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## fiar

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## **Imperial Calculus: *E Pluribus Unum* [1]**

### **Abstract:**

The article traces and discusses imperial vision and the history of *e pluribus unum* in the American New World. The article functions as a reminder to Americanists that the significance of *e pluribus unum* has never been limited to local and parochial issues, but has invariably signald an international complexity whose transnational dynamics have often been occluded behind the veil of integration, assimilation, and acculturation. As the article discusses, the inherent contradictions of ethnic integration in the Americas are rooted in ancient and global history, philological and political.

**Keywords:** ethnic integration, recognition, e pulribus unum,poetic

Processes of integration have always had transnational implications in America. These processes have also been highly contentious, when not outright conflictive. By America, as usual, I mean all of America, not just the USA, as I have explained amply in my presidential address to the founding congress of the International American Studies Association in Leiden in 2003 [2] and in my guest-editor's introduction to the special issue of the *PMLA* on the idea of America in the same year. [3] As is usually the case with human geographies defined by conquest and colonization, the integration of ethnic identities in the Western Hemisphere has been a transnational process by virtue of the fact that ethnic identities have rarely been coterminous with national borders. On the one hand, the phrase "ethnic identities" has often referred to cultures within nation-states where there is no historical or actual congruity between the jurisdictional boundaries of the state and all the cultures that it governs, as is the case, for example, in Canada, Guatemala, Peru, the USA, and, until very recently, Bolivia, where indigeneity and nation-state are far from coterminous. On the other hand, there are indigenous peoples, or first nations, whose life-world spans across borders of nation-states, as is the case, for example, of Paraguay and Brazil, Bolivia and Argentina, Ecuador and Peru, Venezuela and Colombia, Mexico and Guatemala, Canada and the U.S.A. Because of such historical complexities, *e pluribus unum* in America has been a problematic cipher. Despite its intended deployment as declarative of unity and harmonious blending, *e pluribus unum* has often served as ambiguous, if not paradoxical, marker for this incommensurability between ethnic identity and nation. It has also served as talisman for the fraught processes of imperial expansion and conflictive myths of integration, and continues to do so in the twenty-first century.

The ambiguities of the Latin trinomial are more than semantic. The term's cultural semiotics tracks a philological and political itinerary through a time of imperial universalism that dates from the first century B.C. The phrase has its origin in a time when the Roman Empire aspired to consolidate the multiple into the unitary, or the heterogeneous "multi-versal" plurality of peoples it conquered into the hegemonic "universal" of its imperial rule. Thus, it is not surprising that the term *e pluribus unum* should have its textual beginnings in Virgil, the epic voice of imperial Rome. Nor is it fortuitous that the Virgilian phrase should re-emerge as the national motto emblematic of the incipient United States of America (dubbed the "empire of liberty" by one of its founding fathers, Thomas Jefferson, in 1780) at a time when the newly-minted nation projected itself into future history by invoking mimetically the Republican Rome of Virgil's era and the imperial reign of his patrons: Maecenas, the influential court minister, and Octavian, who, in 27 B.C. became the Emperor Augustus Caesar. Mimed as well by the new republic of the U.S.A. are the ambivalences of Virgil's vocation as, on the one hand, epic poet of millennial empire through his *Aeneid*, commissioned by the Emperor Augustus and, on the other hand, as rustic bard of simplicity and

the idyllic pastoral. The phrase *e pluribus unum* originates in the latter, the georgic idyll of the poem “Moretum,” attributed to Virgil and collected as part of the *Appendix Virgiliana*. [4] The career of the phrase, however, has adhered more closely to, and has been more consequential in the former, the perennial history of imperial hegemony, certainly in its American avatars.

The history of *e pluribus unum* in the American New World, as you might recall, does not begin with the July 1776 committee of Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and John Adams, the triumvirate commissioned by the Continental Congress to design the Great Seal for the new nation. Some two hundred and fifty years earlier Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor and sovereign of America, Castille, Naples, the Low Countries, and numerous other geographical regions, had assumed the mantle of Augustus Caesar as emperor and took the Virgilian phrase as one of the talismans of his plural empire united in his majestic person. Virgil’s term, then, enters early modernity as imperial marker that subsumed the American Hemisphere as early as the first decades of the sixteenth century. Its recuperation by the founding fathers of the new republic of the U. S. A. was perhaps inevitable—an inevitability corroborated with steady regularity in the history of the last 230-some years. Recent history demonstrates that the move to adapt the phrase in 1776 continues to prove prophetic well into the twenty-first century and the beginning of the third millennium. Aside from the apparent historical inevitability of its imperial avatars, the recuperation of Virgil’s term from the 103<sup>rd</sup> verse of his georgic idyll entitled “Moretum,” should serve as reminder to all Americanists that the significance of *e pluribus unum* has never been limited to local or parochial issues, but has invariably signaled an international complexity whose transnational dynamics have often been occluded behind the veil of integration, assimilation, and acculturation. The causes and geneses of these up-rooting processes and their resultant historical necessity have often been elided, perhaps precisely because of the imperial and hegemonic nature of those root causes. The epistemological and disciplinary consequences of this elision have consisted in the shifting of focus away from the causes of the necessity for integration under the flag of the Virgilian formula. The historical record has focused, instead, on the effects of those unexamined causes. We could describe this as the documentary foregrounding of a discourse of manifest symptomatology. Skipped over in the process are the interrogation of motives, causes, reasons, and the diagnoses of their historical morphology. Consequently, the historiographic and sociological focus has been on the destination of displaced peoples, rather than on their displacement or the locus from which they have been displaced. In keeping with the teleological history of the New World, in other words, historical discourse and cultural analyses have been focused on the telos, the *terminus ad quem*, rather than on the point of departure and the reasons for departing or the governing logic of such points of departure. The origins of human dislocations, causal and geographical, are literally and epistemologically left behind. The scientific discourse

and its epistemes follow in the footsteps of the unidirectional movement toward the cultural and social habitus at the end of displacement, flight, or migration, where the migrant masses face the inevitable and uncertain prospects of transformative integration and problematic assimilation, often occluded in the cloak of invisibility of ideologically over-determinative phrases such as “the American dream.”

This epistemic complex takes on even greater complexity by the end of the twentieth, beginning of the twenty-first centuries, when integration, ethnic and otherwise, no longer even needs follow the displacement of people. As part of the dynamics of hegemonic globalization, people can now be integrated without the inconvenience of having to be dislocated, and without the burden their flight historically has imposed on destination countries or host nation states. People can now be rendered homeless at home, and integrated into global networks, ethnic and otherwise, just where they are. The latest supra-state and transnational realpolitik of the European Union, as well as the new immigration policies of the United States of America, now epitomized by the high-tech Tortilla Curtain at the southern border, seek to ensure that integration take place not at the end-point of population movements but at their point of origin, not by removal but by remote control through so-called “free-trade” agreements and restructuring of markets and local economies.

When we juxtapose the original moment of planetary integration at the end of the fifteenth century with its avatar at the beginning of the twenty-first century, we arrive at a keener appreciation of the historical processes implicit in *e pluribus unum*. Integration, then and now, signified forms of global consolidation. The momentous events of 1492 were momentous because of the identification of the earthly planetary sphere as composite of hemispheres, or half spheres, literally, that were finally combined into a unitary globe, or integral sphere. Thus, we still refer to the American New World as the “Western Hemisphere,” the half sphere that was joined to the other half after 1492. Integration, then, points to incorporative merging, or *corporate* consolidation as signaled by the motto of *e pluribus unum* in the Emperor Charles V’s royal incorporation and symbolic *embodiment* of his far-flung imperial territories.

We are now keenly aware that the amalgamation of disparate fractions occurs in ways that are invariably asymmetrical. The effects are uneven in their historical consequences for the integrated elements. This is the case whether we speak of ethnic integration, cultural integration, economic integration, genetic integration, or integration of any other kind. The Brazilian sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos, in a 2001 article resonant with the work of the nineteenth-century Cuban revolutionary poet José Martí, “*Nuestra América: Reinventing a Subaltern Paradigm of Recognition and Redistribution*,” defines these historical developments as “hegemonic globalization.” [5] It was not until the mid-twentieth century, 1940, to be exact, that the Cuban



ethnolinguist and cultural critic Fernando Ortiz in his now classic study on transculturation diagnosed the asymmetrically repercussive nature of these integrative processes. [6] Since Ortiz' critical discernment at the threshold of World War II, the focus on integration and the decoding of the Roman imperial formula *e pluribus unum* have come into new light by virtue of that cataclysmic war's consequences on demographic dislocations in Europe and the geographic shifts in the planet's populations. The authoritarian regimes and military dictatorships that ensued from U.S. military incursions and political interventions in Latin America during the so-called Cold War, along with the military debacle of the Vietnam War saw tangible repercussions in the "culture wars" of the 1980s and 1990s. Many of the displaced victims of U.S. militarism from South and Central America, like the Vietnam War refugees from South East Asia, found their way to the eye of the storm from where the military shockwaves that caused their dislocation emanated. During this time the academic discourse of *e pluribus unum* intensified, as documented by Todd Gitlin in his 1995 book *The Twilight of Common Dreams: Why America Is Wracked by Culture Wars*. [7] The critical diagnoses of the time were marked by an eminently culturalist discourse, by which I mean a discourse that tended to elide the historical, political, economic, and certainly the philological root causes for what came to be called "culture wars" in the U.S. The exception to this discursive or academic "culturalism" was the Black Power movement of the 1960s, as was the Migrant Workers campaign that consolidated itself into the Chicano movement. But even when the materiality of historical conditions was not overlooked, the critical discourse of multi-culturalism in the U.S. neutralized its political effectiveness and reformist efficacy in the fragmentary atomization of *pluribus* and in the solipsism of *unum* as identitarian soliloquy, as Sophia McClennen intimates in a recent reprise of the cultural and critical discourses of the 1980s. Her article is entitled "E Pluribus Unum, Ex Uno Plura: Legislating and Deregulating American Studies Post-9/11." [8] Perhaps the most detailed sociological documentation of the current status of ethnic diversity and its human factors in the U.S.A. is a report by Harvard professor Robert D. Putnam entitled "*E Pluribus Unum: Diversity and Community in the Twenty-first Century*." Putnam's study was originally delivered as the 2006 Johan Skytte Prize Lecture of the Nordic Political Science Association and published in 2007 in the journal *Scandinavian Political Studies*. [9] Though the report is limited to the arithmetical surveys and statistical data of its case studies, its raw sociological detail has great potential for critical and interpretive analysis.

The above-mentioned Brazilian Boaventura de Sousa Santos, basing himself on Fernando Ortiz' seminal treatise and its re-elaboration in contemporary Latin American cultural diagnoses such as Angel Rama's 1982 *Transculturación narrativa en América Latina* [10] and Roberto Fernández Retamar's 1971 essay *Caliban*, [11] translate the dynamics of transculturation into counter-hegemonic modes of convergence de Sousa Santos calls a "*theory of translation*," which he



defines as, “[a] given particular or local struggle (for instance, an indigenous or feminist struggle) only recognizes another (for instance, an environment or labor struggle) to the extent that both lose some of their particularism and localism. This occurs as mutual intelligibility between struggles is created” (192). One could argue with Sousa Santos, and, in fact, he argues with himself, on the logical plausibility of a simultaneous hegemonic globalization and a counter-hegemonic globalization, if globalization is indeed global, as happens to be the case especially in the first decade of the twenty-first century. But be that as it may, I invoke his work along with that of the Cuban and the Uruguayan cultural critics because their treatments of the question of ethnic integration raise the horizon of cultural history beyond local considerations, and beyond national and international analysis, to a world-systems purview. [12] In terms of such theoretical constructs articulated by Immanuel Wallerstein in the decade of the 1970s, the diagnoses of these Latin American critics inflect the problematics of *e pluribus unum* with a hemispheric and global dynamic that obliges us to examine the diverse vicissitudes of ethnic integration not only in their circumscribed national cases. Such constructs also oblige us to recall historical precedents such as the first globalization in the sixteenth century and to view these dynamics in terms of what those local instances signify in the larger international/global context in which the local variants are embedded, especially in what is now referred to as “the global south.” These critics oblige us to view history in its *long durée*, the materiality of that history in the context of macroeconomics, and the cultural politics encoded in what came to be the contemporary version of Virgil’s imperial *e pluribus unum* in the context of modernity’s global Realpolitik. Through this prism, the epistemic focus shifts beyond the culturalist parameters of symptomatology, celebratory or accusative, to encompass the causal or genealogical history of a larger politics and its determinacies that make their consequences felt in culture’s life world. One of the most articulate contemporary examples of this sort of critical reflection can be found in the Argentine-Mexican philosopher Enrique Dussel. [13] Ethnic integration, especially as derivative of Virgil’s imperial *e pluribus unum*, viewed in this light reveals the internal contradictions of the historical processes and discursive formations that characterize all modes of integration, ethnic and otherwise. It is through this prism that I view the significance of the phenomenon of *e pluribus unum* at this time.

The inherent contradictions of ethnic integration are rooted in ancient history, philological and political. And I submit that philology is eminently political and inseparable from matters of state and issues of polity. Those contradictions go back to the origins of the state, the city-state, to be exact, and the history of the term “ethnic.” In this regard, the current European Union is very much in conformity with the ideological paradigm it sees as its genealogical precursor, the Athenian democratic city-state of antiquity. Amply clear in this continuity is the EU’s latest legislation on immigrants and transnational migrant labor, which Fidel Castro has characterized as the epitome

of hypocrisy, and against which the member countries of South America's Mercosur are protesting vehemently in their vociferous response to those policies. [14] Mercosur, as you know, consists of full members Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay, with pending ratification of full membership for Venezuela. Associate members are Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru. Among Europe's eight million migrant laborers there are "hundreds of thousands of South Americans working in EU countries, many of them illegally," according to the BBC report I am citing here. All of them are subject to the new EU legislation, due to be implemented in less than two years. It will criminalize undocumented workers, with detention of up to eighteen months, and expulsion with a five-year ban on re-entry. The countries of Latin America are discovering, yet again, what it means to be ethnic, even as the metropolitan European Union is straining to integrate exogenous ethnicities already in Europe, while obviously preferring to integrate the rest by remote control, through the restructuring of international economies and local markets, which, for social scientists like Boaventura de Sousa Santos amounts to diverse forms of hegemonic globalization.

In these efforts, the supranational European Union echoes the pre-national city-state of Athens in its ambivalence toward peoples on its periphery. In Athenian antiquity the term that defined those outside the periphery of the polis was *ta ethne*, meaning "foreign peoples," the same Greek phrase that was used to translate the Hebrew Scriptures' term *goyim*, meaning *gentiles*. The Greek noun *ethnos* and the adjective *ethnikos*, which gave us "ethnic," referred to those who could not be admitted into the *polis* as citizens, but whose existence "in league," or in "federation," or in today's EU parlance, "special relationship" from the periphery was indispensable for the city-state's sustainability. Since then, the actual insertion of the exogenous ethnics into the endogenous *polis* has not meant their integration as much as it has signified a demographic cyst in the body politic. To be part of an *ethnos*, then, has meant to belong to a homogenous group distinguished by the racial, linguistic, and cultural characteristics particular to its members. Any degree or type of integration necessarily implied an intercultural transaction where the "foreign peoples" encountered *the people*; or "the nations" entered the realm of the Athenian city-state, the *polis*, which was the paradigm for the political and, hence, according to Aristotle, was the standard for the human (*Politics* 1235a2-3). Thus, the designation of "ethnic," then and now, signifies the status of not being fully of the city-state. There were no ethnic Athenians, just as the phrase "ethnic German" in Germany, or "ethnic French" in France, can only refer to Germans or French inhabitants of Germany or France who are not of German or of French ethno-racial origin and who, as in the French case, might be considered French citizens *de jure*, though not recognized or treated *de facto* as such.

"Recognition" has, in fact, emerged as a key term in the politics of ethnic integration and in the

realpolitik of *e pluribus unum*. Along with its related term “redistribution,” the two define the stresses, ambiguities, and contradictions of these cultural, economic, and political processes, whether in the American Hemisphere, or in Europe and its transatlantic interactions. Here is how Boaventura de Sousa Santos highlights the polar significance of these two key terms, in the sense of Raymond Williams’ usage of the phrase “key words”: “At the beginning of the new century, after almost 20 years of fierce neoliberal globalization, the balance between the two poles must be retrieved. From the perspective of an oppositional postmodernity, the idea that there is no recognition without redistribution is central [...]. Perhaps the best way to formulate this idea today is to resort to a modernist device, the notion of a fundamental meta-right: the right to have rights. We have the right to be equal whenever difference diminishes us; we have the right to be different whenever equality decharacterizes us. We have here a normative hybrid: it is modernist because based on an abstract universalism, but it is formulated in such a way as to sanction a postmodern opposition based on both redistribution [equality] and recognition [identity]” (Sousa Santos 191-192).

As insightful as Sousa Santos’ articulation might be, what he did not anticipate when he was writing this in 2001 is that by the end of the decade the human struggle of the ethnic within, and the resistance of those *ethnes* outside who are targeted by occupation, ideological zeal, and the depredations of capital, would be consumed by the struggle for meta-rights, or the defense of the possibility for the right to have rights, rather than actually ever arriving at the point of having any rights per se. The hegemonic powers and occupying colonists have ensured, strategically, that the realization of any rights always remains “meta-rights”—an epiphenomenon at least one remove from reality. Those targeted by hegemony and occupation, thus, are perpetually virtualized or derogated into the ghostliness of a meta-reality, just as their rights are held in abeyance while the question of meta-rights, or the right to have rights, is rhetorically deliberated and discursively disputed. As a result of this strategy, the greater the possibility for success of integration becomes, the more tactically the “integrated” are removed toward disintegration and into unreality. The most egregious example of this predicament are the indigenous people of America in reservations, the indigenous people of the Middle East under occupation—from Gaza to Afghanistan—, and the undocumented aliens in the metropolis itself who are integral to the economy, but are rendered invisible within the social and political life world that draws its lifeblood from their labor.

I would like to add a third dimension to Sousa Santos’ neo-modernist dialectic whose polar terms of opposition converge into a postmodern simultaneity of equality—called “redistribution” by Sousa Santos—, and identity, which he characterizes as “recognition.” This third dimension I propose is *not* the product of a dialectical oscillation between oppositional movements that intersect in postmodern virtual dis-integration or spectralization. Sousa Santos’ delineation is marked by an

unmistakable Hegelian dialectic whose terms of redistribution and recognition resonate with the binary of distributive and retributive justice. This is at the heart of what he defines as a counter-hegemonic mode of globalization. Its telos, however, much in the Hegelian fashion, is the Spirit, where the human beings and human agency become ghosted into a plurality of spirits, the *pluribus* out of which is born the spectral revenant of *unum*. I propose to add here the possibility of a third dynamic, that of *poiesis* and the poetic, which point us toward “poetic justice.”

By *poetic* in this context I mean the enabling possibility to opt out of the oscillatory counterpoint between commensurable otherness (equality, or “redistribution,” in Sousa Santos’ terms) and self-identity (“recognition,” per Sousa Santos, retribution, or the re-attribution of identicalness to one’s selfhood). The *poetic*, as I view it, breaks with this dialectical entrapment and its barren, resolute syncretism (what Sousa Santos calls “a normative hybrid”) and, instead, forges, constructs, or makes (what the verbal actions of *poiesis* imply) a more emancipatory life world, a cultural existence that de-defines the vise of oscillatory dialectic between abstracted rights and metaleptic, or doubly figurative meta-rights. The meta-rights and the “normative hybridity” Santos speaks of are the realm of the doubly unreal, of ghosted or of virtualized sub-alternity—invisible Indians in the American context, un-recognized and, therefore, zombied terrorists in the context of the globalized hegemony of occupation and colonization in many other parts of the world. What I call the poetic should return us to the more dynamic transaction of what Fernando Ortiz identified as “transculturation,” a process that is not a synthesis that subsumes the elements of the encounter and dispatches them toward the evanescent aleatoriness or *aufhebung* of Spirit, but a process in which those social actors and historical factors that come into interaction retain identifiable and identifying traces that predate the inexorable transformations of the encounter. Sousa Santos, and most dialectical materialists, in hindsight, I believe, would readily grant us as much, especially in view of what the haunted first decade of the twenty-first century has experienced.

What *poiesis* and poetic justice make possible, in addition to the convergence rehearsed by Sousa Santos, is the productive aftereffect—a continuity through and beyond the historical juncture of integration. This is the dynamic signification of the Greek term *poiesis* as combinatorial operation that does not stop with the syncretism and its ghostly demarcations, but continues to bedevil and compound the phenomena of the encounter and their material significations. *Poiesis* is literally the combinatorial process of “making,” “formation,” and trans-formation. The *poetic* is the discerning enablement that allows us to countenance a worldly predicament and make something of it. It is rooted, as you all know, in the verb *poiein*, meaning, “to make,” from which we derive *poiesis* “creation,” and which makes for poetry, especially concrete poetry, which, as a Brazilian, Boaventura de Sousa Santos should know well.

There are multiple productive ambiguities here, ambiguities with which our formation in literary studies trains us to co-exist, rather than succumbing to the easier course of disambiguation and reduction, or to their expedient dismissal when they are politically inconvenient for us. The *poetic* is the formation and training that gives us the wherewithal to co-habit in the world with the contradictions of integration and the oppositional challenges of *e pluribus unum*. The *poetic*, most importantly, furnishes an interpretive acuity and an ethical stamina that takes us beyond the rationalizing of the contradictions and ambiguities we are obliged to live with. It enables us to question and investigate, forensically, if necessary, the normativity of what Santos calls, in the passage just cited, the “normative hybrid” that issues as postmodern opposition from a modernist abstract universalism. We must elucidate the fact that in this hybridity of oppositions or self-contradictions, the most egregious acts of lawlessness could be rationalized or dismissively shrugged off as expedient norm with the glibness of “so what?”, or “democracy is messy,” or “stuff happens.” Redistribution and recognition, or equality and identity, do not suffice precisely because of their precariousness and their vulnerability. History demonstrates that we are, and actually have been, fully capable of recognizing and conceding the identity of others only to more effectively usurp and destroy them. We have demonstrated in human history that we could all coexist equally in criminality. In this regard, perhaps the most ethnically integrated command cohort in the history of the U.S. government has been the regime of George W. Bush during this first decade of the twenty-first century, with a black woman Secretary of State, a Chicano Secretary of the Department of Justice, a Zionist Director of the National Security Council, a Chinese American legal scholar-specialist on international law and the Geneva Conventions, and a strongly homogeneous ethnic cabal of Neoconservative ideologues that have defined the agenda for a global realpolitik for what they claim as *their* new century. Our “universal consensus,” to paraphrase Jean-François Lyotard’s critique of Jürgen Habermas’ ideology of communication, could well be a screen for tyranny and terror, or, in Lyotard’s words, “conversational imperialism.” [15] Lyotard’s apprehensions on consensus, expressed in a published conversation with Richard Rorty in 1985, are now starkly illustrated by historical reality during the first decade of the twenty-first century in that baneful avatar of *e pluribus unum* that calls itself the “coalition of the willing.”

