” as different from the America to our North that Martí hoped to rally a movement of resistance to the U.S. economic and political hegemony taking place – or, as in the cases of Cuba and Puerto Rico, imminently positioned to take place -- *after* the demise of Spanish colonialism.

Martí begins “Nuestra América” with a call to a battle of ideas based on the “weapons of judgment,” which he claims are much more valuable than actual tactics of war. This confirms the view I proposed earlier regarding his desire for a united front that would

bear diplomatic weight against U.S. hegemony in the region. Characterizing a village mentality as one that fails to be concerned about the relationship between the local and the global (I am rephrasing him using current terms) and, in that context, failing to see that “giants with seven-league boots” can step on top of them, Martí calls for the “awakening” of any remaining village mentality in America ([1891] 1979, 37).

The obstacles Martí faced for people to rally behind his vision of “nuestra América” rested not only in ignorance and apathy with regard to need for political change, but in important structural problems that were a part of Latin American history. Martí’s essay addresses both the external menace and the internal outlooks that must be changed to resist it. Among the latter, two of the most important were (1) overcoming the hierarchical and authoritarian mentality inherited from the colonial period and (2) embracing the multi-racial composition of the continent which he called “nuestra América mestiza” ([1891] 1979, 40). Without invoking or using our terms “colonialism” and “racism,” it was clear that Martí was fighting a combination of both. He also constantly battled the Ibero-American upper and middle class prejudices against working and humble people, reporting that their gaze was focused on imitating European fashionable trends. “Those sons of a carpenter, who are ashamed their father is a carpenter! Those born in America, who are ashamed of the mother [sic] who raised them, because they wear Indian aprons” ([1891] 1979, 8). He does not take a “standpoint epistemology” to argue that whoever is born in America, or is of indigenous, black, or mestizo origin, or comes from a certain class is in a cognitively privileged position to understand his or her political situation. In fact he is fully aware that the masses, just as the middle class, can only make progress if their consciousnesses are awakened and they take on an anti-colonialist stance. He therefore bases the process of liberation from colonialism on the mediating role played by instituting an anti-colonialist republic and, of course, by the consciousness of all those who create and defend it. “The colony,” Martí writes, “continued living in the republic; and our America is getting liberated from its great errors . . . by the superior virtue . . . of the republic that fights against the colony” ([1891] 1979, 41). He observes the damage colonialism continued to exert in the new republics, obstructing their emerging grass-roots democratic processes: “the hierarchical constitution of the colonies resisted the democratic organization of the Republic, . . . the

bookish redeemers did not understand that the revolution triumphed with the soul of the earth [and that], freed at the voice of the liberator, with the soul of the earth one had to govern, and not against it and without it” ([1891] 1979, 40). This failure to govern appropriately meant that “America . . . suffers from the fatigue of accommodation between the conflicting and hostile elements it inherited from a despotic and perverse colonizer and the imported ideas and forms that, because they lack local reality, have been delaying the logical government” (Martí [1891] 1979, 40).

What does Martí mean by “the logical government”? From what he says in the essay, he seems to mean a government founded on the specific needs of its people, not on imported, so-called universal formulas derived from European models – or for that matter, from models imported from the United States. While he invokes Enlightenment notions of reason and freedom, and of “the right of man [human being] to the exercise of his reason,” for Martí the exercise of reason is not necessarily mediated by European values or extra-territorial powers. He refers favorably to “the natural man” or to the “real man”: “the natural man comes, outraged and strong, and knocks down the justice that was accumulated in books, because it is not administered in accordance with the evident needs of the country” ([1891] 1979, 39-40). Further on he invokes an Enlightenment ideal of moderation, appealing to the “serene harmony of Nature” and the “continent of light,” where with the help of a new generation engaged in critical reading (*lectura crítica*) “America is giving birth to the real man” ([1891] 1979, 41).

The real or natural man (or human being) of whom Martí speaks is someone for whom the European concept of racial divisions and the socially hierarchical society built on it do not apply. He places the distinction among races as something that can provoke “useless hatreds” among peoples and instead proclaims that “nature’s justice” reveals “the universal identity of man (human being)” ([1891] 1979, 43). “The soul springs forth,” he continues, “equal and eternal, from bodies diverse in form and in color. Anyone who promotes and propagates the opposition and hatred of the races sins against humanity” ([1891] 1979, 43-44). On this view he claims that “there is no racial hatred, because there are no races” ([1891], 1979, 43). By “race” Martí appears to mean a class of human beings that, on account of their color or related physical characteristics, is thought to be morally or psychologically superior or inferior to any other human type.