The *poetic* I propose for this complex equation is the quotient that can help us calibrate what we make of the worldly conditions we must face, what we do with and what we do about those circumstances once we can discern, recognize, and identify them. Yes, indeed, the *poetic* happens to be an ethical dimension, a dimension that one could only mention apologetically since it has so little currency in public discourse and so little cache in private expression at this historical moment. The *poetic* I propose is the link between the *ethnos* and the *ethos*, or the bridge between ethnicity and ethicality. The *poetic* is what foregrounds the complications of integration, ethnic or culinary.

This is the third dimension in Virgil's poem that is elided by those founding fathers of the U.S.A. charged with designing the national emblem in 1776 and who discovered their motto in the Roman poet's georgic idyll "Moretum." The *poetic* in that particular act of appropriation is a dimension that was, and has been since, relegated to oblivion. I hope you do not mind if we revisit it briefly.

At a most elemental level, the *poetic* dimension, as we could exercise it in the life world of the cultural and the social, makes it possible for us to recognize and to live productively with the connotative resonances of Virgil's poem and the imperial implications beyond the idealized georgics of the pastoral imputed to him. It is the performative demonstration and political contents of this legacy that we must bring, as a third dimension, to the social and cultural discourse of equality and identity, of recognition and distribution, in the social scientist's lexicon.

By way of demonstration, then, here is one instance of the *poetic* third dimension and what it comprises in the inheritance we have taken from Virgil as his posterity through his poem: In the paradox of a postmodern élan from Virgil's pre-modernity (remember, the poem dates from the first century B.C.), Virgil reminds us meta-discursively, or meta-poetically, that his poem is a poem. He does this ambiguously, that is, in a two-handed way, but without capitulating the concrete reality of his poem and of its moment. Virgil accomplishes this by allusion to another poem of which Virgil's own is a re-enactment or "reproduction." Then, narratively, through the dramatization of a combinatorial process, he integrates disparate elements into making or performing through *poiesis* a production that is signified by the title of the work, "Moretum." The "reproductive" performance consists, according to the editor of Virgil's Loeb Classics edition, [16] H. Rushton Fairclough, of the likely rendering of a Greek poem by Parthenius. Parthenius of Nicaea was a Greek poet who was brought to Rome as a prisoner of war in 73 B.C. Once freed from slavery, he settled in Italy and worked as a poet and teacher. Virgil was one of Parthenius' students. This is one phase of integration, of Greek elegiac poetry into Roman idyll and into the poetic work of Rome's imperial epic poet. Next, the subject of the poem, starting with its title, reflectively enacts the combinatorial poetic process through self-recognition. "Moretum" is an eclectic mixture of garden herbs, consisting of garlic, parsley, coriander, rue, all blended with cheese and seasoned with salt, olive oil and vinegar, and formed into a ball. Verse 103 of the poem speaks of the resulting blend as "color est e pluribus unus [sic]." It is from this chromatic characterization of the mixture that *e pluribus unum* is derived.

There is yet another *poetic* dimension, perhaps most literally connected to the two terms of equality and identity, or redistribution and recognition. This is the ethno-political dimension whose discernment the *poetic* makes possible. It is suggested in Virgil's poem through the *dramatis personae*, the *prosopopoeia*, or putting a face on the issues encoded and signified by the poem.



These consist in the poor farmer Simylus and his one house servant, the black African woman Scybale, who bakes the farmer's bread that accompanies the "moretum." [17] Scybale is likely Simylus' manumitted slave turned into a domestic. Thus, if Virgil derives his poem from the freed war prisoner, the Greek Parthenius, who became his teacher and poetic precursor, the freed slave Scybale is the baker of Simylus' daily bread and his female companion. The relationship between the two characters of the poem mirrors not only the derivation of the poem itself and the poetic career of the poet Virgil, it also reflects the subject of the poem designated by the title, which names the depicted phenomenon—a mixture in substance and in chromatic value, both derived from blending a diversity of elements.

Virgil's poem, as a classic, has proved its enduring relevance in offering the founding fathers of the new U.S. republic a signifying enablement—a significant semiotic precedent for capturing the ideological thrust of a historic moment, its encodation as political descriptor, as desideratum, and as portent for the future. The poem's efficacy continues to be viable for us and for the poetic discernments we must attain in the context of discursive and critical predicaments that history imposes on us at this moment. Chief among these discernments is the unavoidable obligation to recognize that the human integration at the heart of Virgil's poem glosses over something very important—the insurmountable difference between Simylus and Scybale. This consists in the unevenness that no redistributive process, or act of recognition, should be able to hide from us given what we have learned from history—the history of Virgil's poem and our own history in the last two millennia as reflected in the political career of that poem. Behind the harmonious chromatics of its georgic idyll, we should be able to discern the asymmetry in the convivial *métissage* depicted by the poem. We now know, or should know, that this is the inevitable asymmetry that characterizes even the most ideal processes of integration between, or among, human subjects, especially when the differential marks of their heterogeneity entail gender, ethnicity, race, class, collective history, and personal biography.

These are differential elements that no mode of integration can overlook, and no mode of integration can afford to succumb to. The first, overlooking, ensures failure by omission. The latter, enthrallment, inevitably blinds by mystification. Difference disdained is no less perilous than difference overvalued and fetishized. As the Brazilian Sousa Santos phrases it in the passage already cited, "[w]e have the right to be equal whenever difference diminishes us; we have the right to be different whenever equality decharacterizes us. We have here a normative hybrid." I maintain that this oscillatory distance between difference and equality has to be continuously assessed and renegotiated. Instrumental in that negotiation is what I have endeavored to define here as the *poetic*, or the discerning faculty that makes it possible for us to decide what to make of the inevitable asymmetries in human interaction and what to do with the "normative hybrid" that issues



from even the most successful processes of integration. Integration, I submit, is not an end or telos, but an intermediate threshold. The ethical discernment of the *poetic* is what enables us to define the possibilities of how to approach, cross, and move beyond that threshold, even as we do so in anticipation of yet another threshold before us. The greatest resistance to the *poetic* and its ethical dimension historically has been the reductive calculus of *Unum*, whether as devouring antithesis to *Pluribus*, or as imperial telos and self-justification as an end in itself.

The elision of asymmetries in human factors integral to processes of integration, starting with Virgil's own historical moment, is not an oversight. Rather, it reflects, symptomatically, an imperial calculus that Virgil himself inscribes in the more canonical corpus of his *Georgics*. These factors and their subtending calculus could well be the trademarks of an idealized "normative hybrid," to use Sousa Santos' phrase once more, that make Virgil attractive to the founding fathers of the new U.S. Republic in 1776. Certainly, Virgil's elision in the "Moretum," namely, the master-slave relationship integral to the prosopopoeia of *e pluribus unus*[sic] was significantly apposite to the ironic oversight of the emancipatory project of the founders of U.S. independence, namely, slavery of Africans and forced displacement of indigenous populations. These were elements omitted from Virgil's idylls, though they were integral to the historical reality of the Roman countryside celebrated in his poetry. There is something hauntingly resonant still in the *Georgics*, which was completed by the year 29 B.C., a resonance still significant, certainly reminiscent even now, of the historical moment at the beginning of our twenty-first century. It occurs in the coda of book 4, the last of the *Georgics*, which closes with the celebration of Julius Caesar's military expedition in the East, a mission that will have served as precedent for empire's self-justification, and continues to justify the imperial calculus of a monadic world, or the new world order's *E Pluribus Unum* as One World:

This song of husbandry of crops and beasts  
And fruit-trees I was singing while great Caesar  
Was thundering beside the deep Euphrates  
In war, victoriously for grateful peoples  
Appointing laws and setting his course for Heaven.  
(bk. 4, lines 558-562). [18]

The integration of ethnicities and barbarians to the fold of civilization, then, has its genesis in Rome's Augustan Empire. New Caesars have repeatedly embarked since, and continue to embark still, on missions of liberation to bring the laws of Man and the light of Heaven to "grateful peoples" on the banks of the Euphrates, expected to greet invading armies with flowers and songs of gratitude. That civilizing mission, whose zeal intensified once it was anointed with the sanctity of religion, as I have documented in my 1992 book on Columbus and Europe's prophetic rhetoric as conquering ideology, [19] would underwrite the conquest and colonization of the American New World under the standard of *E Pluribus Unum* as the motto of Charles V the Holy Roman Emperor

and as the founding motto of what has emerged as modernity's imperial republic and its bellicose *Pax Americana*. As the Salvationist mission enunciated by Virgil passed through the second British imperial era at the end of the nineteenth century, the imperial torch passed on to the U.S.A. was poetically re-calculated by Rudyard Kipling as "the white man's burden" [20] following the Spanish American War and the American conquest of the Philippines at the threshold of the twentieth century. The peroration in Virgil's last georgic figures as "the earliest statement of what was to be the Augustan imperial ideal." [21] It is an ideal still very much alive today, at the beginning of the third millennium.

## Endnotes

- [1] The text of this essay is based on my plenary lecture at the Center for Interdisciplinary Research of Bielefeld University, Germany, on October 8-11, 2008, on the occasion of a conference on the topic of "*E Pluribus Unum?*—Ethnic Identities in Processes of Transnational Integration in the Americas." I am grateful to my distinguished colleagues and their graduate students at Bielefeld University for their gracious hospitality and intellectual camaraderie.
- [2] Djelal Kadir, "Defending America Against Its Devotees," in *How Far Is America From Here? Selected Proceedings of the First World Congress of the International American Studies Association 22-24 May 2003*. Co-edited by Theo D'haen, Paul Giles, Djelal Kadir, and Lois Parkinson Zamora. Amsterdam/New York: Editions Rodopi, 2005. Pp. 13-34.
- [3] Djelal Kadir, "Introduction: America and its Studies," *PMLA*, 118:1 (January 2003): 9-24.
- [4] I am referring to P. Virgili Maronis, "Moretum," in *The Eclogues, Georgics and Moretum of Virgil*. George Stuart, ed. (Philadelphia: Edredge & Brother, 1876), pp. 99-102. On the *Appendix Virgiliana*, see, Gian Biagio Conte, *Latin Literature, A History*. Trans. Joseph B. Solodow (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1994), especially pp.430-433.
- [5] Boaventura de Sousa Santos, "Nuestra América: Reinventing a Subaltern Paradigm of Recognition and Redistribution," *Theory, Culture and Society* 18:2-3 (2001): 185-217.
- [6] Fernando Ortiz, *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azucar* (1940). Barcelona: Ariel, 1973.
- [7] Todd Gitlin, *The Twilight of Common Dreams: Why America Is Wracked by Culture Wars* (New York: Henry Holt, 1995).
- [8] Sophia McClennen, "E Pluribus Unum, Ex Uno Plura: Legislating and Deregulating American Studies Post-9/11," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 8:1 (2008): 155-185.
- [9] Robert D. Putnam, "E Pluribus Unum: Diversity and Community in the Twenty-first Century, originally delivered as The 2006 Johan Skytte Prize Lecture," *Scandinavian Political Studies* 30.2 (2007): 137-174.
- [10] Angel Rama, *Transculturación narrativa en América Latina*. México: Siglo XXI, 1982.
- [11] Roberto Fernández Retamar, *Caliban and Other Essays*, trans. Edward Baker, forward by Frederic Jameson. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.
- [12] On world-systems theory, see Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World Economy in the Sixteenth Century*. New York: Academic Press, 1974.
- [13] See, for example, Dussel's *Ética de la Liberación en la edad de la Globalización y de la Exclusión*. México: Editorial Trotta-UAM.I-UNAM, 1998; 3rd. ed. 2000 and 1492: *El encubrimiento del Otro*. Madrid: Nueva Utopía, 1992.
- [14] See, "Mercosur anger at EU migrant laws," BBC NEWS: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/americas/7482767.stm> Published: 2008/07/01 09:09:59 GMT; also, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/americas/7482767.stm> Published: 2008/07/02 00:05:21 GMT. See also, "EU Passes Tough Migrant Measure," <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/19/world/europe/19migrant.html?hp#>.
- [15] For the most concise statement of Lyotard's pointed critique of Habermas' consensus, see, Jean-François Lyotard and Richard Rorty, 'Discussion', *Critique*, 41 (1985), 581-584.
- [16] *Virgil, I, Eclogues. Georgics, Aeneid. Books 1-6*. Trans. H. Roushton Fairclough. Revised by G. P. Goold. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1916.

- [17] Fitzgerald William, "Labor and the Laborer in Latin Poetry: The Case of the Moretum." *Arethusa* 29: 3 (Fall 1996): 389-418
- [18] *Virgil. The Georgics*. L. P. Wilkinson, trans. Penguin Classics (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1982), 143.
- [19] Djelal Kadir, *Columbus and the Ends of the Earth: Europe's Prophetic Rhetoric as Conquering Ideology* (Berkeley & London: University of California Press, 1992).
- [20] Rudyard Kipling, "The White Man's Burden," (1899): <http://www.online-literature.com/kipling/922/>
- [21] *Virgil. The Georgics*, translator's note to line 561, p. 160.

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## **The Centrality of the Canada-US Border for Hemispheric Studies of the Americas**

### **Abstract:**

This article moves the Canada-US border from a position of latecomer to hemispheric studies toward a place of centrality for theories of boundary-making, migration, and border enforcement in the Americas. Nineteenth-century US attempts to control native mobility occurred simultaneously at both borders with Canada and Mexico, and turn-of-the twentieth century US efforts to enforce the Canadian boundary against Chinese immigrants preceded and influenced later changes at Mexico's northern border. Since that time, developments at the two national boundaries have become more explicitly interconnected. The comparative perspective developed in this article questions the differential construction of the two boundaries in hemispheric studies and moves beyond the singular focus on contemporary Mexico-US border developments that threatens to replicate the very notion of US exceptionalism which an interest in this border geography was originally meant to challenge.

**Keywords:** Canada-US border, Mexico-US border, boundary-making, border enforcement, migration

Scholarship on the Canada-US boundary has come late to the study of global borders. In the 1980s and 1990s when geographers, economists, anthropologists, and social and political scientists examined the Mexico-US border as an exemplar for theories about globalization in the Americas, few scholars were studying the boundary between the United States and Canada. If they did so, they tended to focus on asymmetries in the relationship between the two countries (Konrad and Nicol 76). Social scientists, especially in political science, anthropology and geography, became interested in the national border between Canada and the United States after it became clear that the site would also be impacted by 1990s free trade initiatives (Konrad and Nicol 76). The border has come into even clearer focus since its enforcement after September 11, 2001, which invoked similarities to developments along the Mexico-US boundary. Peter Andreas has argued that reactions to the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks initiated the “Mexicanization” of the Canada-US border after cross-border migration, smuggling, and the potential passage of terrorists across both US land boundaries became evaluated as major threats to US security.

But parallels among the two border locations have a much longer history. Indigenous mobility began to be controlled in the mid-nineteenth century at both North American boundaries, and the late nineteenth-century hardening of the Canada-US border against immigration preceded, modeled, and influenced much of the later developments at Mexico’s northern border. Since the end of that century, changes at the two boundary sites have become even more explicitly interconnected.

A comparative perspective on the two land borders in North America challenges the persistent and singular focus on the Mexico-US boundary in US hemispheric scholarship that continues to largely ignore the US boundary with its northern neighbor. While the origins of hemispheric studies can be traced to nineteenth- and early twentieth century work by José Martí and Herbert Eugene Bolton, a host of inter-American scholarship emerged in the mid-1980s and early 1990s. [1] Produced mainly in Latin American studies, comparative literature, and Chicana/o studies, this work developed topographically comparative models of the Americas that sometimes also included the Caribbean or (marginally) Canada. [2] In the 1990s, several transnational models of study, such as the Black Atlantic, the trans-Pacific, New World studies, and inter-American studies emerged. [3] While most of these perspectives focus on diasporic connections between U.S. ethnic and racial groups and their areas of geographies of origin, New World and hemispheric studies are grounded in a more geographically-based perspective that explores historical and contemporary connections among events, people, communities, and geographies in the Americas, and that has largely neglected Canada. [4] The emphasis on the Southwest (often equated with the Mexico-US border) and its Latino-Chicana/o populations is indebted to Gloria Anzaldúa’s influential book *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1986). In it, Anzaldúa employed the borderlands concept in order to symbolize Chicana

opposition to exclusion from the benefits of US citizenship and from 1950s-1970s Chicano cultural nationalism. Her notion of borderlands became one of the guiding metaphors of Chicana/o studies and also centrally shaped the emergence of transnational and hemispheric perspectives in US American Studies. [5]

While scholarship on the Mexico-US border was immensely influential for the re-emergence and consolidation of hemispheric studies in the 2000s, the persistent and singular focus on this location threatens to replicate the notion of US exceptionalism that an interest in this border geography was originally meant to challenge. The study of national borders more generally also continues to be shaped by the emphasis on the Mexico-US context despite the field's original orientation toward borders worldwide. [6] So far, the scale of scholarship about the border between Mexico and the United States does not have an equivalent in any other, equally as well-known or institutionalized approach to one specific national border anywhere in the world. [7]

Some practitioners of Mexico-US border studies have recently begun to acknowledge the importance of Canada's southern border. In her recent account of Western borderlands history Kelly Lytle Hernández, for example, writes that "[b]attles over migration, smuggling, and the environment also shaped everyday life in the northern borderlands. This new research pushes for a reconsideration of the region as a conflict zone, opens new avenues to examine how border struggles and foreign relations shaped the uneven development of the American West, sharpens our understanding of the U.S.-Mexico border as differently rather than uniquely contested, and forces more nuanced analyses of each border's evolution" ("Borderlands" 327). [8]

Rather than accepting the role of the Canada-US border as a latecomer to border studies, however, I want to move it to a place of centrality for theories of boundary-making, migration, and enforcement in the Americas that also pay attention to the US ascendance as an empire, notions of settler colonialism, and attendant processes of racialization. US border enforcement was closely linked to competing settler colonial projects in the nineteenth- and twentieth centuries (Chang 4), the United States' ascendance to empire status, and to the racialization of indigenous people as well as immigrants from Asia and Latin America. Such a comparative lens shifts beyond the singular focus on contemporary Mexico-US border developments or the view that they might serve as a model for the analysis of other national boundaries. At the same time, a comparative perspective also highlights how contemporary processes of border enforcement, exclusion, and racialization, which tend to be almost exclusively discussed with regards to the Mexico-US border, have affected Canada's southern boundary with the United States.



## Histories of US Border Enforcement

Established in the process of US imperial expansion, both US land borders initially developed in a parallel yet indirect relationship to one another in the larger context of competition among colonial empires and their nation-state successors in the Americas. The US desire for the acquisition of territories held by other colonial powers played a major part in the establishment and enforcement of both boundaries. Today's Canada-US border was created in the 1713 Treaty of Utrecht between France and Britain. The treaty settled differences among two competing colonial empires by designating a boundary at 49 degrees north latitude. Other treaties between the United States and Britain, such as the 1818 Convention of Commerce and the 1846 Oregon Treaty, further established, at the same latitude, the northern boundary of the Louisiana Purchase and the Oregon territory. [9] The United States' border with Mexico was created as a result of the 1848 Mexico-US war, which compelled Mexico to give up half of its territory to the United States. While historians have examined how each boundary was delineated over long stretches of time, comparative histories of border-making still remain to be written. [10]

Of the two boundaries, the Canada-US border was the first to become enforced by military means during the 1775-6 US War of Independence and the War of 1812-1814 between the United States and Britain when a variety of forts and war vessels were employed to militarize the border. In a bloodless transfer of power from Great Britain, Canada became a dominion in 1867. After the 1871 Treaty of Washington initiated an era of peace between the United States and Canada, the border became demilitarized. Financing for forts was converted to support for the transcontinental railway (Stacey 12).

When colonial empires and nation-states laid claim to native territories that had become borderlands, this process also involved attempts to contain the sovereignty of indigenous peoples and limit their rights to freely cross the newly established national borders. Conflicts arose in the 1860s and 1870s when settlement on both sides of the Canada-US boundary expanded and the US government intensified its efforts to confine native people to the international boundaries of reservations.

In 1864, Shakopee and Wakanozhan, two prominent leaders of the Mdewakanton Dakota bands that sought sanctuary from US troops after the 1862 Minnesota River valley uprisings by crossing the forty-ninth parallel, were forcibly taken back across the border in a secret plot hatched by a US official. On the US side, the two men were tried and eventually hanged in 1865. British officials did not formally protest this act of extraordinary rendition even though they had earlier refused to give

into settler demands to allow the US military to cross the border in pursuit of the Dakotas. This lack of official protest indicated the imminent transformation of the former Hudson Bay Company territories north of the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel into a new settler domain that required the dispossession of indigenous people (Hogue 2010).

When members of the Sioux, Nez Perce, and Métis crossed the border to seek refuge from repressive nation-state policies in United States a decade later, after Canada had officially become a Dominion, they were also not welcomed there (LaDow 28). Most famously, Sitting Bull, the leader of the Hunkpapa Sioux, found only temporary refuge in Canada after defeating General Custer's forces at the battle of Little Bighorn in 1876. Insufficient support by the Canadian government which instead urged him to return to the United States as well as failed alliances with other borderland tribes eventually forced the Sioux back into the United States where Sitting Bull surrendered to the US government in 1881 (LaDow 31-32).

Aside from failing to provide sanctuary to indigenous people, the existence of the national border allowed the division of native people into "US" and "Canadian" tribes and thus enabled settlers and governments to articulate demands to place limitations on native cross-border mobility (Seltz 93-4). As early as the mid-1870s, settlers in British Columbia joined some in the state of Washington to voice concerns about the bordercrossings of indigenous people who supposedly brought diseases across the border. Settlers demanded that native people, particularly "northern tribes" who were deemed especially unhealthy, should be excluded from entry into the United States (Seltz 95). While these demands remained local and never appealed to either country's government for support, the projection of diseases onto the bodies of native people resembled later discourses about immigrants that lead to the institution of medical inspections at Ellis Island in the 1890s, Angel Island in 1907, and along the Mexico-US border in the 1920s (Seltz 95). The existence of the border also allowed the exclusion of tribes like the Cree and the border-straddling Métis, whose mixed identity precluded them from gaining treaty rights and their own reserve in Canada, from US territory and US reservations. Marked as "foreign," these groups became subject to penalties by the Department of Indian Affairs or removal by the US army (Hogue 2010, 73). In the 1870s, the US army evicted Métis and Crees from northern Montana, and by the 1880s, the Cree had largely left the US borderlands (Hogue 2004, 89, 101). In 1896, the US army deported several Crees who had petitioned for US citizenship (Hogue 2006, 155).

Along the Mexico-US border, efforts to control the cross-border mobility of native people and confine them to reservations intensified somewhat later than at the Canada-US border in the 1870s and 1880s. In the context of declining Mexican diplomatic and military power and expanding US markets, by the 1830s and 1840s Comanches, Kiowas, Navajos and several Apache bands had

shifted their raiding patterns to Mexico's northern borderlands. As Brian DeLay has argued, these attacks devastated northern Mexico's economy and depopulated the countryside, helping to clear the way for the defeat of the Mexican forces in the war with the United States. In the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo that created the border, the US government agreed to police the newly established international boundary in order to prevent cross-border raids by tribes that now resided in US territory. After several skirmishes with US government forces, the Comanches and their Kiowa allies surrendered in the 1870s.

But the US army continued to engage in border conflicts with Geronimo and his band of Chiricahua Apaches well into the 1880s. The band attempted to escape confinement at San Carlos after another Apache reservation at Chiricahua was dissolved in 1875 because its proximity to the border was believed to enable raids into Mexico (St. John 55-57). As early as 1850, an Indian agent had articulated the notion that "no Indian tribe should be located nearer than one hundred miles of the line of Mexico" (qtd. in St. John 57). The dissolution of the Chiricahua reservation because of its location near the border anticipated contemporary political constructions of US land boundaries as extended border zones, zones of exceptionality, rather than as clearly demarcated lines between two countries. Just as native people were to be largely cleared from border zones in the nineteenth century, today each US land boundary is regarded as a security radius of 35 to 100 miles, where immigration checkpoints can function as the equivalent of the international boundary and where Fourth Amendment Rights necessitating probable cause for arrest can be suspended in order to enforce US immigration legislation. This practice follows the statutory interpretation of section 287 (a) (3) of the Immigration Act of 1952, which authorizes officers to search vehicles "within a reasonable distance from any external boundary of the United States," with "reasonable" being interpreted to mean 100 miles (Mirandé 380).

As they resisted confinement to a reservation located far from the border, Geronimo's band outmaneuvered both the US military and Mexican forces by using the existence of the national boundary to its advantage. Only an 1882 reciprocal crossing agreement between Mexico and the United States that allowed troops to pursue native people into the neighboring country put an end to this practice (St. John 55-59). As in the earlier case of Sitting Bull and the Canada-US border, by the 1880s the Mexico-US border space thus only ended up offering temporary sanctuary for Geronimo and his band. [11]

The 1882 agreement between Mexico and the United States that enabled the US military to cross the border in pursuit of native people did not, however, also serve as a model for cooperation between the two countries when it came to controlling Chinese cross-border migration. The 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act banned virtually all ethnically Chinese immigrants from entering the United

States, created the Chinese Division inside the Immigration Service, and implemented a requirement that Chinese immigrants needed to produce certificates of return, residency or identity to document their exception from exclusion. While many immigrants subsequently arrived at official US ports with fraudulent documents, others used national differences in immigration law between the US and neighboring countries to enter via US land borders (Lee 196-7). As both US borders became enforced in response to the exclusion of Chinese immigrants, the new policies first affected the Canada-US boundary.

Whereas the two borders had until this time developed in parallel ways in response to attempts to control indigenous mobility in the face of new settlement, westward expansion, and resource extraction, the crossings by immigrants from Asia began to link the two boundary geographies more explicitly with each other. Policy-making at the Canada-US border shaped later developments at Mexico's northern boundary. Because Canada's 1885 Chinese Immigration Act made entry into Canada more difficult but not illegal, Chinese immigrants began traveling to Canada and then traversed the unsupervised boundary into the United States. Between the 1880s and the early 1900s a few thousand Chinese entered the country every year via this border (Lee 153). [12] These increases in Chinese immigration were accompanied by growing numbers of Japanese who also began to travel to Canada after the passage of the 1907 US Executive Order that excluded those involved in secondary migration from Hawaii. The order made it impossible for Japanese citizens who did not have passports for the United States to come directly from Hawaii to the US mainland (Geiger 208). In response, Japanese immigrants went to Canada, many with the ultimate goal of crossing the border into the United States (Geiger 215). Immigrants from South Asia soon also used this route after Canada passed its 1908 Continuous Journey Order, which was designed to prevent the immigration of South Asians who had to change steam ships in either Hong Kong or Shanghai (Chang 158).

While the US and Canadian governments negotiated separate voluntary bans on the immigration of Japanese laborers in 1908, the two nations also began to coordinate their efforts to enforce US immigration law against Asian—and increasingly also European—immigrants. In the 1880s and 1890s, the Canada-US border became a popular route for Europeans wanting to avoid increasing restrictions at US ports of entry, especially the enforcement of the 1885 Foran Act, which barred all immigrants from entering the country if they were under contract or agreement to perform labor in the United States. A special congressional committee report in 1891 estimated that 50,000 Europeans were crossing the border in the second half of 1890, a number that equaled approximately 22 percent of all total immigrants admitted to the United States (Ramirez 41-42).

In 1894, Canada and the United States negotiated the so-called Canadian agreement, which made Canadian transportation companies responsible for returning immigrants who were excluded by US immigrant inspectors. These inspectors were stationed outside of US soil at Canadian seaports along the northern land border in order to enforce US law (Smith 129). In addition, between 1905 and 1910 the Canada-US border became further enforced by US customs agents and Canadian immigration officers. Chinese immigrants were treated most harshly. In 1910, the United States closed all northern land border ports to Chinese immigrants and routed them via Halifax to Boston, where they had to apply for admission to the United States (Smith 146). In 1920, the United States and Canada finally agreed upon a firm boundary line to be supervised by custom and immigration officials (McIlwraith 54). In 1923, Canada passed its own Chinese Exclusion law.

The gradual closure of the Canada-US border shifted undocumented immigration to the then largely unguarded border with Mexico, which in the early 1900s became the greatest trouble spot for Chinese undocumented movement (Lee 159). Because direct steamship travel between China and Mexico did not commence until 1902, Chinese immigrants first traveled to the United States, sailed to Mexico, and then crossed the border by themselves or with the help of local guides. Others came with fraudulent Mexican citizenship papers (Lee 161, Ryo 122). Estimates of Mexico-US border crossings range from several hundred Chinese each year to between 7,000 and 21,000 between 1910 and 1920 alone (Lee 158, Ryo 110). After the passage of the Gentlemen's Agreements in 1907, virtually all Japanese migration also moved to the Mexico-US border. Here immigrants invoked their transit privilege to Canada, but then left the trains in the United States. However, the 1908 implementation of Canada's Continuous Journey Order, which was designed to bar the immigration of South Asians who were seen as the most "inassimilable" group, eventually made it impossible for Japanese immigrants entering the Mexico-US border to continue invoking their transit privilege to Canada (Geiger 212).

After the US Congress passed the so-called Quota Acts in the 1920s, the number of Europeans who crossed US borders without the required visa far surpassed that of Chinese (and other Asian) immigrants. Estimates of unauthorized European entry across the Mexico-US border run from 40,000 to 175,000 a year (Hauser 45, Zolberg 266). [13] Because the business of smuggling Europeans supplanted the traffic in Chinese immigrants, the rise in European undocumented immigration shifted the focus of attention away from Chinese border crossers as the primary problem at the southern boundary (Garland 208). While Greek-, Italian- and Eastern European-assisted migration networks, in particular, facilitated the surreptitious entry of Europeans (Stern 65, Garland 208), smuggling rings that specialized in the transportation of co-ethnics also accepted other immigrants and collaborated with smugglers of various national and ethnic backgrounds. For example, although Jewish immigrants from various areas in Eastern Europe often used smugglers

who could speak their languages and were deemed more trustworthy, they also employed Mexican, Cuban, or Canadian guides, and found themselves in the company of Greek, Chinese, Irish, Italian, Syrian and other immigrants (Garland 208-210). Overstaying visitor visas was another path to unauthorized European immigration.

Even as Asian and European migration was increasing at the Mexico-US border, the Mexican government was initially reluctant to accommodate US requests for cooperation in the enforcement of US immigration laws. Mexico was more interested in attracting immigrants and did not want to violate international agreements with China or damage US economic investments in northern Mexico that, to an extent, also relied on Chinese labor. In the context of lacking binational cooperation, US immigration law became enforced by means of border policing. An independent Border Patrol was established as part of the second Quota Act of 1924, and the institution took over the duties of the former Customs Patrol and the Immigration Service officers in the Chinese division. The Border Patrol drew on US and Canadian law enforcement experiences of controlling Chinese and European immigration along the Canada-US boundary. The Border Patrol's original uniform was initially modeled after the Canadian Mounted Police, and their members were contacted to share their experiences in enforcing immigration legislation at the northern US boundary. Only three years after the creation of the Border Patrol, its operations were officially extended from the Mexico-US border to also cover Florida and the Canada-US border (Perkins 90-91).

More rigorously enforced immigration legislation, the interruption of transnational passenger service, and the onset of the Great Depression slowed immigration from Asia and Europe to a trickle in the late 1920s and 1930s. But throughout this time, a roughly equal number of Border Patrol agents remained stationed along both US land boundaries (Lytle Hernández 2006, 427). Their numbers increased during the war years and first fences were built. Rather than focus on undocumented immigration, however, these agents mostly enforced Prohibition at both US land borders (Nevins 29, Dunn 12).

Involved in its new nation-building project after the 1917 Revolution, Mexico's government also initiated a gradual alignment with US policies toward Chinese migrants. Because Chinese cross-border migration had already slowed, this alignment was not so much manifested in the exclusion of Chinese immigrants at the border or in the passage of a Chinese exclusion law, but in deportations, expulsion campaigns, and anti-Chinese violence in Mexico's northern borderlands as well as in the passage of anti-Chinese laws in several municipalities in the 1920s and 1930s. In addition, as Julian Lim has argued, while Mexico had been welcoming to African Americans, having banned slavery and allowing colonization schemes after Reconstruction, in the early 1920s



the federal Mexican government sent confidential circulars to border officials asking them to bar the admission of “members of the Negro race.” This policy interpreted Article 33 of Mexico’s new Constitution, which provided for the possibility of removing “inconvenient” foreigners, as allowing the wholesale denial of admission of all African Americans, whether they attempted to come on a permanent or temporary basis, as colonists, workers, students, or tourists.

Just as US experiences with the enforcement of the Canada-US border were applied to the southern border, nationality- and ethnicity-driven US immigration restrictions that were first instituted with regards to Chinese immigrants were expanded to Mexican nationals after the increase of immigration following upheavals in the context of the Mexican Revolution. Even though the 1920s Quota Acts that restricted immigration from eastern and southern Europe continued to exempt residents of Mexico and Canada, migrants from Mexico began to be selectively excluded from US entry between 1917 and 1930 by enforcing immigration laws that had been originally passed to control European movement (primarily the 1885 Foran Act and the 1917 Literacy Law) and by building quarantine stations at the Mexico-US border. Immigrants who wanted to avoid medical examinations and the enforcement of legislation began to cross along other parts of the border and thus set a precedent for the immanent rise in the numbers of unauthorized Mexican border crossings.

The surge in immigration from Mexico as a result of the Bracero Program instituted by the US government in 1943 further shifted Border Patrol attention away from the Canada-US boundary and toward the Mexico’s northern border (Lytle Hernández 2006, 427). In 1943, more Border Patrol agents were stationed along the southern than at the northern US land border. Among all apprehended immigrants, the percentage of Mexican nationals increased from an average of 17 to 56 percent between 1924 and 1940 to a steady average of 90 percent between 1943 and 1954 (Lytle Hernández 2006, 429). At this time, US policy-making moved to an almost exclusive focus on Mexican unauthorized immigration along the Mexico-US border, which became viewed as the single most important transit point for illegal movement.

When the US state shifted its attention to controlling the migration of Mexican nationals across the Mexico-US border in the 1910s and especially the 1940s, Mexico began to coordinate its emigration-control efforts more closely with the United States and thus contributed to the further hardening of the border (Lytle Hernández 2010, 9-11). The Mexican government more explicitly cooperated with US border enforcement because it wanted to keep its citizens at home in order to participate in the industrialization of Mexico’s agriculture. Starting in 1945, US Border Patrol agents even delivered unauthorized immigrants who resided in Mexico’s interior into the custody of



Mexican officials, who would forcibly relocate them to points south of the border, particularly to areas experiencing labor shortages (Lytle Hernández 2006, 431-432).

### **Border Enforcement since the 1970s**

A comparative history of the two borders highlights the simultaneity of efforts to control and limit bordercrossings by native people starting in the 1860s, and the hardening of the Canada-US border against Chinese and European immigrants in the 1880s which resulted in the “Canadianization” of the Mexico-US boundary well before the Canadian border became, in the words of Peter Andreas, “Mexicanized” in the contemporary period. Since the 1970s the temporality of enforcement at both borders has become reversed, with the Mexico-US border leading the way for changes at the northern border. The southern US border was first *systematically* re-enforced with a ten-foot-high chain-link fence in the 1970s in the context of an economic downturn and energy crises in the United States that shifted attention to issues of immigration (Dunn 38). Border enforcement accelerated throughout the 1990s and was further sped up under the 2005 Real ID Act, which suspended in their entirety 37 federal laws as well as several state, local, and tribal laws, including the Coastal Zone Management Act, the National Environmental Policy Act, the Endangered Species Act, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, the Clean Water Act, the Clean Air Act, and the National Historic Preservation Act. [14] In contrast, the Canada-US border was only enforced after the events of September 11, 2001 led to an evaluation of both boundaries through the same counter-terrorism lens. The Canadian government has cooperated in the hardening of its border just as it supported the enforcement of nineteenth-century US immigration law.

The twenty-first century has witnessed the further extension of contemporary US policies of enforcement, first directed at the Mexico-US border, toward the Canada-US boundary. The first US legislation to do so, the 2006 Secure Fence Act, called for the installation of *virtual* fencing along *both* U.S. boundaries. This surveillance equipment consists of networked cameras, sensors, radar, heat and motion detectors and communications gear technology (Caldwell 2007). Nine towers equipped with such technology that had been erected along the Arizona-Sonora border by 2007 served as the prototype for similar towers in Detroit and Buffalo that monitor water traffic along Lake St. Clair and the Niagara River (Cubbison 2009). In addition to virtual fencing, especially sensitive portions of the border, such as that between Derby, Vermont, and Stanstead, Québec, which traditionally shared a sewer system, emergency services, snowplowing duties, and the

border-straddling Haskell Free Library and Opera House, have since 2009 become enforced by five-foot steel gates. Remote-controlled, the gates prevents the crossing of civilian cars, but can be opened to emergency vehicles, border agents and snowplows. Worried about increases in illegal crossings and crime, in 2012 the Royal Canadian Mounted Police closed the last unguarded border station and fenced it off with a row of flower pots. This temporary solution is designed to win approval from Stanstead for a more permanent blockade similar to the other steel gates in town (Flagg 2012).

Passed in 2012, House Bill HR 1505 aims to expand the Real ID Act, which has exempted the Department of Homeland Security from abiding by environmental protections at the Mexico-US border to Canada's southern boundary. HR 1505 asks that Customs and Border Patrol be exempted from adhering to more than a dozen environmental laws on federal lands within 100 miles of both US land borders to order to construct roads, fences, operating bases, and surveillance equipment. This bill thus once again reinforces the notion of a 100-mile border zone where US law does not fully apply, this time with regards to environmental protections.

Decades of border militarization have already negatively affected Mexico-US boundary ecologies. The 2010 report of the Good Neighbor Environmental Board (GNEB), which has advised the US President and Congress on environmental and infrastructure practices, found that enforcement has led to increased flooding, soil erosion, the depopulation of migratory species, and damaged wilderness areas as well as cultural resources. In Arizona, border militarization has exacerbated seasonal flooding on both sides of the border; accelerated erosion in the Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument; destroyed Native American burials on Tohono O'odham ancestral lands; fragmented critical wildlife corridors of several species, and damaged the desert habitats of bird species. Enforcement threatens the cross-border movement of bighorn sheep, which is necessary to prevent the isolation of populations on the Arizona side. In New Mexico's Playa Valley, border walls block the movement of one of the last wild herds of bison, whose range straddles the Mexico-US border. In Texas, border structures in the Lower Rio Grande Valley National Wildlife Refuge have fragmented habitat critical for the survival of the endangered ocelots. Because so few are left in the United States, they must have access to mates in Mexico to avoid inbreeding, gene isolation, and eventual extinction. In California, 53 acres of rare coastal wildlife habitat were lost to fencing construction in the Border Field State Park; the Otay Mountain Wilderness in Southern California now contains roads and fences in areas that previously only boasted natural vegetation on steep mountain slopes.

In addition, the enforcement of the most popular crossing points near urban areas in California and Texas has transformed public lands, especially in Arizona, into main sites for the trafficking of

humans and drugs, and thus contributed to further ecological degradation (Reyes et. al. 2002). As along the Mexico-US border where the camera-mounted towers first appeared, plans to expand the use of surveillance towers and aircraft to the Canada-US boundary would disproportionately affect publically-held protected land west of the Rocky Mountains, including the North Cascades and Glacier national parks. These changes could disrupt migration routes for animals and harm cultural resources as well as viewsheds (Taylor 2006).

New border policing protocols as well as random highway stops and surprise checkpoints on buses and trains within the 100-mile Canada-US border perimeter have affected what Jane Helleiner calls the “ordinary transnationalism” of cross-border shopping, recreation, education, employment, cross-border kinship and friendship. Customs officials engage in more intense questioning and probing at the border that has resulted in making the other side appear more distant (Helleiner 95). Besides affecting immigrants and bordercrossers, the hardening of the two national boundaries has further undermined the bordercrossing rights of native people, especially those whose ancestral or reservation lands straddle the border, including the Iroquois Confederacy, the Blackfoot/Blackfeet, and the Tohono O’odham. [15] While their tribal enrollment cards sufficed for crossings in the past, tribal members are increasingly required to carry government-issued identification documents to be able to move freely within aboriginal territories. [16]

## **The Future of US Land Borders**

Just as the confinement of indigenous people to US reservations and the limitation of their cross-border mobility were central to nineteenth-century processes of US boundary-making, the ongoing securitization of both US boundaries harshly affects native people and particularly border tribes. The recognition of interlinkages among indigenous inhabitants of both boundaries has shaped activist struggles. Tribes of the Mexico-US border have asked for treaty rights similar to those accorded to tribes at the Canada-US boundary. Once again, historical developments along the Canada-US border constitute an important historical antecedent. The Tohono O’odham of Arizona, whose borderstraddling reservation was forged in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, have several times attempted to sponsor legislation to reaffirm their bordercrossing rights in the context of an increasingly militarized Mexico-US border. The original draft of a 1998 bill advocating that federal land of religious and cultural significance be restored to the nation suggested adding indigenous peoples on the southern border to those on the northern border who have the legal right to free passage under the 1794 Jay Treaty between the United States and Britain.

Even though it failed to become law because the US and Mexican governments opposed a provision asking that existing informal crossing points be respected, the Tohono O’odham bill (and other similar proposals) was supported by several border tribes that came together in the Indigenous Alliance Without Borders, whose annual regional summits have included the Tohono O’odham and other border tribes like the Kickapoo, the Cocopah, the Kumeyaay as well as the Gila River and Yavapai Apache and the Yaqui. The Alliance has also endorsed a Tohono O’odham proposal to grant US citizenship to native people in Mexico who are enrolled members of recognized US tribes (Taliman 12), addressing the fact that, differently from indigenous peoples in Canada, the tribal sovereignty of Indians in Mexico has not been honored since they have been considered citizens of Mexico.

Because of differences in the interpretation of the Jay Treaty, US tribes are probably most interested in the extension of rights inscribed in the law. US legislation has adhered more closely to the Treaty than Canadian law. In the United States, Jay Treaty provisions were incorporated into Section 289 of the 1952 Immigration and Naturalization Act that provide permanent residency to Canadian Indians. In contrast, in the last ten years Canadian courts have restricted Jay Treaty rights to the tribal land that particular indigenous people used to cross historically, asking that native people demonstrate a cultural or historical “nexus” to these areas.

However, indigenous people at both US land borders have been engaged in similar struggles for crossing rights. Members of the Blackfoot Confederacy who today live on reservations in Alberta and Montana have repeatedly called for the establishment of separate border crossings. Similarly, the Mohawk who are governed by the Council of Akwesasne just asked again for the introduction of a new border crossing system. After a standoff over the introduction of armed guards at the customs checkpoint on Cornwall Island shut down the international bridge between Cornwall and Massena in 2009, residents coming from the St Regis reservation in the United States are required to check in with Canada Customs and Immigration and then cross back over the bridge at penalty of having their car impounded and a fine of a thousand dollars levied (“Akwesasne” 2013). In addition, Mohawk representatives have condemned US authorities for entering Mohawk land in pursuit of immigrants and smugglers, despite an agreement that prohibits police from patrolling the river’s shoreline and the many islands that lie within tribal territory (Gibbins 160, Luna Firebaugh 345).