The “natural man” (or human being) of whom he speaks refers to people of every color, all of whom he embraced in his alternative concept of “nuestra América mestiza” ([1891] 1979, 40). He reasoned that racial prejudices were socio-culturally constructed and could indeed result in significant injustice toward targeted populations. This is why he warns that there are indeed some acquired characteristics, dispositions, and interests that accumulate over time in various peoples and that, at restless national moments, can trigger in a dominant group what I have called “colonial intentionalities” toward others whose appearance, color, and customs differ from itself. Such colonial intentionalities are described by Martí as “ideas and habits of expansion and acquisition, of vanity and avarice, that from the latent state of national concerns could, in times of internal disorder or of accelerating national identity (*carácter acumulado del país*) become a grave threat to neighboring lands, isolated and weak, which the strong country declares extremely wanting and inferior” ([1891] 1979, 44). Surely here he uses diplomatic terms to point out the potential for U.S. expansionism toward the “isolated” and relatively “weak” Latin American republics. He thinks the problem of neo-colonialism cannot be averted and that, for the sake of the coming centuries’ peace, the facts of the problem should be brought to light ([1891] 1979, 44).

Just as Martí enunciated a policy of governing according to the needs of specific peoples in the light of reason and avoiding racial prejudice, he held a view of the type of education that the peoples of “our America” should receive in order to reach maturity in their democratic forms of government. He engaged in a tacit polemic with the Argentine ruler and educator Domingo Sarmiento, who had proposed the binary model of “civilization or barbarism” according to which the civilizing goal of the Hispanic American republics should be the importation of European ideas and the overcoming of the rural (considered backward) ways of life and thinking found in the Argentine pampas (Sarmiento [1845] 1998). Without naming Sarmiento, Martí defended a different model of education and cultural development for the American republics. “There is no battle between civilization and barbarity,” he argued, “only [one] between false erudition and nature” ([1891] 1979, 39). Here we see that Martí recognized the binary by which Western colonizing thought places “barbarity” on the side of “nature,” raising its own colonizing project to that of a civilizing mission. But he wisely pointed out that this

binary itself is a form of “false erudition” and a false antagonism between culture and nature. Since due to their exclusive reliance on Western models no Hispanic American university curricula analyzed “the peculiar elements of American peoples,” he asks, what kind of education will those aspiring to govern their countries receive? ([1891] 1979, 39) In a pragmatic but also moral vein, he decried that unless the pursuit of truth included seeking out the truth about your own people – and by this he meant seeking out the subaltern populations that were marginalized from knowledge, culture, and power --, it would not be possible to solve the problems that affect the people.

Politics, culture, pedagogy, and curriculum building are therefore intertwining elements of Martí’s vision as developed in “nuestra América.” “The only way to free a country from tyrannies is to know it and govern it according to such knowledge” ([1891] 1979, 40). For this objective he proposed a new kind of university curriculum centered on the history of América “from the Incas to now” (40), or what today we would call a non-Eurocentric and culturally inclusive education. The indigenous history of Our America must take precedence to Europe’s view of history, in whose model the ancient Greeks occupied the central place. “Our Greece is preferable to the Greece that is not ours,” he states, referring to the continent’s indigenous peoples (40). At the same time, Martí rejects separatism. He adds: “let us insert the world in our republics, but [using the organic metaphor of a tree and its branches] the trunk must be that of our republics” ([1891] 1979, 40). He situates his discourse of cultural centeredness in the context of a world political situation where, on the contrary, the education system of the former Spanish colonies privileged European thought, ignoring the indigenous and African roots of their populations.

Just as education should place priority on Our American history, the manner of government should derive from the very own “constitution” of the country ([1891] 1979, 39), even if the aim seems to be conceived by Martí as a universal one: to attain a state all those who contribute to it especially through their work enjoy freedom and prosperity. This is an Enlightenment model, with one major variation. The methods and institutions through which a reasonable government will be achieved are simply autochthonous. While Martí appealed to Enlightenment concepts of “reason” and “liberty,” for him both of these were grounded in the recognition and appreciation of a non-Eurocentric approach

to Latin America's socio-cultural reality. All those thereafter, who believe in these *ideales martianos*, or Martian governance ideals, identify themselves by the description *nuestra Americanistas*. Over the span of the twentieth century, a significant tradition of Latin American philosophical and political thought has been based on this Martian ideal, which has functioned as a criterion of freedom from colonialism and neo-colonialism in diverse contexts. Perhaps the best known of these is the selective appropriation of Martí's ideas by the Marxist leadership of the Cuban revolution. But many other examples abound, including a strong influence on a sector of twentieth-century Latin American philosophy (Schutte 1993; Cerutti Guldberg 1998) and on the politics of U.S. Latino and Chicano studies since the 1980s (Saldívar 1990; Acosta-Belén 1999).