Very similarly to the tightening of crossings on the Mohawk reserve, informal gates and holes that the transnational Tohono O’odham have used to access health services, visit friends and relatives, and attend religious ceremonies are now viewed as a violation of US federal law (Taliman 12). The Border Patrol often stops and searches tribal members and in some cases returns them to Mexico

(Luna-Firebaugh 347). Since the hardening of border crossing points in Texas and California, the transnational territory of the Tohono O'odham has become a major gateway for people and drugs. The Tohono O'odham have had to take on a large portion of the border enforcement cost, having to pay for law enforcement and health care for undocumented immigrants crossing the inhospitable desert landscape of the Mexico-US border. The building of roads on tribal land has also led to environmental degradation, and a traffic checkpoint on tribal land has been installed in the absence of consultations with the nation (Luna-Firebaugh 349).

Given the sovereignty of each indigenous nation, they have tended to proceed independently in their attempts at resolving the bordercrossing issues that have arisen as a result of militarization (Luna-Firebaugh 362). But because of similarities in their exposure to enforcement along both US borders, native people have also tried to establish joint initiatives. Even though this collaboration has been somewhat limited, its transnational nature promises success. Native people in Canada and the United States have come together to pass the 1999 "Declaration of Kinship and Cooperation among the Indigenous Peoples and Nations of North America," that identified the maintenance of border crossing rights and the full recognition of indigenous cultures as concerns common. [17] In the 2006 Border Summit of the Americas, native people assembled to protest the Secure Fence Act, arguing that further enforcement would divide the ancestral lands of many indigenous tribes at the Mexico-US border.

In order to justify continued border enforcement, US policymaking has recently shifted beyond the almost exclusive attention to terrorism and toward a renewed emphasis on undocumented migration and other cross-border activity, such as drugs and weapons smuggling. This shift can only be adequately understood—and its future adequately evaluated—through an attention to the long and interrelated histories of the two US land borders and their relationship to settler colonialism, imperialism, and processes of racialization. Currently, recognition of these interrelationships can perhaps gain the most political traction in indigenous struggles for bordercrossing rights that are grounded in laws governing the treatment of native people at the Canada-US border. But other initiatives against border enforcement also need to take into account developments at both boundaries and their relationship to border populations as well as border ecologies and wildlife rather than remain focused on discourses of terrorism, drug smuggling, and undocumented immigration along the Mexico-US border.

## Endnotes

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[1] For a more comprehensive historical account of inter-American scholarship since the 1940s, see Sophia McClennen (2005).

[2] Gustavo Pérez-Firmat (1990), Earl Fitz (1991), José David Saldívar (1991), and Hortense Spillers (1991) produced influential examples of mid-1980s and early 1990s inter-American research. Only Fitz included texts from the United States, Spanish America, Brazil, and English and French Canada, and Spiller's collection included an attention on Spanish America, the Caribbean, and Québécois Canada.

[3] The trans-Pacific foregrounds links between Asian America and various Asian countries. Paul Gilroy's (1993) notion of the Black Atlantic forged a trans-Atlantic focus on the legacies of the slave trade. Joseph Roach's (1996) scholarship on the Circum-Atlantic stresses links between New Orleans, the Antilles, West Africa, and London, and is one of the founding works of New World studies. The term New World Studies is often simply used as a synonym for inter-American studies.

[4] For a more in-detail analysis of hemispheric, (inter-) American studies perspectives, see Claudia Sadowski-Smith and Claire F. Fox (2004). For examples of recent hemispheric scholarship, see Anna Brickhouse (2004), Kirsten Silva Gruesz (2002), and José David Saldívar (2007). An exception of hemispheric work that includes Canada in literary studies is Rachel Adams' work (2009).

[5] On the importance of scholarship about the Mexico-US border for transnational perspectives in American Studies, see Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease (1993), Carolyn Porter (1994), Priscilla Wald (1998), Paul Jay (1998), and John Carlos Rowe (2000).

[6] As early as the nineteenth century, scholars in physical and human geography examined boundaries created in the aftermaths of war, conflict, or imperial territorial expansion, particularly post-war state borders in Europe and the delineation of colonial possessions in Africa and Asia (Kolossov 608).

[7] While the attention to the Mexico-US border in the US academy has led to the formation of institutes and centers that focus on this geography, such as the Trans-Border Institute at the University of San Diego or the Center for Inter-American and *Border Studies* at the University of Texas at El Paso, there are fewer institutions that similarly study a single national border territory and its population. They include the Centre for Cross-Border Studies in Armagh and Dublin, the Border Policy Research Institute at Western Washington University that explores the Canada-US border, and the Barents Institute at the University of Tromsø, Norway, that examines the Russia-Norway boundary. Other institutions, like the Nijmegen Centre for Border Research, Netherlands, or the Department of Border Region Studies at the University of Southern Denmark, focus on the study of national boundaries worldwide.

[8] See also the immensely influential comparative collection of historical essays on the Mexico-US and Canada-US borders, *Bridging National Borders in North America* (Ed. Andrew R. Graybill and Benjamin H. Johnson, 2010), from which I often draw in this article.

[9] The Anglo-Russian Convention of 1825, between Russia and Britain, also defined the Pacific-Arctic boundary.

[10] For recent account of the delineation of the Canada-US border, see Sheila McManus (2005) and Tony Rees (2007). On the delineation of the Mexico-US border, see Rachel St. John (2011).

[11] However, even after the confinement of most Apaches to reservations located at a distance from the border, cross-border raiding continued. In the late 1880s a number of Tohono O'odham raided Mexican settlements for livestock and fled back across the border into Arizona. In 1896, a group of Yaqui attacked a customs house at Nogales, Sonora and then fled from Mexican troops into the United States (St. Johns 62).

[12] Lawrence Douglas Taylor Hansen estimates, however, that no more than 300 Chinese per year crossed the Canada-US border (48).



[13] Figures provided by the US consul general in Havana in 1932 suggest that approximately 31,200 Europeans may have entered the United States from Cuba alone; they would have most likely crossed via US borders (Garland 204).

[14] In 2007, Secretary Chertoff again waived several regulations, including the Endangered Species Act and a host of other federal laws, to allow for construction of border fencing through Arizona's San Pedro Riparian National Monument and the Barry M. Goldwater Range, home to the endangered Sonoran Pronghorn. Fencing was also erected in the Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument and in the Cabeza Prieta National Monument, which house rare birds such as the Cactus Ferruginous Pygmy Owl and the Thick-billed Parrot. In 2008 the administration evoked the Real ID Act one more time to allow the construction of another approximately 500 miles of border fence.

[15] Other tribes that share a border with Canada include the Red Lake Band of Chippewa, the Aroostook Band of Micmac, and the Houlton Band Maliseet.

[16] Indigenous people wanting to cross the Canada-US border are now asked to apply for the new Secure Certificate of Indian Status (SCIS) that is compliant with the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI) process. On the Mexico-US border, US authorities have issued members of the Tohono O'odham who are citizens or residents of Mexico and who have been identified as requiring medical attention in the Nation's Health Center so-called "laser" visas or B1/B2 Border Crossing Cards.

[17] The declaration states that indigenous peoples in the Americas are "bound by common origin and history, aspiration and experience" and that "arbitrary lines [between Canada and the United States] have not severed, and n and never will, the ties of kinship among our peoples."



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**Walter Mignolo** (Duke University)

**Decolonial Reflections on Hemispheric Partitions**  
**The "Western Hemisphere" in the Colonial Horizon of Modernity and the**  
**Irreversible Historical Shift to the "Eastern Hemisphere"**

**Abstract:**

In this article I introduce two variations in the conversation with the proposed topic, "Theorizing Hemispheric Studies of the Americas." The first variation, and the first part of my article, would ask whether it is "Hemispheric Studies" we should theorize or the "Invention of America(s) and the idea of (Western) Hemisphere"? In this regard, I would ask the following questions: why is there a growing interest in the Western Hemisphere today and why in Hemispheric Studies? The second question, related to the first, is: what would we like to know by theorizing Hemispheric Studies of the Americas (Western Hemisphere) at the present moment in which everyone on the planet is witnessing what seems to be the irreversible shift to the "Eastern Hemisphere" (Mahbubanu; Froetschel)? Or, a third question: is there nothing specific we would like to know or understand, or are we open to whatever we can "find"?

**Keywords:** atlantica, decolonial thinking, hemispheric American studies, pacifica

About fifteen years ago I explored the meaning of the “Western Hemisphere” in the colonial horizon of modernity. Today, in first decades of the twenty-first century, the economic and political fields of power are rapidly being re-oriented. The expression is more than metaphorical. Firstly, “orientalism” is being superseded, not reversed. Superseded because the “Orient” (from East to South Asia and to South East Asia), are no longer voiceless places and people subjected to Western Orientalists. Secondly, because Hegel’s narrative in his well-known lesson in the philosophy of history has taken a very paradoxical shift: Spirit—tired of Europe and the US where Hegel anticipated it will move (and it did)—is returning to the East.

One cannot engage in hemispheric reflections or in theorizing Hemispheric Studies of the Americas without being aware that such reflections are performed someplace in the heavens (or in the hells, as the case may be), looking from above or from below the hemispheric distribution of the planet without *sensing* how the planetary hemispheric distribution shaped the sensibility of the reflecting subject.

Hegel’s narrative, tracing the trajectory from the birth of the State in ancient China, moving Westward through India, Persia and reaching Greece and Rome, landed in Western Europe, more specifically in Germany. It appears as if Germany was the end of Spirit’s journey when, indeed, it was the beginning of the narrative. And this means, that the beginning was the idea of Spirit arriving in Germany. To justify the itinerary and to create the illusion of “history”, the beginning of the journey had to be elsewhere. In other words, it was *the presence of the enunciation that invented the past of Spirit’s journey*. That fiction works well because when Spirit arrived in Germany, it looked like it was a “natural” journey rather than a narrative that *started* in Germany to tell a story that *started* in China. What matters was the presence of the enunciation rather than the Spirit’s journey.

Hegel surmised that the route of Spirit would continue, cross the Atlantic and dwell in the US. But, Hegel said, that is the future and his narrative was about the past. South America was dismissed as a place of “caudillos” and civil wars. Africa was out of history. Today Spirit, after being deceived by European history, crossed the Atlantic and indeed dwelled in the US. Deceived again, it decided to continue its route to the West and return to its place of origination. It was Columbus’s dream: to reach the Orient, from Europe, navigating toward the West. The return of Spirit to the East makes us realize that indeed the East is the West seen not from the location of European but from the location of people in the Western Hemisphere, the Americas Hemisphere (Mignolo, “Geopolitics of Sensing and Knowing”).

I would revisit here this essay and introduce two variations in the conversation with the proposed topic, “Theorizing Hemispheric Studies of the Americas.” The first variation, and the first part of my



article, would ask whether it is "Hemispheric Studies" we should theorize or the "Invention of America(s) and the idea of (Western) Hemisphere"? In this regard, I would ask the following questions: why is there a growing interest in the Western Hemisphere today and why in Hemispheric Studies? The second question, related to the first, is: what we would like to know by theorizing Hemispheric Studies of the Americas (Western Hemisphere) at the present moment in which everyone on the planet is witnessing what seems to be the irreversible shift to the "Eastern Hemisphere" (Mahbubanu; Froetschel)? Or, a third question: is there something specific we would like to know or understand, or are we open to whatever we can "find"?

## **1. The Invention of America and of the Western Hemisphere**

### **1.1.**

In order to theorize "Hemispheric Studies of the Americas" it would be advisable to first ask a theoretical historical question: when did the idea of the Americas and of the Western Hemisphere emerge and why? For "America" did not exist before 1504. There was no idea of America either and even less the awareness that the planet was divided in two Hemispheres. So that both "America" and "Western Hemisphere" are not entities but geopolitical ideas to organize the planet; or, if you wish, there are entities configured by an idea constituted by a name and a cartographic image. The point is that the idea did not come about by way of the universal consensus of all existing civilizations. No, it came from Western Christians who had already conceived the world as divided into three continents: Asia, Europe and Africa. The notion that the planet divided into three continents only made sense for Western Christians. But that is not all: the idea of East and West, Western and Eastern Hemisphere needed first the idea of the America that was first christened "New World." However, the continental land and islands that became the New World for Europeans was not new for the millions of people that for perhaps 20,000 years had been dwelling in the lands about which the European did not know.

To be fair, people inhabiting Anahuac, Tawantinsuyu, Abya-Yala and the hundreds of other territories on the continent, did not know about the "Old World" either. The distinction between Old and New World is tantamount with the distinction between Indias Occidentales e Indias Orientales for the Spaniards and America for people north of the Pyrenees. The division between Indias Orientales and Indias Occidentales was the creation of Pope Alexander VI. The second was introduced by an Italian man of letters, Pietro Martir d'Anghiera, toward the last decade of the Fifteenth Century, after the famous letter by Amerigo Vespucci, the Italian explorer, financier and navigator who realized that Columbus had not landed in Cipango or India, but in a "Mundus Novo," a New World (Vespucci).

Castilians conquerors (Hernán Cortés), Italian explorers (Columbus, Vespucci) and men of letters in Castile (Anghiera) were the first, in Europe and in the world, to write about and map the continent they did not know about. Mayan, Aztec and Incan civilizations that were dwelling in the continent when Spaniards arrived had a totally different conception of the world. Written and printed information and conceptualization about land and people unknown to the actors who were writing and mapping had a tremendous effect: it transformed ignorance into ontology and fiction into truth. This is the context in which I propose to theorize American Hemispheric Studies.

## 1.2.

I opened up my lecture in Bielefeld with a two-minute statement by Native American theologian Richard Twiss (*Theology of Manifest Destiny*). If you check the statement on YouTube, you will soon see the reasons why I started with his statement. There is a common historical ground among theologian and secular Native Americans thinkers, First Nations people of Canada and Pueblos Originarios of South and Central América: that common ground is the invasion of European colonizers since late fifteenth century and through all the sixteenth century. Be they Spaniards, Portuguese, English or French, there was little difference from the perspective of the people being invaded: different languages and the same inhumanity, even among those who defended the “Indians” but considered them somewhat defective.

There is a common ground among thinkers of Afro-American descent in the Caribbean, in continental South and Central America and some US Afro-America (e.g., Cornel West) for whom 1492 is the point of reference of the life and death of the continent. Although the slave trade started in earnest during the Sixteenth Century, 1492 is the date of reference that created the conditions to the transportation of enslaved Africans to “America.”

There is also a common ground among thinkers of European descent, either of theological or of secular persuasion, in considering that 1492 is the point of reference in the making of the life and death of the continent. A considerable difference distinguishes the group of European descent from the first two: people of European descent divide between those who considered the invasion beneficial for Indians and Blacks and those who consider it a genocidal intervention. We do not encounter that division, at least with such clear profiles, among Indians and Blacks. The majority agrees in both demographic groups that the invasion was genocidal.

The bottom line is that all the disputes about the New World were disputes about Europeans in Europe and Europeans in the New World first, and then between Creoles (people of European descent) among themselves and among Europeans. Indians and Blacks were being discussed but were not being allowed to enter the discussion. The two pillars that set up the debate about the

continental divide among Europeans were decided by appropriating and expropriating lands, dividing among themselves and naming the new territories based on their own memories.

A second historical moment came in two instances. It was by the end of the Seventeenth Century that European cartographers divided the planet into two hemispheres, the Western Hemisphere and the Eastern Hemisphere. However, in the Nineteenth Century, the US appropriated the idea of “Western Hemisphere” claiming US sovereignty on the continent and disputing European expansionism. This was a crucial move for international politics in the sense that, up to that point, the idea of the “Western Hemisphere” referred to European colonies in the New World/America. From that moment onward Western Hemisphere named and defined “America” from a US perspective and management: the US became equivalent to America.

Theodore Roosevelt made clear in 1904-1905 by amending the “Monroe Doctrine” a century after its proclamation saying that Europe shall stay out of “American” soils as the US became the guardian and the putative manager of countries in the Western Hemisphere to prevent European colonialism. [1] Since then, the rhetoric of US foreign policy has promoted the US as the agents of world order and world freedom. It was an interesting move indeed: the US became the imperial guardian of the Western Hemisphere. The rhetoric of salvation changed. Europe was confronted by the US and denounced for their imperial designs. In the process, the US affirmed its state autonomy simultaneously with the vision of its own imperial design molded in the name of liberty. What is unique in the appropriation of the idea of Western Hemisphere was the complementarity between the ideology of liberty upon which the Founding Fathers built their arguments and, simultaneously, the justification of US imperial expansion as a struggle in the name of liberty and democracy. “Hemispheric America” became then the US and the rest. Here again we could revisit Richard Twiss.

## **2. The Irreversible Shift to the Eastern Hemisphere**

Although the division between East and West was based on how Christians imagined and visualized the world with Jerusalem and later on with Rome at the center, the fiction acquired ontological status. The distinction was taken for granted and the rhetoric of the global order is still predicated on the presumed “existence” of two entities, the East and the West. More recently the Global South complicated the picture. Global South was a notion that had some currency in the 1970s, when it was taken up by Third World and Non-Aligned states. With the end of the Cold War the division between Three Worlds lost currency and the Global South gained ascendancy.

I am bringing this scenario into consideration between “Hemispheric America” and “The Western Hemisphere” because it is crossed over by the Global South in two ways: There is, on the one

hand, South and Central America and, on the other, North America. In the middle is the Caribbean, which is also counted as Global South. But that is not all because there is also the South of the North (e.g., the South of the US.) (Leavander and Mignolo). The superposition of the Global South over Hemispheric America flags the power differentials in the very same Hemisphere—power differentials that can be accounted for by the history of coloniality from 1500 to the present.

Today the Global South is parallel to the rising visibility, economic force, and political power of the Eastern Hemisphere, according to the aforementioned Seventeenth Century European cartographers' invention and, later on, the politics of US Manifest Destiny. This shift means that for the first time in 500 years (since Pope Alexandre VI divided the planet between Indias Occidentales and Indias Orientales) the Eastern Hemisphere is no longer a complement to the Western Hemisphere but becoming an equalizer.

The return of China is more than economic growth. It includes the affirmation and strengthening of political decisions in the inter-state arena. It also means that Western coloniality (e.g., the hidden logic of imperial discourse of civilization, progress and development) focused in the ideas of the modern nation-state, liberalism and industrial capitalism since the late eighteenth century came into full planetary force. The Opium War was one telling episode. It dismembered the long lasting traditions of Chinese dynasties. China is now recovering, after 150 years of disarray, returning and leading the way of the global shift to the Eastern Hemisphere. By redressing the balance of global forces, it changes the configuration and profile of the Western Hemisphere. It is provoking the US to regain the leadership that it gained in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. [2] South and Central America as well as the Caribbean now have open options. It depends on the government of the moment whether a given state will align its political and economic balance and make an alliance with the Eastern Hemisphere or remain tacked to the North of the Western Hemisphere.

The implications of the shift are enormous. The most daring is that the shift dismantles the basic partition of the world since Alexander VI: now the East is both in the West and in the South. And the South is both in the East and the North. A multi-polar ordering of the world is erasing the modern/colonial division in Hemispheres and continents. That is to say, economic and political forces establish trans-hemispheric alliances and trans-cardinal-direction alliances. Take the case of the BRICS states. Certainly, China is in the Eastern Hemisphere according to the modern/colonial imaginary and Brazil is in the Western Hemisphere, but also in the Global South. South Africa is certainly in the Global South but in between the Western and the Eastern Hemispheres: the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean kiss each other south of Cape Town.

But that is not all. Many South and Central American countries, following the leadership of Brazil, are joining the shift toward the East so that states in the older Western (or American) Hemisphere

are running away from the US control of the Western Hemisphere. The shift is leaving the US with the remains of what, until recently, was clearly Hemispheric America.

The political shift across hemispheres has a name: Dewesternization, a turning away from Westernization initiated by Western European states (Latouche). And dewesternization means to dispute the overarching control of global affairs by four states in the Western Hemisphere: England, France, Germany and the US (GEFU). GEFU is in the Northern Hemisphere leaving below and behind the Southern Hemisphere in Europe: Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal, grouped in an ingenious and problematic acronym: PIGS. Do they belong to the Global South or to Western Europe? Certainly not Greece, which by its geographical location is closer to West Asia, but certainly, yes; Greece being one of the symbolic pillars of “the West.”

As far as Hemispheric America was mostly profiled in one of its sides, the Atlantic, the distinction between Western Hemisphere and the West was blurred. Once again, Western Europe and today the European Union, plus Britain, are no doubt in the West (that is, West of Jerusalem which was where Christians located themselves and for that reason attributed Europe to Japheth), but not in the Western Hemisphere. It never was, even from the initial division of the world in two hemispheres, much before the US would claim control and ownership. On the other hand, in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century the Western Hemisphere is, paradoxically, turning to the West, to the Pacific. China, after all, is at the East of Europe but at the West of the Western Hemisphere. Recently, the US has started an international project to secure the presence of the West within the East and the South: The Pacific Alliance announced by Hillary Clinton in her discourse in Honolulu in November of 2011, although President Barack Obama’s lobbying preceded this discourse (Clinton).

Shortly after Hillary Clinton’s discourse in Honolulu, four states in the Global South of Hemispheric America initiated their own project Pacific Ocean project. It was, apparently, an initiative of South American states in the Western Hemisphere (Chile, Peru, Colombia and Mexico), that is, the most conservative and neo-liberal prone that goes with the project of re-westernization (Bilbao). In the most recent meeting of the Alianza del Pacifico in Colombia, President Juan Manuel Santos invited President Barack Obama as his guest of honor. These four countries are joining Obama’s efforts to re-westernize the world. Re-westernization is Obama’s response to de-westernization, that is, to the return of China and the rise of BRICS “alliance.” The Alliance of the Pacific plays in confrontation with MERCOSUR AND CELAC (Comunidad de Estados Latino-Americanos y Caribeños).

Clearly then, the Western Hemisphere or Hemispheric America is being partitioned between De-westernization and Re-westernization, the first led—in the continent—by Brazil and the second by the US. Now, in this historical seismic shift, the unity of Hemispheric America or the Western

Hemisphere is exploding into pieces and being redistributed in the remaking of the global order. What is different in this remaking is that Western Europe and the US are no longer leading it at their will. Economic growth (that is, not led by the IMF and the World Bank) is really something of the past. This tendency will accelerate; there is no return to the renaissance global hemispheric order that persisted for 500 years.

The buzz on this was, “Oh, things are not that simple. They are more complex.” And one wonders: so then what do we do with the complexity and the denial of simplicity? These are questions that do not much affect a theoretical understanding of global shifts as they impinge on how disciplinary territories are mapped and defended. The problem that presents itself quite often is the epistemic and political lag between disciplinary formation and the understanding of socio-historical processes in order to orient our action within them.