In recent years Martí's model of postcolonial Latin American emancipation has come under attack. I am not speaking about the critique of his ideals as too utopian, which in a way predate postmodern trends, but of critiques emerging in the wake of the recent neo-liberal acceleration of global capitalism, which coincides with a postmodern intellectual boom. While Martí's essay has elicited disagreements from all parts of the political spectrum, I will concentrate on arguments that circulate primarily in liberal and left-of-center venues. In the next part of my paper I cover some of the principal objections raised, whether specifically at his essay or more generally at the conceptual framework on which it relies. The types of objections raised against Martí's political manifesto, and the responses such objections have evoked, provide a window into the type of questions capturing the attention of intellectuals coping with the impact of neo-liberal globalization processes on the very conceptual frameworks we deem appropriate for research in our changing times.

#### FIRST OBJECTION: THE CASE FOR NORTH/SOUTH INTEGRATIONISM

One of the challenges for postcolonial critique in Latin America is to avoid the binary judgments that point solely to Europe as the source of colonialism's problems. Surprisingly, this binary, often found in U.S. postcolonial studies, places the burden of the colonial enterprise exclusively on Europe, neglecting the role played at least since 1898 by the United States.<sup>3</sup> Under this paradigm, the Americas are seen as culturally distinct from Western Europe, with the latter representing the culture primarily

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<sup>3</sup> 1898 marks the United States' defeat of Spain in the Spanish-American War.

responsible for all modern colonialist practices. Again, in this view, the asymmetries of power throughout the hemisphere, whether across countries or within them, remain unspecified. Yet, as Martí has shown, the situation is much more complex. In order to resist the rising hegemony of the United States in the Americas, Martí created a distinction between two Americas, “theirs” and “ours.” Martí supersedes a geographical mapping of the Americas with a mapping responding to the cultural and political values and intentionalities of its peoples. In other words, he realizes that geography alone is not the ultimate boundary either between Europe and the Americas or between Anglo-Saxon and Latin America. Colonialism has shown that there is no correspondence between a geographical space and the system of governance and/or economic interests that rule therein. Martí’s concept of “our America” served as a way to try to point to this dissonance. This concept helped to empower Latin Americans to appropriate their own space and cultural creations, in such a way as both to resist the expanding neighbor to the North and to demand the respect of the U.S. population. Without it, the critical analysis of Latin America’s postcoloniality would be deeply impoverished.

For its part, the United States government tries to foster the notion of One America in which its hegemony is not challenged explicitly. It manipulates its own rhetoric of respect toward its Southern neighbors, which it ties to a Pan-Americanism where the common ties among the hemispheric republics conforming to its principles are stressed.<sup>4</sup> Pan-Americanist rhetoric also appeals to the alleged self-interest of the Latin Americans with regard to economic enrichment (growth). Whether it uses force or persuasion, the United States wants a united hemisphere where its leadership (hegemony) in economic and political matters goes without question. The South’s poverty, racial differences, and cultural/linguistic differences are perhaps the factors that still repel, for many Northerners, the thought of a full integration for Latin Americans into U.S. society. So, from the part of the North, a wedge is driven between the goals of neo-liberal capitalist economic and political integration (as exemplified by treaties such as NAFTA), which suits the North’s interests, and full integration, which is found threatening given the

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<sup>4</sup> One of the ways in which the U.S. government shows its repudiation of the socialist government of Cuba is by excluding it from its Pan-Americanist meetings.

stereotyped representations of the impoverished, dark-skinned, or, at best, exotic, Latin American “others.”

Integrationists in the field of Latin American Studies hold that since the fall of the Soviet Union and the rapid acceleration of globalization processes in its wake there is no longer any significant justification for dividing the study of the Americas into Latin American and Caribbean Studies, on one hand, and “American Studies,” on the other.<sup>5</sup> This view responds to the increasing economic integration of the Americas and the South-to-North migration inserting millions of Latinos into U.S. civil society. It observes, correctly, that the historic, economic, and cultural boundaries between Anglo and Hispanic America no longer hold. But from these observations it deduces that Latin American Studies should be superseded by Inter-American Studies, where “American” comes to mean the whole of the Americas. This representation of the Americas appears to be very egalitarian because it purports to treat all inhabitants of the Americas in the same way. It gives the South’s presence in the North through migration the same weight as the North’s influence on the South’s economic and political agendas. But in doing so, it overlooks a great asymmetry in power between North and South, in addition to keeping silent on the less than satisfactory solutions the United States government currently employs to deal with what it considers excessive South-to-North migration. Believing that the vast number of Latino immigrants in the United States, whether legal or illegal, is sufficient to indicate their economic and political power, Inter-American integrationism fails to note the current attempts of the U.S. administration to manage illegal immigration by proposing to legalize a fixed-term length of stay in the U.S. while mandating the continual rotation of the work force so “generously” granted temporary legality. These types of solutions, however, propose to legalize the exploitation of foreign labor on the condition of eventually expelling the laborers themselves, who are mandated to return to their countries of origin after a term of three to six years in exchange for their receiving temporary legal status. How convenient for the employer, yet how disrespectful of the laborer is this proposed solution! Moreover, it should be noted that Latinos with the

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<sup>5</sup> For an example of this position see Andrzej Dembicz, “Los estudios latinoamericanos y las Américas, o sea, es posible un latinoamericanismo interamericanista?,” *Revista del CELSA* [Centro de Estudios Latinoamericanos Universidad de Varsovia], No. 5 (2003): 41-52. To some extent, I have oversimplified Dembicz’s argument to delineate the integrationist position presented here.

power to vote as citizens of the United States have no collective power of representation unless they reside in Latino territorial enclaves, given that representation in U.S. democracy is territorially determined. While it is important to realize, as the integrationist position asserts, that the recent globalization processes have broken down many traditional cultural, economic, and political barriers, and that the reciprocal impact of North/South activities is much higher than in years past, I do not see that we are served well by a paradigm that seeks to minimize the boundaries that make it possible for us to still point out the differences between a country with the military and economic power to set the global agenda and those without that power, whose cultures, economies, and political traditions differ in kind for the former. For it is not as if the hemisphere's inhabitants are simply interacting with each other, trading, and moving from place to place without restriction. The reality is that their interactions are still to a very large part mediated and regulated by governments, whose relations are themselves determined by geopolitical conditions resting on anything but equality.

#### SECOND OBJECTION: THE REJECTION OF A SUBALTERN MODEL OF INTEGRATION AND OF THE SYMBOLIC USE OF MESTIZAJE

A second and, in my view, more important objection to Martí's vision of "nuestra América" comes from a standpoint almost opposite the above. This standpoint is anti-integrationist, arguing that to integrate is to impose an artificial and most likely unjust unity over a perennially diversified population. Influenced by a postmodern distrust against any unifying strategy of representation, it takes "nuestra América" to be too enveloping a concept, one which hides the near-infinite modalities of perspectives, ethnic and racial groupings, and economic sectors in Latin America. Moreover, this standpoint rejects the validity of the notion of "mestizaje" (the mixture of races and cultures) as a *progressive* and *anti-racist* notion. It claims, on the contrary, that for Hispanic Americans to generalize our main cultural difference from Anglo-Americans through the notion of "mestizaje" is to marginalize or silence Blacks, indigenous peoples, and others whose racial or cultural heritage may not fit neatly into the "mixture" of one race/culture with others. This standpoint sees "mestizaje" as an assimilationist concept whose goal was to "whiten" the representation of the indigenous and Black parts of the population. It sees "mestizaje" not as the antidote for the concept of white racial purity but as the

equivalent of “whiteness” with respect to Blacks and indigenous peoples. By association, Martí is seen as a spokesperson for white Hispanic America, regardless of his attempt to include African descendants and indigenous people under the symbolism of “nuestra América mestiza” and regardless of his critique of the ways indigenous people and Blacks were treated in nineteenth-century United States (see Acosta-Belén 1999, 86). For example, such critics point to the legacy of the Mexican revolution and to the political will of the Mexican ruling class to idealize mestizaje while the indigenous sectors of the population continued to be marginalized, receiving substandard treatment. Reading Martí by way of some subsequent idealizers of mestizaje such as the Mexican philosopher José Vasconcelos, such criticism asserts that “reducing all cultural differences to a single principle – a mestizismo or romanticized indigenism – was the way to ensure the emergence of a popular State that would at the same time guarantee the ‘national unity’”<sup>6</sup> (Castro-Gómez 1998, 142). The social movements of the last four decades of the twentieth century have demanded representation for specific constituencies in their separate identities – following more recent twentieth-century models of a multi-ethnic, multi-racial, gender-diversified, and multi-cultural society. In view of such activist developments, Martí’s integrationist anti-colonial identity politics of the last part of the nineteenth century appears to some not to be able to keep pace with a later century’s mobilizations according to race, ethnicity, class, gender, and other more particular interests whose main concerns are not to defend an anti-colonialist cultural identity as such, but rather to demand political representation for their specific constituencies.

Nonetheless, others argue that Martí’s anti-colonialist vision of two oppositional Americas, broadly construed and re-interpreted in our own times of global capitalist acceleration impelled by the United States and the transnational migration of people from South to North, is both conscious of internal differentiations among Latin America’s exploited groups and especially relevant to the construction of a contemporary oppositional pan-Latina/o or trans-Latino hemispheric consciousness. As the Puerto Rican feminist and Latina scholar Edna Acosta-Belén states: “[Martí’s] pan-national

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<sup>6</sup> “La reducción de todas las diferencias culturales a un solo principio – un mestizismo o indigenismo romantizado – era la vía para asegurar el surgimiento de un Estado popular que garantizara al mismo tiempo la ‘unidad nacional.’”

affirmation of a multicultural and multiracial *nuestra América* also takes on great contemporary significance as we strive to put an end to European and Anglo-American ethnocentrism by decolonizing and deconstructing the cultural mythologies and received knowledge about subaltern groups perpetuated within the dominant Western tradition” (Acosta-Belén 1999, 86). In fact, Martí’s idealization of a voluntary *nuestra Americanista* identity over a century ago now seems immensely helpful as a strategy to guide the construction of the new pan-ethnic “Latina/o” identities imposed on or adopted by immigrants from the Caribbean and Latin American to the United States. One of the advantages of Martí’s notion of *nuestra América* noted by Acosta-Belén, in addition to its oppositional anti-colonialist quality, is its transcending of national boundaries, in a way that can ground “reciprocal interactions and bi-directional exchanges” among the U.S. Latina/o and Latin American/Caribbean populations, rather than treat each as a separate entity lodged within national borders (Acosta-Belén 1999, 82-83).