Decolonial thinking, in one of its strand at least, claims the second option and the delinking for the strictures of disciplinary formation. To think the world decolonially, when the questions are asked about hemispheric formations, means to think through the compound complex, indeed, of the rhetoric of modernity (and their successful mapping of the world) and the logic of coloniality (the persistent making and remaking of global injustice behind the promise of the rhetoric of modernity). “Hemispheric studies” is for us, decolonial thinkers, something else.

Now, what shall be noticed in this line of reflections is that “Hemispheric Studies” is an initiative whose point of origination is the North of the Western Hemisphere and in Western Europe. Nowhere else on the planet, not even South and Central America, has a strong investment in this. If there are some interested, it is because of US and Western Europe initiatives. As far as I know it is not a concern of scholars dwelling in the South of the Western Hemisphere, including the Caribbean. Neither is it an initiative of scholars dwelling in the South of Europe. At close inspection it seems that the US and Germany are the two locations where Hemispheric Studies of the Americas flourish.

Why is this so? One answer that is often mentioned in the platforms of such studies is to overcome the division between North and South America on the one hand and the Caribbean on the other, and concentrate on hemispheric unity. However, when you look at the remapping of West and East, the Global South and the South of Europe, the South of the Global North along the lines I sketched above, you would again understand that these projects are initiatives of the North, not of the South or the Caribbean (Levander and Mignolo). In the South and the Caribbean scholars and intellectuals have other concerns and relatively little interest in Hemispheric Studies or in the creation of Hemispheric Institutes.



### 3. The Underlying Fields of Forces Remapping Eastern and Western Hemispheres

Inter-American relations are, as I mentioned before, divided between the states that go along with and are supported by United States foreign policy on the one hand and the states that have opted to join dewesternizing forces on the other. Now the fact is, as has already been remarked, that such a situation is far from ideal. It is, one could say, like delinking from the lion to give oneself to the tiger. For better or worse, it is the way it will be most of the twenty-first century, and I cannot anticipate what will come next, which brings up the question of strong and smaller states in the international order and of course in the Western Hemisphere of the Hemisphere of the Americas and the Caribbean.

These are the conditions under which taking up on the invitation to “theorize hemispheric studies of the Americas” it would be beneficial to start by asking, once more, what the expression means. In my understanding it means that “hemispheric” studies are not, cannot be, only of the “Americas.” Or better yet, the Americas do not have the privilege of being the only hemisphere on the planet and of having a life of their own. Therefore, “hemispheric studies of the Americas” means first to have an understanding of how the hemispheric division of the planet came about, how it was maintained, who benefited and how it is now falling to pieces. It also means, in the second place, that “hemispheric studies” should be understood in relation to “oceanic studies” for the Eastern and Western hemispheres are surrounded and interconnected by oceans. “Oceanic studies” if you wish could either complement or undermine “Hemispheric studies.”

So the next question that shall be put to the hemispheric studies of the Americas would be: why hemispheric studies of the America now? Certainly, the answers to this question would abound, but the bottom line may be obscured. The bottom line is this: why do we need hemispheric studies of the Americas now and why do we need to theorize them? Any theoretical investigation starts with a question—if there is no question, there is no need to investigate or theorize because there is no problem to address or question to answer. Furthermore, what distinguishes an empirical question from a theoretical one? Max Horkheimer addressed the issue in his classic article “Traditional and Critical Theory” (1989.) Empirical questions are formulated on the assumption that something exists and the knower wants to know more or understand something of what there is. Theoretical questions ask how what there is came to be what it is. That means that “hemispheric studies of the Americas” is not something that the theoretical subject takes for granted. But there is still another layer, the third: the decolonial view of the world and understanding the semantics of oceanic and hemispheric consideration. This brings coloniality into the picture for the division of the planet since the late fifteenth century goes hand-in-hand with the logic of coloniality. Carl Schmitt

provided a Eurocentered analytic history of this in the formation and transformation of the “second *nomos* of the earth” and the emergence of global linear thinking. [3]

Once we accept the premise that “hemispheric America” is not a given but a historical fiction that gained ontological currency, then we have to ask how that fiction came to be, and why a fiction gained ontological currency. I have touched on this issue above. It is necessary, however, to recast it in the current stage of the argument. Let’s refresh our memories:

hemisphere (n.)

late 14c., *hemysperie*, in reference to the celestial sphere, from Latin *hemisphaerium*, from Greek *hemisphairion*, from *hemi-* “half” (see hemi-) + *sphaira* “sphere” (see sphere). (“Hemisphere”)

Now, if one hemisphere is half of the planet, then the other half is the second hemisphere—clear and simple enough. But the hemisphere could have been “cut” to above and below the equator, that is, Northern and Southern Hemispheres. If that division would have been used, then the Americas would not today be one Hemisphere but part of the Southern or Northern Hemisphere. And indeed, the expression is not un-known. [4] The Southern Hemisphere more or less coincides nowadays with the Global South. But not quite: half of Africa would be in the North and a significant portion of South America would also be in the North. This may sound strange, but the bottom line and question is: if both divisions of the semi-spheres, South/North and East/West are possible and legitimate, why did the second catch on while the first did not?

Here we go again to the realization that both divisions do not have anything to do with the planet but with who decides on the division of the planet. European Christian who were in control of knowledge and institutions decided, and they had the possibility of depicting (mapping) the planet according to their views and needs. What were their views and needs? Let’s first attend the views.

If we look at the famous T/O map after what I just said, we can see that there is no clear East/West division. [5] There are indeed “three hemispheres”, which is a non-sense if we take seriously the etymology of the word. So the planet was not divided in hemispheres but in three continental landmasses separated by water. The “three” was not serendipity and did not depend on landmasses but on the meaning of number three in Christian cosmology. Each part of the planet “belonged” to one of Noah’s son. We do not see hemispheres but hierarchies: Asia corresponds to Shem, Africa to Ham and Europe to Japheth. A basic knowledge of biblical narrative is sufficient to understand the hierarchy: Christians did not inhabit the land of Shem or Ham but the land of Japheth. At that point, before the Crusades, the center was Jerusalem.

But Jerusalem was not the center of the world for all. It was the center of the world only for Christians. The Bunting Clover Leaf map is univocal. [6] It was drawn in 1581. For Jews Jerusalem is the heart of Judaism, dating back to around 1700 years BC. But it was not necessarily the center of the world, as it was mapped in the Christian T/O map around 6<sup>th</sup> century AC. For Christians, Jerusalem is the city of the minister of Jesus Christ. The ministry of Christ is date between 27 and 36 AC. For Jews, Jerusalem is the Ancient Testament. Christian Jerusalem is the New Testament. In the Bunting Clover Leaf map, what predominates is Christian Jerusalem, for Western Christians were in command, the Jews having been expelled from the Iberian Peninsula by Western Christians at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

In chapter 5 of *The Darker Side of the Renaissance* entitled “Geometric and Ethnic Centers”, I argue that until the creation of the renaissance world maps (Gerardus Mercator *Orbis Terrae Compendiosa Descriptio*, 1569; [7] Abraham Ortelius, *Typus Orbis Terrarum*, 1570) each civilization on the planet had its own ethnic center, including of course, Jerusalem as the ethnic center of Jewish and Christian cosmologies. What Mercator’s and Ortelius’s maps did was to project the *ethnic center into a geometric one*. [8] The move had tremendous consequences—uplifting for those belonging to the civilization in which the world map was made, and devastating for all the other ethnic centers that did not have the possibility, the potential or the need to project their own ethnic center into a geometric one. At that point Rome changed status: from being the Christians ethnic center, it became the center of the world. That was precisely the moment in which Pope Alexander VI divided the planet between Indias Orientales and Indias Occidentales.

Rome became the center of the world and in consequence the center of enunciation. It managed to impose over other civilizations its own conception of the planet and be recognized as the geographical location of universal knowledge—theological knowledge in this case. The Atlantic Ocean became the center of trade and commerce and, for that reason, the expanded center of the world: ancient Rome and the emerging Mediterranean. The Atlantic Ocean encompassed the Eastern Coasts of the New World and the Eastern Coasts of Africa and Europe. The “triangular trade” (commodities from the New World to Europe, guns and manufacture from Europe to Africa, enslaved human beings from Africa to the New World)—this and no other shall be the foundation of any “hemispheric studies of the Americas.” The triangular trade meant also the dismantling of co-existing civilizations of the New World, mainly those of the Andes (Tawantinsuyu) and Mesoamerica (Anahuac). Any hemispheric studies of the Americas that do not start from this historical foundation would be like any study of European civilizations ignoring Greece and Rome.

#### 4. Five Hundred Years Later: from the Atlantic to the Pacific and the Indian Ocean

The Western Hemisphere or Hemispheric America is not a lump of land surrounded by water. It is, and it always has been since the name “America” was bestowed upon the landmasses that became the Western Hemisphere, a field of forces in the modern/colonial and European self-consolidation and imperial expansion. If we start from this premise, the question is not to “study” Hemispheric America but what “questions to ask about the inventions of America, the Western Hemisphere and Hemispheric America.” A field of global forces, the Western Hemisphere and America were constituted from the perspective of the emerging Atlantic commercial circuit, but it is now turning to the Pacific. Turning to the Pacific has been a major move and declaration from the Obama administration (Clinton). Even before Hillary Clinton’s declaration in November 2011 in Honolulu responding to the China challenge, Barack Obama had already announced this turn in Japan in 2009 (Chen and Goldman). It was also at this time that, coincidentally, Chile, Peru, Colombia and Mexico formed the Alianza del Pacífico. More recently, Barack Obama was invited as the guest of honor to the meeting of the Alianza held in Colombia. You get the picture: the four neo-liberal oriented countries in South America are allied with the US. On the other hand, the Atlantic MERCOSUR are working toward delinking from the control and management of the US.

Hemispheric America is being partitioned according to the emerging global order prompted by the growing influence and power of BRICS countries, parallel to the growing economies such as Turkey (that has an ambiguous relation with the US because of Syria) and Indonesia (with a declining enthusiasm toward US global leadership). Economic growth brings confidence in state identity, national confidence, political decision-making and courage to reject the instructions received from Western imperial states. [9]

I have mentioned two trajectories today and for years to come, as “de-westernization” and “re-westernization.” The larger scenario is the following. After 500 years of the consolidation of Western Civilization (e.g., “westernization”) of the world and consequent imperial expansion, by 2000 the situation began to change. In retrospect the signs of the changes were in place but not very visible yet. What was changing? Simply put, the Westernization of the world was a long, persistent and changing process from the sixteenth century under the flags of Spain and Portugal, to the nineteenth and half of the twentieth century by England, and after WWII by the US (Latouche). [10] What was changing was that the long history was coming to an end. Not the end of Western Civilization but the end of Western domination. One current example: Vladimir Putin stealing the show and proposing a diplomatic way out to the global Syrian crisis and stopping the military intervention announced by Nobel Peace Prize recipient Barack Obama. This is but a small example, but there are many, of the dewesternization of the world.

Underlying the process of westernization has always been a conceptual structure legitimizing political decisions and political and economic actions—the colonial matrix of power. It is this underlying structure of Western Civilization that allowed for both the consolidation and expansion of Western religion (Christianity), economy (capitalism), politics (liberalism and neoliberalism), racism (white supremacy), genderism and sexualism (patriarchy and heteronormativity), aesthetics (the universalism of the beautiful and the sublime), epistemology and hermeneutics (explanation and understanding according to Western norms of theology, science and philosophy). Euro-US actors and institutions managed to make believe that the world is, and should be, as seen through the lenses of the colonial matrix of power. In other words, through the rhetoric of salvation promoted under the name of modernity and globalization and the justification of illegal invasion, uses of force, expropriation and exploitation in the name of salvation (e.g., democracy, development, etc.).

What began to change and become visible is that more and more people around the planet are waking up and realizing that the world has many shapes, forms and colors; people around the world began to realize that they have fallen prey to a fiction and in that fiction they appeared as inferior and lacking humanity: inhuman conducts in the name of humanity has been and continues to be a fundamental part of the rhetoric of modernity, a rhetoric of salvation, progress, development and happiness. Thus, the awakening and consequent delinking from the illusion of the good of Westernization manifests itself in two major trajectories: de-westernization and the refurbishing of the meaning of “decolonization” during the Cold War. While decolonization in Asia and Africa were no doubt crucial moves, the first cycle ended up in the hand of corrupt governments (Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, Libya, Syria) the consequences of which the world has been witnessing for the past couple of years.

The concept of decolonization emerged after WWII to name the process of liberation in Africa and Asia. “Decoloniality” is a concept that, interestingly enough, originated in Hemispheric America, not in the North but in the South (Mignolo, “Geopolitics of Sensing and Knowing”). What came into being after the collapse of the Soviet Union, perhaps because the idea that decolonization conceived meant that the natives might control the state and not the colonizer, was an illusion that brought about dictatorships and corruption. What was needed was not to “take the state” but to decolonize political and economic knowledge and consequently to decolonize subjectivities that had been captured and enslaved by the rhetoric of salvation and the illusion of happiness and well-being in the name of modernity.

From 1500 AD to 2000 AD, men and institutions of the European renaissance enlarged their views with the emergence of the Atlantic commercial circuits and the invention of “America.” These men

and institutions imagined and enacted the cycle of Westernization. Responses from the Tawantinsuyu and Anahuac, and Ayiti were there, but ignored, silenced and forgotten. Around 2000, at the Western end of the Pacific, the return of China and 9/11 became two visible signs that the world was no longer ready to submit to Westernization. The trajectory of Dewesternization was already visible. Dewesternization is a trajectory that doesn't question capitalist economy (the economy of accumulation, exploitation and corruption), but questions those who make decisions in the international arena. Dewesternization is a very complicated trajectory that shall not be ignored because it is complicated. As a matter of fact, Westernization was also complicated, but it was the only game in town. Not anymore. Dewesternization messed up the seemingly easy ride of Westernization. In fact, there were many who in the late 90s believed that we had arrived at the end of history. That is to say, Westernization was victorious to the end of time. By the first decade of the twenty first century even those who had believed in the end of history changed their opinion.

In 2008 the trajectory of Rewesternization began. It was inaugurated with President Barack Obama's speech in Cairo. Rewesternization is the attempt to regain US leadership in the world, leadership conquered in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and lost thanks to the good governance of George W. Bush and Dick Cheney. The second moment was the announcement of the Pacific Alliance and the decision to move away from Pakistan and Iraq and concentrate on the Pacific. Clearly, Rewesternization was a response to the growing force of Dewesternization. And we are now in the middle of this war between capitalist states: on the one hand those who want to continue their hegemony and dominance, on the other those who are no longer willing to be dominated.

How these two trajectories impinge on Hemispheric America is already very clear, as I mentioned above. Hemispheric America is being partitioned in inter-state relations: Chile, Peru, Colombia and Mexico are joining Rewesternization through the Pacific Alliance while Brazil, Bolivia, Ecuador, Argentina, Uruguay and Nicaragua are joining Dewesternization and following up on the leadership of Brazil as a member of the BRICS countries. MERCOSUR, ALBA and CARICOM are other regional organizations that tend toward Dewesternization. Canada is also following in the footsteps of Rewesternization, keeping the NAFTA agreement alive.

Certainly, this politico-economic scenario doesn't exhaust the life of Hemispheric America. However, it frames the terrestrial and insular lands and waters into the global imaginary. For, it is an illusion to think that "Latin America", "America" and "the Caribbean" (meaning the insular Caribbean), are isolated entities and that to "study" them would mean to "look at what is inside." Hemispheric America is twice entangled in the global scenario. First, from the moment of its invention, "the fourth continent" meant that whoever labeled it knew that there were already three



others. And the only ones who knew there were already three continents (because they invented them and not because the earth was naturally divided in three continents from its creation) were Western Christians. The second entanglement is the history of Hemispheric America both in its international field of forces and in its inter-state relations. For, there are no continents that interact and inter-exchange in themselves, but only people through institutions in each of the said continents.

Which prompts the following questions: who are the persons (scholars) and institutions (agencies) interested in “Hemispheric Studies of the Americas?” Are scholars in South America and the Caribbean interested in Hemispheric Studies of the Americas? Maybe, but if there are, it is not a priority in the regions with concerns other than Hemispheric Studies beyond the triangulation between South/Central America and the Caribbean, the US, the EU and China.

That leaves us with the fact that Hemispheric Studies (of the Americas) is a concern of scholars located in Western Europe and the US. The question is: what for? What is at stake? What would be the purpose of “studying and knowing” Hemispheric America? To simplify a simple story, Hemispheric America is a conflicting field of forces within the Hemisphere but always in relation to the European Union (which is neither Western nor Eastern Hemisphere) and with the unavoidable fact that the Eastern Hemisphere is returning and that, according to several estimates, before 2020 China will be the first and the US the second largest economy in the world.

Some of the tasks ahead could be guided by some of these and similar questions: How would that impinge on the Hemispheric Americas? What do we need and want to know about ourselves and about the tsunami world order that will alter the long lasting formation, rise and consolidation of Western Civilization, the US of North America and Canada, and the continuing struggle of South America and Caribbean-America?

The cycle that started with the invention of America and later on the Western Hemisphere is closing. Theorizing Hemispheric Studies of the Americas means to start from this closing while, at the same time, knowing well the conditions under which America and the Western Hemisphere were created and under which the illusion is maintained.

## Endnotes

[1] A reproduction of Roosevelt's *Annual Message to Congress* is available online. See below.

[2] At the moment of editing this article the world is witnessing one of the most evident (and distressing) moves to regain and maintain US leadership: President Barack Obama announcing first to invade Syria, to seek after his decision support from Congress, and bypassing the United Nations. All this means an effort to maintain the leadership of North Hemispheric America. Under these circumstances, who is theorizing the studies of Hemispheric America and what for?

[3] For an expanded version of the argument see my *The Darker Side of Western Modernity. Global Futures, Decolonial Options*.

[4] A Northern/Southern Hemisphere Map:

<http://withfriendship.com/images/g/33558/southern-hemisphere-shem.jpg>.

Accessed September 10, 2013.

[5] The Medieval Christian T/O map:

[http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/70/T\\_and\\_O\\_map\\_Guntherus\\_Ziner\\_1472.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/70/T_and_O_map_Guntherus_Ziner_1472.jpg). Accessed September 10, 2013.

[6] The Bunting Clover Leaf Map, 1581:

[http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/8/87/1581\\_Bunting\\_clover\\_leaf\\_map.jpg/976px-1581\\_Bunting\\_clover\\_leaf\\_map.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/8/87/1581_Bunting_clover_leaf_map.jpg/976px-1581_Bunting_clover_leaf_map.jpg).

Accessed September 10, 2013.

[7] The Mercator World Map:

[http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/58/Mercator\\_World\\_Map.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/58/Mercator_World_Map.jpg).

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[8] On the meaning of Ortelius's map see especially chapter 5 of my *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality and Colonization*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2003.

[9] And certainly it creates anxiety in European institutions like the Goehte-Institute in Johannesburg, which now is promoting artists from BRICS countries, <http://www.fnbjoburgartfair.co.za/article/brics-project>. However, this generosity shall confuse no one. This move toward re-westernization is already behind the growing awareness and projects of dewesternization. See my article on Sharjah Biennial 11. "Re:Emerging, Decentering and Delinking: Shifting the Geographies of Sensing, Believing and Knowing." <http://www.ibraaz.org/essays/59/>.

[10] For re-westernization and its consequences, see my *The Darker Side of Western Modernity...* op cit.

[11] See my "Geopolitics of Sensing and Knowing." Sep 2011.

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**Mobilizing 'America/América': Toward Entangled Americas  
and a Blueprint for Inter-American 'Area Studies'**

**Abstract:**

As the conflictive imaginaries of the Americas—of who matters and who does not—show, the *Inter-American* is more easily evoked than described. In a by now famous quote, Frederic Jameson has called globalization an “untotalizable totality”. Similarly, we may speculate that the prefix “inter” refers to an undefined relationship to America/América and between the Americas. How can the “inter” as significant marker within Inter-American Studies potentially be translated into research paradigms? The article delineates developments and debates within the field of Inter-American studies and creates and reflects a critical vocabulary in glossary form. The entries in the second part follow in alphabetical order and represent modalities of space, albeit on conceptually different levels. Their links to spatial categories help to avoid arbitrariness. Being aware of the impossibility of totality, they should be used in a kaleidoscopic way to look at area(s) from multiple angles and perspectives. The terms are loosely connected, may sometimes overlap to a small degree, and, as tropes within mobility studies, need to be continuously renegotiated with the flux of time and place.

**Keywords:** critical vocabulary, transversal, translocational, mobility studies, knowledge production

### **America**

Let us be lovers, we'll marry our fortunes together  
I've got some real estate here in my bag  
So we bought a pack of cigarettes, and Mrs. Wagner pies  
And we walked off to look for America

Cathy, I'm lost, I said, though I knew she was sleeping  
I'm empty and I'm aching and I don't know why  
Countin' the cars on the New Jersey turnpike  
They've all come to look for America, all come to look for America

(Paul Simon)

### **Buscando América**

Te estoy buscando América  
y temo no encontrarte,  
tus huellas se han perdido entre la  
oscuridad.

Te estoy llamando América  
pero no me respondes,  
te han desaparecido, los que temen la  
verdad.

Si el sueño de uno  
es sueño de todos.  
Romper la cadena  
y echarnos a andar.  
Tengamos confianza.  
Pa' lante mi raza.

Te han secuestrado América  
y han amordazado tu boca,  
y a nosotros nos toca  
ponerte en libertad  
Te estoy llamando América,  
nuestro futuro espera  
y antes que se nos muera  
te vamos a encontrar.

Te estoy buscando América.

(Rubén Blades)



## Looking for America/América

Both Paul Simon and Ruben Blades have artistically traversed the Americas many times. They also have crisscrossed the multiple musical cultures of the Americas in numerous recordings fusing jazz, salsa, rock and folk among others in their musical creations and have given voice to various Americas in their rich musical fusions of sounds, rhythms, and words. What the song lyrics quoted as preface have in common is that they express the quest for 'America/América' in spatial as well as metaphorical terms. They are different in language and content, though. Written in blank verse and English, Paul Simon's song "America" narrates a journey east in the United States. Two lovers are hitch-hiking from Saginaw, Michigan to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania to look for 'America'. There they board a Greyhound bus to New York City. As they pass through the New Jersey turnpike, the initial excitement about the trip turns into anxiety, fear and sadness; a mood that is also captured by Rubén Blades' song "Buscando América," released by the composer and his band Seis del Solar & Son del Solar in 1984. But while Paul Simon's composition recorded by Simon & Garfunkel on their 1968 album *Bookends* is first of all a melancholic love song, Rubén Blades' salsa infused Spanish tune "Buscando América" is part of the more politically outspoken album of the same title. Echoing Bolivarian notions of 'América', Blades' song, politically conscious, reflects the divide between utopia and dystopia in relation to 'América'. Similar to Paul Simon's "America", the Blades's lyrics shift and negotiate between hopefulness and disillusionment. The former's references are to locations in the United States, the latter's references to history, yet, primarily refer to political systems in Latin America. Despite these different conceptualizations of 'America/América' that recast geopolitical imaginaries of a North and South America divide, both songs, on the other hand, wistfully play with the concept 'America/América' as a "dense and suggestive signifier" (Kunow 246) and set the term free for "a multiplicity of interpellations of subject positions" (Rausser/Isensee 1). Both songs also negotiate individual and collective quests for America/América—"They all come to look for America/ Nuestro futuro espera"—thus adding additional suggestiveness to the signifier that goes beyond the concept of nation-states. To further comprehend 'America/América' as signifier it, hence, seems useful to switch to a plural version: The Americas. Outside Latin America the term 'America' frequently recalls images of U.S. America only, but both the English and the Spanish term have historically functioned as signifiers in respect to notions of utopia and independence in particular. As Quijano and Wallerstein have pointed out, the differences lie within utopian conceptualizations: "North America's "utopia of social equality and liberty" and Latin America's indigenous "utopia of reciprocity, solidarity, and direct democracy" (Quijano and Wallerstein 1992, 556-57). "If Hemispheric American studies", as Ralph Bauer concludes, "cannot 'discover' the cultural essence of a hemispheric America in the tabula rasa of

unfamiliar textual terrains, it can study the rich and diverse history of this idea" (243). It is here that Inter-American scholarship gains new momentum and prominence. Beyond the idea of "a hemispheric America" and certainly ever since the collapse of Spanish imperial claims in 1898, concrete cultural, political and economic dynamics, tensions, and processes within the Americas have increasingly created inter-American webs and networks that manifest mutual entanglements between locations, regions, and nations beyond a North-South divide.

### **From America/América to the Americas or Re-thinking Hemispheric 'American' Studies**

A look at the present and the past reveals that Inter-American Studies today is a booming field with important predecessors in the twentieth century. We may think of literary comparatists and Latin Americanists as M. J. Valdés, José Ballón Gari Laguardia and Lois Parkinson to name but a few and during the 1990s comparative Inter-American scholarship in the US by critics as Djelal Kadir, Doris Sommer, Antonio Benítez Rojo and José David Saldívar. Many of these critics continue to nourish the field with new theoretical and critical insight, as Saldívar's recent book *Trans-Americanity. Subaltern Modernities, Global Coloniality and the Cultures of Greater Mexico* (2012) illustrates. As Earl Fitz notes, "though we have seen interest in the Inter-American project wax and wane through the years, we are now living in a time when, for a variety of reasons, interest in Inter-American relations suddenly looms large and more urgent than it ever has before" (13). This is due in part to the fact that postnational and transnational turns in Latin American and American Studies have recognized the necessity to think "nation" and "area" anew and have slowly entered the critical debates about the restructuring of area studies that have been prompted by radical transformations in geopolitics and economics in times of globalization. Critics like Walter Mignolo and José David Saldívar have introduced new kinds of border thinking that question traditional knowledge and power division that have created hierarchies along the North-South axis which have become as troubling as earlier examples of a divide between East-West. Not only do they introduce mobile border concepts, they also favor dialogical approaches, as does Saldívar in *Trans-Americanity. Subaltern Modernities, Global Coloniality and the Cultures of Greater Mexico*, to comprehend the interconnectedness of cultures and cultural productions within the Americas beyond a North-South divide and introduce the necessity of optional discourses such as indigenous knowledge production, as Mignolo calls for in his recent book *The Darker Side of Western Modernity* (2011).

It is safe to say that Inter-American Studies has challenged the ways of thinking about the Americas beyond South American and North American "Creole Nationalisms" (Mignolo) that have created distinct nationalities in the aftermath of conquest and colonization in particular and, thusly,

have put into question earlier conceptualizations of area studies in general. Inter-American Studies, in our understanding, conceptualize the Americas as transversally related, chronotopically entangled, and multiply interconnected. In that sense Inter-American Studies envision a post-territorial understanding of area(s). With its critical positioning at the crossroads of cultural studies and area studies the field pushes further the postcolonial, postnational and cross-border turns in studies of the Americas toward a model of horizontal dialogue beyond constructed areas, cultures as well as disciplines. As John Carlos Rowe puts it, “the U.S., Canada, Europe, and their Greco-Roman sources—are not “areas” at all, but conceptualizations ... (and) the intellectual complements” of what Mignolo calls the “modern/colonial world system” (Rowe 322-23). To investigate how, to what degree, and in which ways ‘America/América’ as geopolitical, cultural and social manifestation should be seen as ‘entangled Americas’ beyond closed national and area spaces is one of Inter-American scholars’ central goals to comprehend the Americas in their historical, social and cultural interrelatedness more fully.

Inter-American studies first of all should be seen as a collaborative project that involves many scholars from various disciplines studying the history(ies), societ(ies), culture(s), language(s) and politic(s) of the two continents forming the Americas. While we are still in the initial phase of creating horizontal dialogical patterns to overcome classical nationalist and area study concepts, a new conscience and alertness of mobilizing and revising earlier paradigms have infused American Studies, Canadian Studies, Caribbean Studies and Latin American Studies (I see these disciplines as area studies related) to different degrees. Harry Harootunian critically comments that area studies “failed to provide . . . a persuasive attempt to account for its privilege of space (and place) and its apparent exemption from an encounter with time” (29). Similarly Doreen Massey reminds us that “while ‘time is equaled with movement and progress, ‘space’/‘place’ is equaled with stasis and reaction” (n.p). David Szanton notes that area studies are frequently charged with being merely “ideographic,” primarily concerned with description, as opposed to the “nomothetic” or the theory building and generalizing character of the core social science disciplines (4). As Szanton reflections reveal, area studies in crisis and/or under attack are frequently confronted with lacking convincing theory or overall narrative. If area studies are in crisis at the same time it appears that they are in a process of reorientation. A general tendency to be observed is the way in which scholars from the mentioned area study related fields have redefined the relationships between center and periphery, often multiplied and diversified these concepts, and have moved away from container visions of locality, region and nation to embrace translocal, transregional, and transnational categories as paradigms for current investigation. What we can deduct from this development is that “area” gets infused by the idea of a mobile sense of place and hence becomes thinkable as framed but open, historically grown but changing, specific yet interconnected.

Arguably Caribbean Studies have always been translocally oriented. The particular history and development of the area is full of translocal, transregional and transnational entanglements. Accordingly the Caribbean as area construct in the words of Karla Slocum and Deborah A. Thomas “problematizes assumptions about moving in a linear fashion from a locally rooted area studies approach to a global transnational one” (553-34). From an anthropological position the authors point toward the “theoretical lens of creolization,” “migration as hallmark of Caribbean anthropology” and “synergies between global and local frames” (556, 558,560) to delineate a rethinking of ‘area’ as mobile and multiply related. Their thinking is highly relevant for a further conceptualization of Inter-American studies, as both share the conviction that local area analysis is important for the understanding of global processes. Slocum and Thomas conclude their reflection on Caribbean area studies as follows:

Clearly, an analysis of processes in, through, and around the Caribbean has not been exclusively local. Because of the historical particularities of the region, it requires constant boundary crossing—disciplinarily, analytically, conceptually and categorically. Even when looking at the Caribbean as an “area,” Caribbeanists analyses rarely have been strictly bounded. Examination of the Caribbean’s connections with other areas—particularity through the movements and relations of Caribbean people, places, and state structures—has been a significant way that Caribbeanists have made this clear. (560)

As concerns a conceptualization of area studies it is important to remember that Immanuel Wallerstein enhanced a vision of the Caribbean as expanded and truly inter-American showcase already in the 1970s. In what he calls “the extended Caribbean” we encounter a cultural and historical formation that stretches from Brazil to the East coast of the United States (47). Emphasizing commerce, trade, plantation economy, and cultural transmission, Wallerstein gives us an early example of how to envision the Americas as space of entanglement(s) beyond European claims and postcolonial boundaries. His focus on economic, environmental, and historical affiliations along the coastlines from Brazil to the USA provides a microcosmic lens to perceive the Americas hemispherically as well as internally interconnected beyond Old World-New World dialectics.

Walter Dignolo’s recent thoughts about global futures and decolonial options in *The Darker Side of Modernity* provide further inspiration to rethink our understanding of area studies in particular with reference to the Americas. According to him, the decolonial found its first intellectual voices during the Cold War in the writings of African, African Caribbean and African American thinkers and intellectuals. Historically, as Dignolo points out, decolonization finds its predecessors in liberation movements of the early nineteenth century: “The words employed in the colonies referring to the same ends were independence and revolution, as per the American and Haitian Revolutions or the Mexican and Argentine Independence” (53). Beyond its meaning as historical referent and toward the end of the Cold War period, decolonization becomes ‘decoloniality’, signifying in the words of

Mignolo the “decolonization of knowledge” (53) and becomes “synonymous with being epistemologically disobedient” (54). What critics like Mignolo envision is a world of thought in which many parallel worlds of thinking coexist. To achieve such perhaps utopian thought system “epistemic obedience” and “epistemic delinking” are fundamental (54). For a reconceptualization of area studies, Mignolo’s assertion that “the historical presence of ‘pueblo originarios’ (ab-origines) and the massive African slave trade are two of the radical experiences that differentiate the decolonial from the postcolonial” (55) mark another point of explication why indeed the inter-American interconnectedness becomes an important voice for a new epistemic orientation towards “pluri-topic” thinking (61). A focus on inter-American connectedness indeed opens venues to see the politics, cultural productions and thought systems among, for instance, indigenous cultures and African Caribbean, African American and Latin African American cultures and diaspora cultures within the Americas as providing optional discourses to comprehend the constellation of the Americas as hemispherically related beyond and also outside of the Old World-New World axis. In that sense an inter-American lens not only provides new insights into the Americas as being defined regionally or nationally, transatlantic and transpacific studies of the Americas, but additionally, helps us tackle one of the weak spots of area studies, namely its lack of theory building. Area should first of all be envisioned in the plural version, related to a mobile “progressive sense of place” (Massey n.p) that is intrinsically connected to synchronic as well as uneven temporalities. Thus synchronicity, simultaneity, and the investigation of vertical as well as horizontal relations with respect to knowledge and power systems shape the general theoretical framework. The critical analysis should direct itself at issues of process, relation, and interaction to come to terms with areas as spaces of political, economic and cultural entanglement.

### **Studying the Americas: Fueling Dialog, Re-thinking Processes of Othering and Overcoming the Rhetoric of Exceptionalism**

Cultural critics Frances Aparicio and Susana Chávez-Silverman seek “to contribute a polydirectional and multivocal approach to the politics of representation, seeking to avoid the pervading binarism in the field and the colonial gaze that essentializes and fetishizes subaltern cultures and privileges dominant ones” (14). As they suggest in their introduction to mode of conceptualizing asymmetrical power relations. It would be naïve to assume that the endeavors of Inter-American scholarship can easily ignore ideological as well as disciplinary battlegrounds involved in defining and redefining academic orientation. Different representatives of disciplines related to area studies in the Americas have been replicating colonial and global politics shaping relations between the U.S., Canada, Caribbean and Latin American nations on a level of academic

debate and dispute. Hence discussions of empire and empire-building have included debates about theory and knowledge production and recast scenarios of Western intellectual supremacy and dominance complicating a true exchange not only along a south/north axis.

As John Carlos Rowe reminds us, Latin American Studies scholars tend to view the postnationalist turn in American Studies critically, frequently relating it to empire-building and imperialist U.S. politics (c.f. 326). What suspicious minds refer to are the hegemonic discourse of U.S. expansionism built on concepts of U.S. American exceptionalism and, as Donald Pease succinctly traces in *The New American Exceptionalism* (2009), it is indeed a mobile and powerful trope capable of redefining itself seemingly endlessly. In *The New American Exceptionalism* (2009) Donald Pease traces the changing name of American exceptionalism from its assumed beginnings in Puritan times to the war on terror announced by the Bush administration after September 11, 2001. The way he tracks the different contextualizations and reinterpretations sheds light on Stephen Greenblatt's assumption that despite our scholarly concerns with mobility change "we need to account for the persistence, over very long time periods and in the face of radical disruption, of cultural identities for which substantial numbers of people are willing to make extreme sacrifices, including life itself" (2). Indeed the Puritan belief in being among the selected citizens of a new model city for the rest of the world has reechoed in different periods of U.S. American history. As Pease explains, "American exceptionalism is the name of a much coveted form of nationality that provided U.S. citizens with a representative form of self-recognition across the history of the cold war. As a discourse, American exceptionalism includes a complex assemblage of theological and secular assumptions out of which Americans have developed the lasting belief in America as the fulfillment of the national ideal to which other nations aspire" (7). Whereas this discourse has persevered over time, it is striking how the flux of history has brought forth decisive changes in self-representation. Concepts such as "The City upon the Hill", "Manifest Destiny", "Nation of Nations", and "Leader of the Free World" reveals the rhetorical shifts of an underlying pattern to continuously create conceptual metaphors to keep on nourishing the belief in the exceptionality of the United States of America. The adaptability reveals how intriguing and mobile the concept has been to policymakers who have managed to reconfigure its constituents to address new historical challenges and geopolitical circumstances. As becomes evident in Pease's explanation, "the semantic indeterminacy of American exceptionalism" renders this concept so adaptable to often successfully bridge contradictions and tensions in the self-recognition of U.S. citizens (9). Hence policymakers sanctioned war actions as justified in the struggle for free trade as well as the struggle for a world free of terrorism and in complacency with American exceptionality as "World Police". While policymakers drew upon the fantasy of American exceptionalism to authorize governance as well as military action, scholars of the humanities relied on the beliefs of



American exceptionalism in order to control the selection process of events to be represented in historical discourse as well as the process of canon-making as concerns U.S. American literature (Pease 11).

Key figures of the Myth and Symbol school of American studies used tropes such as “The City upon the Hill” “the Frontier”, and “Manifest Destiny” in the early years of cold war politics to construct an exceptionalist model of the United States for the curriculum of American studies as well as a prescriptive model for political communities outside U.S. geopolitical territory (Pease 12). It is important to note that the heightened visibility of the reconfigurations of American exceptionalism in the postwar gains new momentum in the U.S. policymakers’ repositioning of governance after September 11, 2001. Hence, Pease’s critical inquiry makes it all the more desirable to call for horizontal and dialogical paradigms to study the Americas; moreover it demonstrates the urgency to further decolonize imperialist paradigms for the production and diffusion of knowledge. Likewise, as Stefan Rinke emphasizes, we need to acknowledge that the diversity of Latin America has been subsumed and simplified as homogeneous entity in U.S. American ideological discourse within a process of “othering” that positions Latin America as the U.S.’s inferior Other within a Pan-American imaginary (3). To pave the way for future dialogical thinking, John Carlos Rowe’s hint “that not all study of other societies is inevitably imperialist” seems helpful, though (326).

In a similar vein, Caroline F. Levander and Robert S. Levine stress that, “recent tendencies to conceive of the United States in the American hemisphere solely in terms of empire and imperialism tend to overlook the complex series of encounters that collectively comprise national communities in the Americas” (7). They maintain the necessity to acknowledge and explore the entanglement of regions and nations within the Americas against binary structures of hegemony versus periphery. Quoting Rodrigo Lazo they maintain:

“the separation of America as a hemisphere promoted by the Monroe doctrine worked hand in hand with opposition to Spain in some sectors of Latin America.” From such a perspective, the U.S. nation can be understood in relation to nationalistic Latin American liberation movements of the early to mid-nineteenth century. A recognition of this intertwined history of nations in formation presses us to abandon a simple binary that pits the United States as a fully formed, homogeneous entity against the myriad peoples and nations of the rest of the hemisphere. (7)

Looking at recent developments in the Americas at large it is safe to assert that the cultural and political landscape is subject to at times contradictory dynamics of change. New global players from the South, Brazil in particular, are gaining power, whereas the geopolitical hegemony of the United States appears to be gradually declining. Different historical epochs have brought forth varying power constellations within the Americas including the interrelations between nations of

Central America, the Caribbean and Latin America. The Caribbean islands even more than the mainland have witnessed flux, change and intercultural dynamics frequently throughout their histories and numerous networks and interconnections have emerged that mark the Caribbean region as a specifically mobile and multiply connected one; within the Americas but certainly also beyond. Perhaps due to the geographically marginal position far north, Canada and Canadian Studies frequently appear absent from agendas of Inter-American Studies. As Albert Braz succinctly reminds us, "...hemispheric studies have become increasingly oriented along a United States-Hispanic America axis. Consequently Canada is seldom considered in continental dialogues, whether they originate in the United States or in Spanish America" (119). Geographical positioning and language markers such as French and English in Canada and Portuguese in Brazil may partially explain why both cultures frequently fall off of the mappings of Inter-American Studies. Another reason may be that both countries have had a tendency to look at the world from European perspectives, not positioning themselves firmly as part of the American hemispheres. In the words of Neil Bresner both nations "constantly reproduce and carry forward with them the colonial perception of inauthenticity and imitation" (26). Still, what they share with the hemispheric Americas is colonial history, hybrid processes of identity formation and transcultural productivity. With reference to Canada, Albert Braz in particular points to the intellectual force of Louis Riel who in his writings exposes métissage, racial hybridity, and continental identity as central for Canadian identity formation processes (122-26). Similar to conceptualizations of new racial crossing along the lines of "Nuestra América" by thinkers such as José Martí, Simon Bolívar, Roberto Fernández Retamar and José Vasconcelos, Riel's métissage (with reference to the Métis and Halfbreeds in Canada) provides another option to rethink difference and the emergence of continental identities also north of the United States of America, namely Canada. Similarly the heterogeneity of Brazilian culture points toward processes of creolization that link Brazil to the American project in multiple ways.

### **From the Prefix "Inter" to Research Paradigms**

As the conflictive imaginaries of the Americas—of who matters and who does not—show, the *Inter-American* is more easily evoked than described. In a by now famous quote, Frederic Jameson has called globalization an "untotalizable totality" (xii). Similarly, we may speculate that the prefix "inter" refers to an undefined relationship to America/América and between the Americas. How can the "inter" as significant marker within Inter-American Studies potentially be translated into research paradigms? "Inter" is "a prefix that means overlapping, concurrence, layers of interaction, juxtapositions, connectivity. It is not synthesizing two or more into one and it is not simply mixing

approaches or terminologies between areas studies and disciplines... [It] is to cross lines between, it is to express the lines of transition, it is to express multidimensional connectedness and multidirectional flows" (146), as Ana Luz explains. "Inter" stresses "in-betweenness" (146). Certainly the knowledge production about local, regional and national history(ies), societ(ies), literatures remains important. Only by revisiting existing paradigms and knowledge pools can Inter-American scholarship attempt to provide missing links to comprehend these local, regional, and national specifics as transnationally and hemispherically connected. While numerous disciplines with an area studies focus have fostered transatlantic and more recently transpacific approaches to studying the Americas in revisionist processes that give voice to colonial and postcolonial relations between the colonizing nations of Europe and the postcolonial repercussions until contemporary times, Inter-American Scholarship directs its focus to multi-layered connections, multidirectional flows, conflicted and overlapping imaginaries and complex entanglements within the Americas. It thus intends to rethink spatial configurations that have functioned as a basis for framing areas studies in earlier decades. Likewise it aims at new knowledge production that revises master narratives, canon-making, museolog(ies) from the vista of Inter-American relations. In a broader sense the projects inscribes themselves in a larger endeavor to decolonize concepts, perspectives on, and approaches to the Americas.

What are major general paradigms to pursue Inter-American Studies? The most obvious, and in some disciplines, such as comparative literatures, a well established one, is certainly the comparative approach: in general a juxtaposition of cultural productions in various contexts of the Americas, a comparison of historical events and conditions as well as their impact in the American hemisphere, comparative studies of political and economic decisions and their effects on different, nations, regions, localities in the Americas. While these comparative aspects open up venues to shed light upon similarities and differences within and between the two continents, they tend to fall short when it comes to the analysis of relations and processes. Hence I would like to propose more complex relational and processual strategies for a future fine tuning of Inter-American scholarship. Horizontal as well as vertical dimensions play a crucial role in exploring what types of relations exist between individuals, groups, regions, and nations within the Americas. In this relational approach to Inter-American studies the scholar aims at discovering the links, the obstacles as well as the power constellations that shape the interaction between various agents of the production of capital, culture, environment, network, and knowledge. Part of these relational strategies are border discourses, as they have emerged in particular in the context of transnational studies of the Americas, which permit the Inter-American scholar to explore the in-betweenness as well as the political, cultural, economic, and spatial overlaps in their asymmetrical constellations that characterize manifestations of entanglements in the Americas. Finally, to study movement and

process within the American hemisphere, the processual approach investigating translocation and development serves as a useful tool for capturing the channels, circulations, flows, itineraries and shifting imaginaries that have crisscrossed and transversally linked the Americas from colonial times to the global present. The processual approach both ‘follows the thing’ and analyzes context, progression as well as stasis at departure, transit, and arrival points.