The Puerto Rican sociologist Juan Flores argues against adopting the U.S. Latina/o identity in the mainstream form in which it is being forced upon and constructed *for* Puerto Ricans, Chicanas/os, Mexican-Americans, and all the other groups of migrants or descendants of migrants living in the United States. He distinguishes between the formation of voluntary pan-Latino or trans-Latino identities -- which would take into account the specific characteristics of each group as well as the need to affirm an anti-colonialist identity -- and the conservative, manipulative use of the Latino/a or Hispanic identity to normalize and assimilate this population into the global economic and political agenda of the United States. Flores notes that Puerto Ricans resist adapting to the “Latino” designation. He alerts other groups called to identify with this category that the experience of Puerto Rico as colonized by the United States must not be removed from our consciousness of U.S. Latino/a identities. In this view, resistance to U.S. colonialism should be incorporated as an important factor in the conscious construction of Pan-Latina/o identities. Flores also points to existing differences among so-called Latino/a groups – for example, between the Puerto Ricans and Mexicans in Chicago – to stress the fact that even with the adoption of pan-ethnic identities, it is essential to “emphasize the need for an eminently flexible, inclusive concept based on a clear understanding of

historical differences and particularities” (Flores 1999, 128).<sup>7</sup> He seeks a conceptual framework offering the “hope that the idea and study of ‘Latino’ might transcend – and transgress – the domestic confines of U.S. public discourse on politics and cultural identity, and engage (or re-engage) it to the global processes of which it is a part” (Flores 1999,128). Such a conceptual framework is what Acosta-Belén and others propose Martí’s notion of *nuestra América* can fulfill as long as it is re-read one hundred years later to include the specificities and particularities of the great mass of social movements challenging the effects of both European colonialism and U.S. imperialism on the continent.

Another contemporary re-deployment of Martí, also originating in the context of the emerging Latino and Ethnic Studies in the United States in the 1980s and 1990s, appeared in the fields of literary, ethnic, and cultural studies. José Saldívar, currently professor of Ethnic Studies at UC Berkeley, argued in an early essay challenging the culturally hegemonous content within the field of American literature that “American literatures can only be understood as part of the larger debates and confrontations between “Our America” and the “other America,” which is not ours (Saldívar 1990, 78). In what he called “the dialectics of our America,” Saldívar extrapolated Martí’s analysis of U.S. political, economic, and cultural hegemony over Latin America to challenge the exclusion of ethnic literatures and criticism from the field of American Studies in the United States. Influenced by Edward Said’s critique of Orientalist discourse as well as Roberto Fernández Retamar’s Marxist cultural analyses of Latin American and Caribbean resistance to Western colonialism and U.S. imperialism, Saldívar – from the standpoint of Chicano studies – revalidated Martí’s notion of *nuestra América* as a useful perspective for reclaiming the missing voices from Our America in the North American literary canon. He likens Martí’s role in promoting the notion of *nuestra América*, which serves to ground the legacy of anti-colonialist Latin American and Caribbean cultural production, to Emerson’s essay, “The American Scholar” (1837), “which established the grounds for a national, popular American literature” (Saldívar 1990, 66). But for Saldívar, what radicalizes Martí’s conception of *nuestra América* even further, enabling

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<sup>7</sup> I would add, in the same spirit, that it is not sufficient to note the differences among groups, since there can also be important differences within any particular national-ethnic group, whereas the “image” of any particular group tends to be stereotyped beyond / against the desires of all its members.

its implications and repercussions to link up with the late twentieth-century debates on the role of postcolonial intellectuals in U.S. ethnic and cultural studies, is the materialist reconversion of Martí's notion by the Cuban Marxist postcolonial critic Roberto Fernández Retamar. "Fernández Retamar has produced perhaps the most powerful model of oppositional critical practice in Our America since Martí," wrote Saldívar in 1990 (Saldívar 1990, 73).