## **Critical Terminology and Case Studies**

What are helpful tropes to tackle Hemispheric ‘American’ Studies in a larger understanding of all cultures as inherently mobile and translocally, if not hemispherically or even globally connected? Terminology and paradigms feed into programs and archives of knowledge that frequently and for long stretches of time remain unchallenged sources of knowledge. Hence, the most basic yet essential requirement of a critical terminology of Inter-American Studies is the acknowledgement of the multiplicity and simultaneity of knowledge production in different areas of the Americas and in various disciplines studying the Americas. Scholarship needs to record the differences, juxtapose contraries and similarities, and mobilize the existing sources of knowledge in a dialogical way. In such manner knowledge itself becomes recognizable as flow and the scholars need to pay attention to the controlling and channeling of flows to move from vertical to horizontal acknowledgement and diffusion of knowledge production. This also automatically implies that all revisions of key terms, phenomena and paradigms pursued here-and-now are subject to future changes, as history(ies) move on and forms of archiving, and the channels and distribution of knowledge modulate over time. Working toward a critical lexicography for the hemispheric study of the Americas that should underpin the theoretical redefinition of areas as mobile, transversal and progressive, I resort to a broader framework of current mobility studies. Migratory patterns, mediascapes, and citational practices—to name but a few paradigms available—give expression to the assumption that all cultures are inherently mobile. Beyond that they permit us to investigate how different forms and manifestations of movement in space and time shape and reshape geopolitical imaginaries within the Americas, how they produce and reproduce ‘culture’, ‘environment’ and ‘nature’; they enable us to discover the ways knowledge travels, how it is produced and diffused, channeled, framed, controlled, and suppressed. By assuming that cultures and histories are in process one may claim flow as evidence of mobility and an object of study. One may assume flow as category to understand the shifting production of knowledge and theory and one may embrace flow as objective since the overall intention is to mobilize the existing knowledge production from a dialogically defined to a horizontal cultural studies perspective (see also Berkin/Kaltmeier 2012). Ideally then entries in a list of critical lexicography address the

transversal, multidirectional, and interconnected nature of historical processes, political developments, economic changes and cultural productions that one considers fundamental for a more comprehensive understanding of the Americas as entangled space(s).

What epistemology may serve as scholarly tools of a fast emerging field of research on the Americas? Projecting a matrix for a critical epistemology of Inter-American Studies, metaphors such as flows, itineraries, border, and entanglement move to the foreground. They may function as tropes illustrating methodological challenges and changes associated with cross-area studies. The subsequent paragraphs present key terms for the study of the Americas within a dialogically and horizontally oriented critical terminology. My point of departure is another currently booming field, that of mobility studies. Drawing on concepts developed by critics such as Arjun Appadurai, James Clifford, Stephen Greenblatt, John Urry, and Anna Tsing, I argue that 'mobilization' is fundamental to Inter-American Studies on various levels. On a meta-level of area studies, Inter-American studies require a rethinking of dialogue between disciplines such as American Studies, Canadian Studies, Caribbean Studies and Latin American Studies in the first place. On a level of spatial thinking Inter-American Studies can profit from Doreen Massey's conceptualization of places in progress. Spatial units, accordingly, keep on changing over time, and their developments help us come to terms with the interconnectivity between localities, regions, and nations within the Americas in a diachronic as well as synchronic way. The conceptualization of space as porous, fluid, mobile and as framed, controlled and channeled dialectically permits us to study the transversal flows that have shaped cultural, economic and political processes within the Americas without losing a consciousness of hierarchies and power structures involved. Linking spatial mobility with time we begin to discover new links, connections, as well as gaps and borderlines that characterize the complex, multidirectional and multirelational diffusion of cultures in the Americas. Moreover, we need critical vocabulary that permits us to study the interconnectedness, transversality and multidirectionality in concrete case studies. Based upon my own research conduct, the terms introduced in the glossary section hopefully encourages scholars as well as students to approach Inter-American Studies, despite the field's complexity, with confidence, ease, and clarity. To make this clear from the start, a glossary per se provides terminology, definition, explication, circumscription as well as paraphrase. As such a lexicography is an assemblage of knowledge, a selection of information, ideally a critical reflection and always also a site of new knowledge production. To approach the study of the Americas in a transdisciplinary perspective is recommendable since different disciplines provide optional insights and open venues for dialogue and exchange. As Matthias Oppermann rightly warns, "If, as Sophia McClennen has argued, Inter-American Studies is "dedicated to critically examining the ways that disciplinary knowledge has been used to support hegemony" (407), then practitioners in the field must be particularly sensitive

to attempts to limit their comparative, post-national inquiries into the cultures of the Americas and their global relations to just one distinctive type of textuality” (n.p). With a nod to Rüdiger Kunow’s lexicography presented in his article “American Studies as Mobility Studies: Some Terms and Constellations,” I chart a series of tropes that do not aspire to be a complete blueprint for transdisciplinary Inter-American mobility studies but may function as a basic epistemology. What the selected tropes hope to capture are points “where more than one location, tradition, or practice are coming into play” (Kunow 260). If you want “America” turns into “America(s)” and becomes “constituted and performed across different social and cultural spaces” in which the signifier is viewed from various perspectives at once (Kunow 248). As such these tropes function as tools to comprehend the Americas as spatially and temporally entangled. I want to mention here that the examples given are guided and at the same time limited by my own scholarly preference for the interdisciplinary study of music, film, literature, urban studies, and performance arts within the Americas in a larger cultural studies framework.

The entries follow in alphabetical order and represent modalities of space, albeit on conceptually different levels. Their links to spatial categories help to avoid arbitrariness. Being aware of the impossibility of totality, they should be used in a kaleidoscopic way to look at area(s) from multiple angles and perspectives. The terms are loosely connected, may sometimes overlap to a small degree, and, as tropes within mobility studies, need to be continuously renegotiated with the flux of time and place.

## **Amerindia Interfaces**

From Brazil to Canada a Transamerican phenomena to deconstruct and decolonialize “Indianness” and “Indian” as aboriginal other and unified “Indian” signifier has spread in the aftermath of multiculturalist debates in the 1970s and 80s. What emerges is a new decolonial perspective emphasizing heterogeneity, plurality, and mobility with regard to indigenous cultures in the Americas today. Recovering an “indigenismo” that is interconnected with local and global changes in the Americas and beyond, writers, artists, activists and intellectuals have challenged Eurocentric and essentialist conceptualization of First Nation, Native American, Indigenous and Amerindian identities. Referring to a split in the Bolivian government of Eva Morales between “Indianism” and “Marxismo”, Walter Mignolo emphasizes that “the positive side of the tension is that Indian intellectuals, activists, and organizations are gaining ground and confidence in building and affirming their place in an emerging plurinational state” (*The Darker Side* 42). What Mignolo sees



developing is an alliance of “The Indian nations (pueblos originarios) in Bolivia, Ecuador, Chiapas, and Guatemala ... moving in clear decolonial directions parallel to the state and ... creating a strong decolonial political society” (43). Plurilocality and heterogeneity mark the discourse that characterizes the decolonial movement toward a perception of “Amerindia” as complex, diverse and heterogeneous in terms of language, knowledge, culture and politics. With a nod to Gerald Vizenor, I would like to add “post” as preface to illustrate that indigenous cultures have undergone radical changes also as actors beyond imperial destruction and exclusion, and provide interfaces as trope to explore movements such as the twentieth century Pan-Indianism as well as contemporary local and global cultural productions of indigenous cultures as interrelated and frequently overlapping in their effort to provide optional forms of knowledge production. While these optional forms certainly cannot bring back the Amerindian archive of knowledge that got destroyed in colonial times, they may reveal complex levels of diachronic as well as synchronic interconnectivity within and beyond indigenous cultures and their networks. To study cultural productions by writers and artists from different tribal affiliations from a decolonial perspective sheds light not only on the intrinsic mobility of the cultures they refer to but also the on the discursive entanglement of new narratives of tribal knowledge production. What the writers briefly presented share here is a continued struggle against colonial semiosis and neocolonial power politics against tribal cultures in the Americas and beyond. Novels by Gerald Vizenor (USA) display a complex synergy between poststructuralist thinking and Anishinaabe storytelling practices. Resorting to trickster figures and trickster stories, he breaks through a clear divide of supposedly different and opposed systems of knowledge production. He mobilizes not only his literary figures and plots by putting them in various locations within and outside the Americas to far away locations in Europe and Asia but deconstructs the Euro-American invention of “Indian” and “Amerindia” through humor, irony, and pastiche. In his 1992 novel *The Heirs of Columbus*, Columbus is portrayed as a Mayan-Indian desperately trying to return to his home in Central America. Through mobilizing tribal cultures and tribal identities, Vizenor metaphorically creates images of Post-Amerindia that define tribal cultures as cross-culturally and trans-locally linked and propose polylocal agency in contemporary cultural production. Similar to Vizenor’s literary decolonial practices Canadian Ojibway writer, playwright and film-maker Drew Hayden Taylor places tribal cultures and identities into a larger local-global framework of postfordist commodification and neocolonial power structures. A series cultural encounters, cultural border crossings, and cross-cultural reflections infuse his travel narrative *Funny, You don’t look like one*. In this collection of vignettes, yarn, and reflective essays Drew Hayden Taylor presents observations, speculations, and ideas of a Native person traveling around

Canada. Central to the concept of the travel narrative is the Native as mobile, thoughtful, critical, and humorous observer that relives various scenarios of Native encounters with Euro-American clichés, imaginaries and biases. In his 21<sup>st</sup> century play *The Berlin Blues* he places “Amerindia” in a larger context of global capitalist economy and Disneyfication. Displaying the individual and political divisions within a local Native community as reaction to a German developing plan to turn a fictional Otter Lake Reserve into “Ojibway World,” a Native Theme Park designed to attract international tourists, he mocks European inventions and perversions of Amerindia and showcases First Nation stereotypes diffused by Native American cultures themselves. What Drew Hayden Taylor’s works reveal is an intricate net of mobile tribal cultures intertwined with cultural, political and economic processes of globalization. Similar to the political engagements of Gerald Vizenor and Drew Hayden Taylor, activism and writing are part of the Brazilian writer Eliane Potiguara’s trajectory in the defense of human and women’s rights in Brazil and beyond. Her approach to the redefinition of indigenous cultures is transnationally oriented. She is part of global movement of women to rethink and transform the representations of indigenous people. Her writing includes various stories and voices that are connected by the ancestral knowledge of heterogeneous Indigenous traditions. Performing the function of oratory, these voices aim at the mobilization and transformation of Indigenous people in their fight against colonial and neocolonial oppression. In life writings such as *Metade cara, metade máscara* (2004) Potiguara links colonial history in Brazil with the global present through a mix of history, fiction and autobiographical references. In a hybrid discourse of history and fiction dissolving clear dividing lines between the mythic and the historical, history and memory, place and nation, identity and alterity Potiguara develops story-telling based literary voices exemplifying the capacity for mobility and transformation. As Rubelise da Cunha points out, Potiguara underscores that “the construction of knowledge for Indigenous peoples can only be achieved by the storytelling practice” (65). As the work of all three writers manifest, contemporary indigenous storytelling practice is one of multiple tones, styles, and translocal voices to capture the complexity of knowledge recuperation, production, and diffusion accompanying the indigenous struggle for recognition and survivance (Vizenor) across the Americas at the intersection of grassroots activism and literary creation.

## Biocultural Intersections

In the words of W.J.T. Mitchell: “Terrorism is so routinely analogized to things like sleeper cells, viruses, cancers, and autoimmune disorders that one is tempted to say that, at the level of imagery and imagination all terrorism is bioterrorism, ... “ (20). Building upon actor network theories, critics like Bruno Latour and Ian Hodder point out similar entanglements between natural and cultural phenomena. In Latour’s by now famous study of “the pasteurization of France” the microbe is analyzed as an “essential actor” in biological as well as cultural terms (39). As Ian Hodder further explains, “microbes as things connect people and they connect people and things. Those in our guts connect us to what we eat. They also connect us through the spread of contagious diseases, and because we depend on each other to be hygienic and defeat microbes” (23). Biocultural intersections here signify a crossover trope between epidemics, plagues, diseases etc. and imaginaries of cultural radicalism and difference present in contemporary narrations of inter-American entanglements. From colonial history to most recent outbreaks of cholera in Haiti in 2010 and 2011, epidemics have not only accompanied the flows of goods and people across the Americas, they have had decisive impact on politics of colonial dominance, immigration, security and exclusion. Referring to Spanish colonization in Latin America, Susan Peterson reminds us that Francisco Pizarro defeated an Incan army of 80,000 soldiers with only 168 Spaniard soldiers because a smallpox epidemic killed large numbers of the Native American population (including the emperor and his heir) and caused civil war (55, 76). With reference to inter-American migrations, Felice Batlan recalls that the Massachusetts Bay Colony instituted a quarantine measure in 1647 to stop passengers arriving from Barbados from infecting its populace with the plague (80). Repeatedly epidemics have posed security threats to indigenous pueblos, colonies and states in a number of ways, primarily through their negative affect on economic and military power and domestic or internal security as well as foreign relations. But epidemics and plagues have also infused cultural imaginaries across the Americas with concepts of difference and resistance and have become powerful tropes to narrate cultural clash and change in the Americas. A number of more recent and contemporary literary texts have drawn on epidemics, plagues and curses to unfold stories of inter-American entanglements. Drawing on the 1793 epidemic of yellow fever in Philadelphia, John Edgar Wideman describes racial politics and the conflicted race relations in the Americas in his 1996 novel *Cattle Killing*. During the epidemic crisis in the late eighteenth-century, the outbreak of the yellow fever, as Kunow reminds us, “was almost immediately linked to the recent arrivals of thousands of French-speaking refugees from the Caribbean who had escaped the revolutionary uprising

on Haiti headed by Toussaint l'Ouverture" (254). In the satire *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972) by the African American writer Ishmael Reed, Jes Grew, a Voodoo music and dance epidemic is spreading all over the Americas. For the white hegemonic discourse the threat is tremendous: "if this Jes Grew becomes pandemic it will mean the end of Civilization As We Know It" (7). Jes Grew is defined as biocultural force expressed physically through dance and motion as well as spiritually through border-crossing thinking in the works of HooDoo detective Papa LaBas. Tongue-in-cheek Reed draws on a rich repertoire of African cultural lore in the Caribbean, in New Orleans as Creole capital of the United States and African American musical heritage to provide a blackening of history in the Americas with black Egyptian culture as the mother of all civilizations. Aids as epidemic threat to cultural norms loom large behind Brazilian writer Caio Fernando Abreu's literary creations of hybrid and transnational concepts of Brazilian Queer identity in particular. Exploring transamerican countercultural utopias of the 1960s and the new biocultural threat Aids as challenge to Brazilian identitarian politics, his characters in books such as *Os dragões não conhecem o paraíso* (1988), *Onde andar* *Dulce Vega* (1990) and *Morangos mofados* (1982) live and function in the periphery of society, reveal politics of exclusion and relate and refer to queer characters in North American literary traditions thus joining a larger project of "queering" the Americas. In the novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007) by Dominican American writer Junot Diaz, "fukú americanus, or more colloquially, fukú" (1) becomes the propelling force and omnipresent protagonist behind stories of family migrations between the Caribbean and the United States. Fukú is described as demon, curse, natural force and as political force related to colonial powers as well as recent dictatorships. "No matter what its name or provenance, it is believed that the arrival of Europeans on Hispaniola unleashed the fukú on the world" (1). Referring to the political power of Dominican dictator Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Molina, the narrator reveals: "If you even thought a bad thing about Trujillo, fuá, a hurricane would sweep your family out to the sea, fuá, a boulder would fall out of a clear sky and squash you ..." (3). In the imagination of the narrator even the assassination of J.F. Kennedy and the lost War in Vietnam needs to be related to fukú. "Who killed JFK? Let me, your humble Watcher reveal once and for all the God's Honest Truth: It wasn't the mob or LBJ or the ghost of Marilyn Fucking Monroe. It wasn't aliens or the KGB or a lone gunman. ...; it was fukú." (5).

Everything that happens in the brief wondrous life of Oscar Wao and in the inter-American stories told in the novel happens because of fukú. As all three examples illustrate, biocultural intersections are important markers in cultural productions to expose the

complex networks of mobile bodies, biotic mobilities, traveling cultures, and politics of inclusion and exclusion within the American hemisphere

## Camp

The camp in Giorgio Agamben's rendering is a piece of land "outside the judicial order" but within the larger public space (170). We may think of prison camps, detention camps, plantations, favelas, and ghettos. But we may also think of more mobile manifestations of 'camp' such as trains like *La Bestia negra* and deportation trains. According to Agamben, the individual turns into *homo sacer* by abandonment and displacement. In that ban, the life of the individual becomes open to everyone's intervenes. A similar loss of power and control and the impact on subject positioning Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou discuss in their recent book *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political* (2013): "Our conversation began with the consideration of a poststructuralist position we both share, namely that the idea of the unitary subject serves a form of power that must be challenged and undone, signifying a style of masculinism that effaces sexual difference and enacts mastery over the domain of life. We recognized that both of us thought that ethical and political responsibility emerges only when a sovereign and unitary subject can effectively be challenged, and that the fissuring of the subject or its constituting "Difference," proves central for a politics that challenges both property and sovereignty in specific ways. Yet as much as we prize the forms of responsibility and resistance that emerge from a "dispossessed" subject—one that avows the differentiated bonds by which it is constituted and to which it is obligated—we are also keenly aware that dispossession constitutes a form of suffering for those displaced and colonized and so could not remain an unambivalent political ideal. We started to think together about how to formulate a theory of political performativity that could take into account the version of dispossession that we valued as well as the version we oppose" (ix). Butler's and Athanasiou's book progresses in in form of a dialogue. Together, Butler and Athanasiou set out to "think about dispossession outside the logic of possession" (7). In other words, on the one hand, they expose the multiple forces that lead to bleak sides of dispossession (displacement, colonialism, slavery, homelessness, etc.). On the other hand, they evade falling back on the neo-liberal discourse of 'you are what you own' as the primary constituents of subjectivity. Rather, they expose in the dialogical argumentation that there is a limit to self-sufficiency. Precisely at this threshold of autonomy, humans can see themselves as relational and interdependent beings. Self-displacement in a sense becomes our basic human condition. Hence humans

are always already dispossessed of themselves and bound together. Humans and histories in the Americas are thus seen as closely entangled through the lens of dispossession. The analysis of texts and cultural productions from colonial times to the present that explore the notion of dispossession along the lines of gender, race, ethnicity, and class as important constituent for subject positioning and human interconnectedness beyond local, regional and national confinement would include works by Afro Caribbean writer Teodora Gines, African American poet Phillis Wheatley the Brazilian poet Narcisa Amalia, the first professional woman journalist and the nineteenth-century anti-slavery Brazilian poet to voices from the twentieth and twenty-first century such as the Canadians Anishnaabe/Chippewa poetkateri akiwenzie-damm, and the Saskatchewan Poet Laureate Louise Bernice Halfe; the Chilean Cecilia Vicuña; the U.S. American Sherman Alexie, and Rigoberta Menchú, from Guatemala.

## Cross-Borders

As Claudia Sadowski-Smith points out in the abstract to her article “The Centrality of the Canada-US Border for Hemispheric Studies of the Americas” in this journal edition, “Nineteenth-century US attempts to control native mobility occurred simultaneously at both borders with Canada and Mexico, and turn-of-the twentieth century US efforts to enforce the Canadian boundary against Chinese immigrants preceded and influenced later changes at Mexico’s northern border” (n.p). She sees a historical continuity in the interconnectedness of both borders, as she concludes that “[s]ince that time, developments at the two national boundaries have become more explicitly interconnected” (n.p). In her article she develops a comparative perspective that not only questions “the differential construction of the two boundaries in hemispheric studies” but moves beyond “the singular focus on contemporary Mexico-US border developments that threatens to replicate the very notion of US exceptionalism” which an interest in this border region was originally meant to challenge (Abstract n.p.). With “cross-borders” I want to suggest a trope to study borders not only as contact zones, rupture of mobility or in-between spaces, as has been done with reference to critics like Gloria Anzaldúa and José David Saldívar in particular, but as related and relational contact zones which mirror encounter, inclusion, exclusion and transitions as translocal and transnational phenomena embedded within migration and immigration politics on a global scale. While borders between nations, regions, and reserves lend themselves to comparative and relational approaches, we should extend the border concept to thresholds also within locations such as pueblos, towns, cities, metropolises,



and postmetropolises. For a comparative and relational study of the Canadian-U.S. and Mexican-U.S. border Courtney Hunt's film *Frozen River* (2008) and Tommy Lee Curtis and Guillermo Arriaga's *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada* (2006) permit a close look at the interconnectedness of border semiosis and border politics as an hemispheric phenomenon in the Americas in times of global migration. Films like the *City of God* (2002), *Crash* (2004) and *Falling Down* (1993) explore borders in the midst of contemporary postmetropolises such as Rio de Janeiro and Los Angeles. Reflecting the inner-city divisions along the lines of gender, race, ethnicity, and class, these films link urban structures and development to inter-American migratory patterns, neocolonial politics, barrio defense, and gated community politics. Through a 'cross-borders' lens favelas in Rio de Janeiro, barrios and ghettos in cities further north such as Los Angeles, Mexico City, Detroit and Toronto can be seen as interrelated in the changing urban semiosis and geopolitical rhetoric of land and space distribution across the Americas.