The author of *Caliban*, "Our America and the West," and other postcolonial essays, Fernández Retamar belonged to a generation of Latin American theorists who, energized by the cultural and political hemispheric impact of the Cuban revolution and by the works of Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire, among others, shed the idealist metaphysics typical of many earlier Latin American writers. As Saldívar points out: "Fernández Retamar's criticism recognizes the political materiality of culture. He does not merely turn 'Our American culture' into a literary myth [an allusion to idealist appropriations of Martí], but as a Cuban Marxist he describes how culture is related to the idea of hegemony" (Saldívar 1990, 75). In this view, the economic and political hegemony of the West in defining what counts as Latin American culture – down to the very nomenclature to describe the European invasion and colonization of the hemisphere as the "discovery" of America – requires oppositional resistance in the form of new intellectual allegiances and a new literary canon opening the way for the recognition of new Latin American narratives and the work of Chicanos/as, African Americans, and other "minority" writers in the United States. From the encounters of radical and progressive writers gathered at the Casa de las Américas Cuban cultural center, directed by Fernández Retamar, Saldívar deduced (correctly, in my view), that there was much that the literature of the Americas (North and South) had in common, but that to appreciate what they had in common one had to apply a genealogy regarding the regimes of power they were resisting. In this regard, José Martí's "Nuestra América" – later enhanced by the Calibanesque rebellion against colonialism embraced by Fernández Retamar and many other postcolonial writers and intellectuals -- was the definitive text through which subsequent alliances for or against colonialist regimes of power could be interpreted. The outcome of this analysis is to link together powerful works by writers of color in the United States with the Latin American and Caribbean leftist postcolonial writers, understanding that, despite the wide

differences in style or languages of composition, what unites them is their alternative visions for “our America” and their resistance to that “other America” which is not ours, the America complicit with the work of Western colonialism.

In this section I have therefore emphasized that the difference between those who charge that Martí’s idealistic, unifying notion of *nuestra América* is no longer acceptable in our time and those who on the contrary still see it not only as relevant but as central to an understanding of postcolonial intellectuality lies largely in the latter’s ability to re-deploy Martí’s notion expanding the political and cultural connections among and beyond the marginalized and exploited groups Martí identified in his own time. In particular, those theorists and critics who take Latinas/os in the United States as bridge-builders between North and South in the labor of deconstructing or otherwise resisting the legacies of colonialism appear to have much better insights into the continued relevance of Martí’s “Nuestra América” for a postcolonial critique of today’s globalized economies, politics, and cultures.

### THIRD OBJECTION: POSTMODERNISM AS THE ONLY VIABLE EPISTEMIC FRAMEWORK FOR LATIN AMERICAN POSTCOLONIAL CRITIQUE

The third objection I consider against the continued relevance of *nuestra Americanista* ideals is the theoretical argument that only a postmodern epistemic framework is acceptable as a basis for Latin American postcolonial theory. According to this argument, which has been most coherently elaborated by the Colombian philosopher Santiago Castro-Gómez, what determines the true nature of postcolonial critique is not an oppositional political and economic stance against colonialism and its aftermath in the Americas, but the adoption of a postmodern epistemic framework by Latin American philosophers and social theorists. This argument is partly based on the premise that Western colonialism and Western modernity are basically two sides of the same coin, from which it is deduced that only by moving beyond the conceptual paradigms of modernity can one avoid reproducing the founding ideologies of Western colonialism.<sup>8</sup>

Personally, I think Castro-Gómez’s argument suffers from a methodological reductionism inattentive to the full complexity of Latin American philosophy and social

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<sup>8</sup> What this reasoning cannot guarantee is that postmodern conceptual paradigms as such would be free necessarily from some of the founding ideologies of Western colonialism. The complexity of and lack of agreement on what counts as a postmodern conceptual paradigm would also be at issue here.

thought in the last two centuries. As I have argued in my book, *Cultural Identity and Social Liberation in Latin American Thought* (1993), there is a long and diverse tradition of Latin American philosophy and social thought focused precisely on a critique of the conquest and colonization of the Americas, the marginalization and exclusion of indigenous and African thought, the Third World status of Latin American societies vis-à-vis the advanced capitalist societies that impoverished them, the role of Western intellectual hegemony in the formation of native intellectuals, and a host of related questions typical of postcolonial intellectual and political debates. Castro-Gómez's argument against the existence of a postcolonial Latin American philosophy is similarly inattentive to the nuances of postcolonial theory insofar as the latter takes any distance from postmodernism. In this regard, as I pointed out in my introduction, Edward Said distinguishes between postcolonial theory and postmodernism in his 1994 Afterword to *Orientalism*, distancing himself from a postmodern epistemic framework despite his debt to Foucault. Likewise, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, an important postcolonial feminist theorist, has recently clarified that she was misunderstood in the past when her critique of Western representations of Third World Women was taken to mean that she was rejecting any claim whatsoever to universality (Mohanty 2003, 505). Clearly, no postcolonial theorist would try to defend a Western European notion of rights or of universal reason, but many have argued either for an expanded notion of reason where non-Western -- and I would add, hybrid -- perspectives are equally appreciated (Wiredu 1996) or for an ethics of dialogue where the alterity of the subaltern is respected and nurtured (Schutte 1998).

Castro-Gómez does make some very interesting points which may take on a more specific meaning than his broad reductive generalizations. He rejects the premise that there is any kind of pure alterity that stands opposed to the West in a binary epistemic construction where a blameless "we" is exteriorly located to European modernity, which furthermore is represented as a "will to dominance" in its totality (Castro-Gómez 1998, 87). While this binary is found in some Latin American texts that oppose modernity for a wide variety of reasons, such a dichotomy is not operative in José Martí's notion of *nuestra América*. The reason is that for Martí *nuestra América* is not located wholly outside of Europe, nor is Europe wholly outside of us, since our population includes its mixed and transgressive offspring. Similarly, according to Martí the cultural

positionality of *nuestra América* does not proclaim its citizens free from failures, corruption, or vices -- only that we must make every effort to overcome these if we are to overturn both new and old forms of injustice. Castro-Gómez criticizes Martí's reliance on the concepts of harmony and on the "aesthetics of the beautiful" that typified Latin American modernism (Castro-Gómez 1998, 140). He argues that postcolonial thought cannot rely on the aesthetics of the beautiful but must, following Lyotard's analysis of Kant, switch to an aesthetics of the sublime which, unlike the aesthetics of the beautiful, is not totalizing. But why should these conceptual models arising within European debates on postmodernity and aesthetics serve as the final criteria to determine whether or not the tenets and practices of Latin American modernism are legitimate? Isn't much of the point of Martí's postcolonial critique that we must overcome the seduction to ground our values and ways of thinking in the latest cultural trends found in the United States and Europe? Why must our Latin American postcolonial status be delegitimated (even when we criticize the economic and political effects of colonialism) because some of us fail to theorize "beauty" or "difference" in just the way advocated by Lyotard -- especially someone like Martí, who lived long before Lyotard was born? It seems to me that, in the name of difference, the type of reductive argumentation followed by Castro-Gómez actually destroys our sensitivities to appreciate the actual cultural differences found in the many creative approaches used to resist colonialism and its sequels in Latin America. But, to be fair to him, reductionist arguments are not so uncommon in these types of discussions. His reductionist claims are more interesting than most, insofar he is proposing a leftist critique of the Left, in a kind of revisionist move against the metaphysical and epistemic assumptions of older generations of intellectuals and scholars.

At bottom, Castro-Gómez is concerned (and so am I) with the danger of homogenizing the categories that point to our differences. He rejects the aesthetics of harmony and the beautiful because he believes they will keep us trapped in homogeneous and normalizing representations that stagnate and block the processes of political resistance against oppression. I sympathize strongly with his concern. To bring up the example of the ideology of *mestizaje* again -- clearly, if or when the representation of *mestizaje* becomes homogenized to stand for all of Latin America, and idealized within

the aesthetics of harmony and the beautiful, so to make it appear that no racial or ethnic conflicts exists, then what we are dealing with is not postcolonial critical thought but a resurgence of racism under a different name. Similarly, the aesthetics of harmony and the beautiful can be very damaging to women, and are often employed in the service of heterosexist white privilege. But I want to add that it is also possible to reject such colonizing models of beauty and instead find beauty in what is simple or subaltern. It is possible to invoke the notions of harmony or peace yet defer acknowledgment of their attainment as long as violence, injustice, and inequality continue to characterize basic social, economic, and political relations in contemporary societies. I want to claim that it is not a total contradiction to speak of the “struggle for peace.” The seduction only occurs when we think that a particular course of political action will achieve peace or liberation once and for all, when in fact a more realistic appraisal of the human condition shows us that such a “final” moment is nothing but an illusion.

#### CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

To many contemporary Latin Americans residing in Latin America it seems sometimes as if “postcolonial theory” is just a debate going on in the Northern academies. Unlike Castro-Gómez, who argues that no Latin American thinkers have been postcolonial because they have lacked a postmodern epistemic framework – and perhaps on account of arguments such as his --, they feel that their intellectual traditions are left out of the debate. In the production of postcolonial theory, the South-to-North migrant appears to hold a privileged position. In response to this concern I would like to say that while our experiences as migrants are very important and may serve to bridge complex problems across different cultures, the postcolonial condition is indeed much more varied and broader than any migrant or group of migrants’ experiences. Still, I myself am very much persuaded by Bhabha’s psychoanalytical reading of the migrant’s split subjectivity as a key to deciphering the different temporalities inscribed in postcolonial histories. We must pay attention to the complexities and ambiguities of signification emerging as a result of “migration, diaspora, displacement, [and] relocation” (Bhabha 1994, 172). Part of this complexity involves relating to the intellectual production of those parts of the world where we no longer (primarily) reside. In this spirit I want to conclude by submitting a word or two of caution about the risks of

speaking about Latin America to audiences in North America, and the kinds of displacements that result for postcolonial critics, intellectuals, and scholars residing in Latin America who do not necessarily write in, or have the option of, being translated to, English. As the Uruguayan literary critic Hugo Achúgar observes: “We should not forget that one thing is to be postcolonial in English and another in Spanish, Portuguese, Bayano, Quechua, Aymara, Guarini, Papiamento and equivalents” (Achúgar 1998, 278).

Indeed, postcolonial critique involves at least two different components: the historical parameters and conditions of decolonization in specific nations and parts of the world, and the speaking positions from which such historical conditions have been theorized, imagined, or otherwise represented. In recent years, the trend has been to emphasize the latter rather than the former, in a relative victory of semiotic analysis over, let’s say, Marxist or feminist political theory. In philosophy the debate over the hermeneutics of deciphering the various nuances of speaking positions and what the U.S./Argentine postcolonial theorist Walter Mignolo calls “*loci of enunciation*” (Mignolo 2000, 182) has taken precedence over the debates regarding democratization processes in Latin American civil society and the expansion of rights for the various subaltern groups that may constitute its particular populations. Furthermore, the intellectual legacy from which diverse critics in Latin America speak is differently constituted from that which grounds the Latin American migrant to the United States. In this vein, Achúgar inquires: “What is the agenda that determines the relevance or legitimacy of knowledges? Is it the agendas founded in the battles that minorities carry forth in North American civil society or the agendas designed in the bosom of Latin American civil society?” (Achúgar 1998, 281). He argues that although they are not exactly comparable or the same, what the North calls postcolonial studies is something that Latin Americans have been doing since the nineteenth century under different names, among them in particular, what has been called *pensamiento Latinoamericano* (Latin American thought) (Achúgar 1998, 280). I think he is correct in noting that postcolonial Latin American thought can be both modern and postmodern and that it includes, as did Martí’s vision of Our America, both migrants and non-migrants. What distinguishes this vision from postcolonial thought emerging elsewhere is that the evolving vision of *nuestra América* “arises from the history of the

agendas of Latin American society” (Achúgar 1998, 281) and the social movements found therein.

In my book *Cultural Identity and Social Liberation in Latin American Thought* I provided an analysis of several generations of twentieth-century postcolonial Latin American thought in relation to important social and political movements of the time – socialism, nationalism, liberation movements, and feminism. In studying the thought of the early twentieth-century Peruvian Marxist José Carlos Mariátegui, I noted that the question of national identity, or national formation, for Mariátegui, emerged differently from the question of national identity in Western Europe. Because Mariátegui theorized the Spanish conquest as a violation or interruption of a highly sophisticated Inca civilization, he was aware of “the contingency of modernity vis-à-vis other possible cultural formations that might have evolved on the continent” (Schutte 1993, 117; 28-29). He conceived of the Peruvian nation as a plurality of communities of different ethnic origins (primarily, Hispanic and indigenous), wherein different senses of time prevailed (for the European descendant, linear time; for the indigenous peoples, cyclical time). This is why when I read Homi Bhabha’s famous essay, “DissemiNation: Time, narrative and the margins of the modern nation” (in *The Location of Culture*), I am reminded time and again of the affinities between the postmodern migrant’s perspective of “the disjunctive time of the nation’s modernity” invoked by Bhabha (1994, 142) and Mariátegui’s insistence that the indigenous sense of time must be allowed a distinctive place in the modern Peruvian nation. When Bhabha asserts that “historians transfixed on the event and the origins of the [modern] nation never ask, and political theorists possessed of the ‘modern’ totalities of the nation . . . never pose, the essential question of the representation of the nation as a temporal process” (1994, 142), I want to point to Mariátegui’s *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality*, published in Lima in 1928, which indeed questioned the clash of temporalities occurring in America with the Spanish conquest.

Just as Martí had done before Mariátegui and many others would do as well, the postcolonial Latin American thinkers knew that at the base of the political realities they theorized there were disjunctive time frames which did not dilute but rather enriched the cultures of *nuestra América*. The time gaps and differences from European modernity

were evident in many Latin American narratives, if only because indigenous peoples did not share modern Europe's sense of time, while African religions bear a spirited relationship to nature, rejecting Western monotheism. The official state ideologies of "progreso" (progress) and "retraso" (backwardness), always measured in terms of the demands of Western capitalism and Eurocentric notions of culture, stand in contrast to the plurality of *nuestra Americanista* counter-narratives. Yet, as I have argued and shown, the absence of an explicitly held deconstructive or postmodern perspective does not mean that postcolonial theory will be absent from Latin America until its theoreticians are sufficiently postmodern. What it means is that postcolonial theory in the United States will be further enriched if it admits the wide plurality of voices from/of Latin America, rather than restrict their theoretical legitimacy based on highly selective criteria regarding the hermeneutic pedigree of the writers' *loci* of enunciation.

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