## Itineraries

Studying itineraries provides insight into territory, mapping, and geopolitical imaginaries. At the same time they permit us to crisscross and transgress any notion of solid geopolitical entities, fixed spatial units, or static cultures. As James Clifford puts it, "If we rethink culture and its science, anthropology, in terms of travel, then the organic, naturalizing bias of the term 'culture'—seen as a rooted body that grows, lives, dies, and so—is questioned" (25). He continues that "Constructed and disputed *historicitities*, sites of displacement, interference, and interaction, come more sharply into view" (25). Within a closer analysis of itineraries scholarship may focus on migration patterns of individuals as well as groups within and between sites and regions of the Americas. Next to classical immigration, transmigration, and multiple back and forth migrations of workers, merchants, and scholars among others, the denial of visa or citizenship and radical politics of deportation related to specific individuals and groups characterize contemporary mobility and immobility patterns between Central America, Mexico, the US, and Canada. As site is closely related to spatial progression, return, diversion as well as blockade, the road in its topographical and textual presence sheds light on complex intersections of uneven temporalities and spatialities in the overall context of itineraries. As object of investigation related cultural production I suggest to take a closer look at road narratives in particular. The channels of media industries traverse the Americas, albeit in an asymmetrical way, and enhance cultural exchange as well as the diffusion of cultural productions, concepts as well

as ideologies. It comes as no surprise, then, that road movie as generic narrative about the ever new quest for 'America' has witnessed a tremendous explosion all across the Americas. The road movie genre with its plots centering around ideas of traveling, of embarking on a journey, of the meaning of spatial mobility and the mobilization of identities between roots and routes makes us traverse locality, region, and nation and discover heterogeneity within. But it takes us also beyond, on 'transamerica' journeys either literally or metaphorically, by connecting specific roads with larger translocal inter-American as well as global processes (cf. Raussert and Martínez-Zalce 3-4). As Christopher Morris puts it, "the road is not to be taken literally. ... The road teaches that the figural precedes the literal, that there can be no uninterpreted road" (26). Traveling protagonists encountering new territories experience and suffer from transformations; their journeys often are a response to and a mirror of an identity crisis that frequently corresponds to a personal as well as collective level, be it related to gender, ethnicity, race, age, or nationality. The road movie as genre challenges cultures of conformity. It embraces the journey as experience and the encounter with the other as form of escape, resistance as well as transformation. Bruce McDonald's *Highway 61* (1991), Carlos Bolado's *Bajo California. El límite del tiempo* (1998). André Forcier's *La Comtesse de Baton Rouge* (1998), Tommy Lee Jones' *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada* (2006), Chris Eyre's *Smoke Signals* (1998), Duncan Tucker's *Transamerica* (2005), Marshall Lewy's *Blue State* (2007), Walter Salles' epic road movie *Diarios de motocicleta* (2004), and Cary Fukunaga's *Sin Nombre* (2009) are but a small selection of road movies that feature multiple border crossings between local, regional and national territories and narrate identitarian quests against the backdrop of temporal and spatial entanglements within the Americas. As road movies they narrate individual as well as collective journeys, they open venues to explore processes of mobilizing self and group positionings as well as their intersections, as the films' protagonists travel on and off Panamerican highways. On a different scale road movies such as Carlos Sorin's *Historias mínimas* (2002) and *El Perro* (2004) together with David Lynch's *The Straight Story* (1999) and Alexander Payne's *Nebraska* (2013) allow us contrastive but related South-North insights into the search for individual autonomy and alternative forms of mobility against the challenges of postfordist Americas.

## Sites of Mobility

Airports, train stations, bus stops, and seaports represent crucial sites of transit where arrival and departure collide, where various journeys, memories, identities and narratives intersect, and where progression and movement frequently turn into immobility. Stephen Greenblatt, in his “A Manifesto,” indirectly points to the above sites of mobility. As point of departure for conceptualizing mobility studies he chooses an interest in literal movement and gives us a list of concrete examples such as “boarding a plane, venturing on a ship, climbing onto the back of a wagon, crowding into a coach, mounting on a horseback, or simply setting one foot in front of the other” (250). Transit points (Urry) such as airports are nodal points of global movement and, as Peter Adey reminds us, such sites are indicative of “the increasingly mobile world in which we live, and must owe its momentum to the popular fluid and mobile thought of philosophers such as Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, Ian Chambers and Paul Virillio” (501). As he concludes, “This new paradigm has moved beyond static idealizations of society towards theories that are marked by terms such as nomadism, displacement, speed and movement” (501). Critics like Castells draw our attention to the importance of airport studies e.g. and address the new social space reconfigurations of airports in contemporary times. I would add that current conceptualizations of airports as dense conglomeration of gateway, cash exchange, restaurant, foodmart, duty free shopping mall, museum space, art gallery, and bookshop turns these sites into chronotopical crossroads of future, present, and past, into intersections of forward and backward movement, of vision and memory in transit. Particularly interesting is the synthesis of art gallery and museum within airport settings, frequently related to the urban histories through which locality becomes hemispherically connected to the traveling histories of individuals and groups from other parts of the globe. The Airport History and Art project at Atlanta International Airport is my case study example here. My last visit dates back to February 2014 while traveling from Atlanta to Guadalajara. It is important to mention that Atlanta International Airport both by passenger traffic and by number of landings and take-offs has been ranked as the world’s busiest airport of recent times. As major international airport in the United States and as central link to connecting flights to Europe, Canada, Latin America and the Caribbean, Atlanta Hartfield is at the crossroads of regional, national and international mobility. Put simply, Atlanta International Airport, hence, stands as *pars pro todo* for heightened mobility in times of globalization. The airport is located approximately seven miles south of Atlanta City’s, a predominantly black city whose development is firmly embedded within the frequent waves of mobility and motilities that shaped African American history and culture throughout the centuries. African

American mayors have held office ever since Maynard Jackson took office in 1973. As a gateway to the New South after the Civil War, as influential center of African American education already in the second part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and as commercial hub with Atlanta's Sweet Auburn Avenue being called "the most prosperous Negro street in the nation" in the early 20th century as well as in its role as one of the centers of the Civil Rights Movements in the 1960s Atlanta's history is strongly connected with the changes that have shaped African America until today. The Atlanta Airport History and Art Project also localizes, regionalizes and thus historicizes the "non-place" Atlanta airport through a reflection on African American cultural production on a local as well as translocal-global scale. The showcases on the city's and region's history redirect the passenger in transit to the past, the various exhibitions and installations record the region's cultural production of past and present and install artistic visions and reflections of migration and mobility in the Americas and beyond thus introducing levels of abstraction and self-reflection. The traveler in transit consciously taking in the encounter with the multilayered history and art project moves in and out of entangled temporalities that are emerging in form of a triad relation between history's obsession with the past, art's enthusiasm for vision and abstraction, and the traveler's interrupted and redirected motion in time and space as spectator. Studying the exhibition as both historical archive and visualized aesthetic reflection of mobility in photographs, paintings, and installations sheds new light on sites of mobility as nodal points of cultural translocation. As John Urry, in a blueprint for the mobility studies suggests, "the (mobile) turn connects the analyses of different forms of travel, transport, and communication with the multiple ways in which economic and social life is performed and organized through time and various spaces" (6). Defining the mobility turn as "post-disciplinary", Urry not only refers to the transdisciplinary potential of a focus on mobility studies but also highlights "how all social entities, from a single household to large scale corporations, presuppose many different forms of actual and potential movement" (6). The exhibition awaits the airport traveler in his actual transition from one place and to another and raises his curiosity for a place behind the so-called "no place". By transplanting the city and region into the airport one might conclude that the officials of the Atlanta History and Airportart project transcend the airport as "non-place" (Bender 78). The airport seen through the cultural production of the exhibit takes on an important function as mediating site and entangling force between the local and the global, the regional history and the global traveler.

## Transborder

“Transborder” differs from “Cross-Borders” by focusing relational processes over comparative perspectives. The former refer to continuous transculturation, multiplied border crossings, transcultural mobility, and multiple cultural affiliations. Sophia McClennen has recently argued that the field of Inter-American Studies must resist the notion that “history and literature are bound by regional borders” and instead focus on “the ways that culture often transgresses borders, both geographic and identitarian,” in order to “put pressure on nationalist and cultural essentialist epistemes” (408-09). Border discourses advocated by critics such as Gloria Anzaldúa, José David Saldívar, Néstor García Canclini, Walter Dignolo, and Günter H. Lenz have overcome container thinking about areas and nations as container cultures. Neither national nor ethnic groups are seen as territorially confined but as embedded in intercultural contact zones and characterized by hybridity, *mestizaje*, and creolization. Accordingly the culture concept assumes a new dimension beyond territory-based and rather closed assumptions of cultural plurality as represented in multicultural politics. By now a classic of border studies Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) charts hybrid processes of identity formation at the U.S. Mexican border and disrupts Anglo-centric nationalist histories as well as male-centered Chicano nationalist agenda through a radical feminist lens. As Anzaldúa emphasizes, her vision of hybrid border identities is deeply entrenched in the past and requires a dialogic negotiation between past, present, and future as well as between various cultural options, home and elsewhere: “My Chicana identity is grounded in the Indian woman’s history of resistance ... I feel perfectly free to rebel and rail against my culture. ... To separate from my culture (as from my family) I had to feel competent enough on the outside and secure enough inside to live life on my own. Yet in leaving home I did not lose touch with my origins because lo mexicano is in my system. I am a turtle, wherever I go I carry “home” on my back “(43). Building on Anzaldúa’s work and remapping the borderlands of theory and theorists, Héctor Catedrón and José David Saldívar place recent border discourses in a larger context of postcolonial studies when they state that “Our work in the eighties and nineties, along with of other postcolonial intellectuals moves, travels as they say, between cores and peripheries, centers and margins” (7). For Saldívar borderlands are embedded in a dialogic pattern between local and global constellations and for both Anzaldúa and Saldívar mobility is at the very core of shifting and clashing identities. These critics explore new intercultural imaginaries as forms of subaltern knowledge. They are quite aware of the conditions of unequal power distribution in the Americas and engage the colonial and postcolonial differences on a local level where global power is adapted, negotiated, rejected, and

transculturated (Lenz 392). These border discourses in particular are valid for a remapping the studies of the Americas in a hemispheric context since they address interactions, dynamics and tensions between North America and Latin America. With a nod to previous border discourses I suggest that studying transborder phenomena needs further intensification for illustrating the process of transnationalizing recent and contemporary diaspora identity politics. Looking at the U.S.-Mexican border, one of the greatest impulses for transborder thinking south of the border goes back to Tin Tan, cult figure, actor, and *pachuco* personification who has served as a model of inspiration for a young generation of performance artists and musicians in Mexico to define their music as rhythmic projects transcending essentialist concepts of ethnicity and nationality as well. Tin Tan's burlesque manner of borrowing from various musical traditions for performance scenes in his films such as *El hijo desobediente* marks an inter-American dialogical model in which music traditions from south and north are adapted, fused, parodied, and reformulated as a potential "transfronterizo" identity concept that allows for flexibility, fluidity, and dialogue. Accordingly, national emblematic songs and rhythms become transculturated through new rhythmic underpinnings borrowed from Argentine, U.S. American and Spanish Arab music traditions (cf. Yolanda Campos). Tin Tan's transcultural strategies of citation anticipate more recent and contemporary transborder aesthetics developed by performance artists like Guillermo Gómez-Peña with his "polycentric aesthetic" in books and performances (Shohat and Stam 27). As multimedia performance artist Gómez-Peña has staged seminal performance art pieces including "Temple of Confessions" (1995), "The Mexterminator Project" (1997-99), "The Living Museum of Fetishized Identities" (1999-2002), and most recently "Corpo Insurrecto" (2012-2013). In his futuristic utopian vision of a transcultural *América* Gómez-Peña builds upon avant-garde strategies of audience participation and uses borders as conceptual sites of resistance. Together with Gómez-Peña Cuban American multimedia artist Coco Fusco created the performance piece *The Year of the White Bear and Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit the West* (1992-1994), a satirical met-en-scène in which the two artists were exhibited as authentic Amerindians dressed in ethnic drag at a series of art festivals and in museums in major cities throughout the Americas. In other collaborative projects such as *The Last Wish (El Ultimo Deseo)* 1997 and *The Incredible Disappearing Woman* (2003) she uses multi-media performance and video art to highlight the trauma of gendered and migratory bodies in exile, diaspora and borderlands with reference to Cuba, Mexico and the U.S. As Marc Priewe points out, Fusco uses "a momentary and context-specific combination of a variety of national discourses or imaginaries to suit emancipator purposes" (270). As a final example for border aesthetics I would also add here the Chicano musician Robert Lopez, aka El Vez. He is an unorthodox



Elvis Presley impersonator who develops aesthetics of difference through pastiche, copy, mix and fusion. As José David Saldívar has it, “the translocal performance art of El Vez, the Mexican Elvis, thematizes a remarkable shift from acting and thinking at the state level to thinking and acting the ethnic Elvis (global) level” (89). Using strategies of citing and blending, Chicano musician Robert Lopez, aka El Vez intersperses the music of Elvis Presley and other national icons with a global mix of music citations. In El Vez’s song “Atzlán” (from the album *Graciasland*), a parody of Paul Simon’s title song from the album *Graceland* (1987), the travelers to the mythic land are a mixed group of Latinas, Latin Americans and Anglo Americans. The narrator explicitly invites and welcomes passengers from various ethnic groups, different Latin American countries and a variety of national backgrounds in general: “Homeboys, Chicanos, Latinas we all are going to Aztlán” (*Graciasland*). He reverses the flow from Latinos to the US, instead his passengers travel South to Aztlan and Miss Liberty, America’s Statue of Freedom is on board together with the La Virgen Guadalupe, emblem of Mexican hybrid sacred practice between Catholicism and indigenous religion. El Vez’s lyrics embrace transcultural imaginaries and create a transnational narrative. While doing so, El Vez’s also riffs on historically grown U.S. visions of an ideal multiethnic society but places it within a larger hemispheric framework of the Americas beyond U.S. America hegemony. The performance artists selected here create border visions of locality, identity as well as resistance and thusly challenge forms of closure, be they aesthetic, communal, political, or national, through synthesizing border aesthetics with a complex side-by-side and overlap of national and transnational imaginaries.

## Translocational Positioning

How the histories of seemingly remote and distant places in the Americas are related, and how a reductive divide between a south/north axis enters into a multiplicity of relations and finds chronotopical expression and how histories become multiplied and knowledge redefined we can explore by close readings of transnational memoirs and translocational narrative positioning in various types of writings by authors such as Edwidge Danticat (Haiti/USA), Dionne Brand (Trinidad/Canada), David Chariandy (Canada/Trinidad), Guillermo Verdecchia (Argentina/Canada), Karen Thai Yamashita (Brazil/USA) and Maria Mariposa Fernandez (USA/Puerto Rico) . In different genres, styles and degrees these authors develop multiple narrative patterns, dialogical and nomadic matrices of narrating personal and collective histories giving voice to multiple migratory patterns that relate localities, regions, and nations through inter-American lenses. As Floya Anthias has

demanded, "[...] we need a new imaginary for studying the complex mobilities in the modern era of transnationalism and the new emerging forms of power involved" (108). She has created such an imaginary by reframing the notion of intersectionality using the lenses of "translocation" and "translocational positionality" to account for the often shifting and contradictory spatial and temporal contexts within which social locations are produced. According to her, Transnational Migration Studies need to be conducted "within a contextual, dynamic, and processual analysis that recognises the interconnectedness of different identities and hierarchical structures relating to gender, ethnicity, "race", class and other social divisions at local, national, transnational and global levels" (102). Departing from that matrix, one finds her notion of translocational positionality "as a tool for making sense of the positions and outcomes produced through intersections between a number of different social structures and processes, including transnational ones" (107-108). Anthias' rethinking of intersectionality in terms of more agent-oriented translocational positionality provides a matrix to analyze the literary and memoir works of authors like Edwidge Danticat, Karen Thai Yamashita and Guillermo Verdecchia to illustrate plurilocal narrative strategies. Danticat develops a complex transnational narrative pattern already in her first novel *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994) and even more so in her recent transnational memoir *Brother I'm Dying* (2007). In the latter she depicts the autobiographical self and her related families in Haiti and the U.S. in constant transition within the countries and between them. Frequent airport scenes place the narrator in a positionality of transit. Mobility in *Brother I'm Dying* is narrated in the larger framework of diaspora experience and the text is both memory work and a narrative of family migrations. Through telling the life stories of her father and uncle, Danticat creates a memoir that stretches far into colonial history and connects colonial networks to postcolonial and neo-colonial structures characterizing Haiti's multiple political and economic entanglements in the larger framework of Caribbean histories and their relations to French and US foreign policy. While always relating historic details to specific family memories in Haiti and the US, Danticat selectively recollects moments, events and periods through which she narrates a particular history of US-American-Haitian entanglements stretching back to Haitian colonial history and its struggle for independence. What she creates in the memoir is a complex web of temporalities and spatialities that include flashback, zigzag narrative progression, and a non-linear mode of narration. She lends her voice to others. "I am writing this only because they can't" (26). In doing this Danticat's narrative voice becomes translocational in outreach. Placing the Americas in a global context of mobility and migration, Karen Thai Yamashita's novel *Tropic of Orange* (1997) presents us with seven intertwined stories of its major characters living mainly in Los Angeles or moving back and forth between Mexico and the Californian

metropolis. Each character's story is told in a unique voice so that the novel progresses through narrative polyphony. Yamashita's postmodern eclectic style draws on Latin American realism, magic realism, cyberpunk, media satire, street vernacular, and immigration narrative to represent the complexity of life in one of the most heterogeneous metropolises in the Americas. Los Angeles is the urban site of the novel where the various narratives intersect and overlap and, like the symbolical center of the novel, the orange, it is constantly on the move. The orange's presence in the text is versatile and manifold; it appears as a fruit, poisoned fruit, color, and trope of geopolitical space, migration, and expansion. The orange as global fruit expresses a series of diachronic and synchronic transnational movements and signifies also an economic divide between south and north. What happens in Yamashita's novel is that the city is no longer a geographical space defined through buildings, barrios, ghettos, railroads, and industrial sites; rather, its dynamics are shaped by new means of transportation and the emergence of new communication technologies (radio, TV, telephone, internet and so on). The narrators and their stories are translocally distributed within the cityscape which means that not only do they narrate from different spatial sites within the city but their stories are linked to larger global and inter-American migrations to and from Los Angeles. Guillermo Verdecchia, a third and final example here, uses a double persona (alter ego named Wideload) and a double voice in his play *Fronteras Americanas American Borders* (1993). Wideload's voice is the one to provoke the Anglo-Saxon audience, to caricature ethnic stereotypes and clichéd identity politics. Verdecchia's voice is that of the self –reflective, doubting seeker. It

is also the traveling voice that narrates from different locations in Chile, Argentina, and Canada. Set in the Toronto Distillery District as a microcosm of all continental diasporas, the play retells the colonial histories of the Americas by multiply entangling south and north and consciously deconstructing the U.S. as hegemonic center. As Rachel Adams has it, "Although he is clearly conversant in U.S.-Mexico border studies, Verdecchia seeks to transform its symbolic geographies by deemphasizing the United States, while explicitly incorporating Canada into a symbolic mapping of the American hemisphere" (315). Considering "Americanness as spatial and temporal conjunction" (Saldívar xxvii), Verdecchia develops a parodic voice play in which colonial history is retold through Argentine-Canadian perspectives and which the American hemisphere turns into a single border. "The border is a tricky place....Or is the border the whole country, the continent? Where does the U.S. end and Canada begin? (2-3) "And when I say "America," I don't mean a country, I mean the continent. Somos todos Americanos. We are all Americans" (2), Verdecchia declares.

## Transversal Flows

Flows are seen here as a prominent way to study the processes of entanglement, the emergence and development. It is important to note that flows are neither positive nor negative per se. Anna Tsing draws on nature as well as technology metaphorically to delineate the mobility of all things in global times. Her images chosen turn abstract thoughts into concrete images: "Imagine a creek cutting through the hillside. As the water rushes down, it carves rock and moves gravel; it deposits silt on slow turns; it switches courses and breaks earth dams after a sudden storm. As the creek flows, it makes and remakes its channels" (66). From natural imagery she moves to current examples from technology, migration, and commerce: "Imagine an internet system, linking up computer users. Or a rush of immigrants across national borders. Or capital investments shuttled to varied offshore locations" (66). As she concludes, "These world-making 'flows,' too, are not just interconnections but also the recarving of channels and the remapping of the possibilities of geography" (66). Arjun Appadurai distinguishes "five dimensions of global flows that can be termed (a) ethniscapes, (b) mediascapes, (c) technoscapes, (d) financescapes, and (e) ideoscapes" (33) to illustrate the omnipresence of fluidity within the spectrum of cultural production. Finally, it is Doreen Massey who specifically reminds us of agency, the power hierarchies and asymmetries involved in and hovering behind global circuits: "Different social groups have distinct relationships to ... mobility: Some people are more in charge of it than others; some initiate flows and movement, others don't; some are more on the receiving-end of it than others; some are effectively imprisoned by it" (n.p). For an Inter-American Studies perspective we can deduct that a more comprehensive view of circuits and circulations requires to think flows as transversal, multidirectional, constituted of different temporalities and velocities, and as embedded within a complex network of agency and control. As a paradigmatic case study I propose the analysis of complex musical flows triggered off by politically motivated diffusion of sounds, melodies, and rhythms on a transnational scale. Music, no doubt, is a global player, as it traverses national and continental boundaries faster than any other art form. It moves within transnational economic, cultural, and political circuits and forms an important asset of translocal and global community-building. But does globalization via music signify a smooth homogeneous and ideologically unified process? Perhaps music's utopian potential should not be overestimated but its political significance has been recognized by governmental institutions and grassroots movements alike. The Son Jarocho movement and in particular its offspring the Fandango Sin Fronteras project establishes a dialog between Chicana/o culture in the North and the Jarocho/o culture in the Veracruz region of Mexico. Representative of

contemporary transnational grassroots movements, the musicians and activists involved aim for community-building through participatory music events transgressing the border between Mexico and the US. The Fandango Sin Fronteras movement draws upon a restoration policy developed by El Nuevo Movimiento Jaranero in the mid-1970s to decolonize the state identity politics of the Mexican government by re-emphasizing the multicultural ingredients of the music tradition and by reviving the participatory and improvisational elements in the fandango praxis of rural communities (cf. Gonzalez 63). To link this newly regained praxis to Chicano/a communities in the United States music groups such as Quetzal and Son de Madera started collaborations at the beginning of the new millennium. For more than a decade now the Fandango Sin Fronteras movement has produced mobile diaspora communities through the diffusion of sound, rhythm, and dance between the Caribbean cultures of Veracruz, Mexico and various cities in the US and Canada such as Los Angeles, Washington Seattle, Vancouver, and Chicago as well as along the conflicted US-Mexican border. But the sounds of Son Jarocho/o have also travelled south and produced crossover versions of fandango and tango music in Argentina. The movement feeds on transversal flows of people and sounds across regional and national boundaries and functions as a matrix for reconceptualizations of both musical tradition and diaspora identities. Musicians and activists move back and forth diffusing ideas, concepts as well as new forms of instrumentalization challenging and enriching existing traditions both in the Veracruz region and in Chicana/o/Latina/o diaspora communities. While studying the tracks of musicians and activists within the movements highlights various aspects of “ethniscapes”, “mediascapes”, and “technoscapes” a mirroring approach that juxtaposes the grassroots conditions of the Fandango Sin Fronteras project with government sponsored music diffusion adds new perspectives also on Appadurai’s “financescapes” and “ideoscapes”. In U.S. government-sponsored programs such as The Jazz Ambassadors and The Rhythm Road, music as political messenger is mobilized from above; political power structures with national interests in global politics guide the funding and distribution of “American” musical expression cross-culturally. Both projects emerged in moments of national crisis, The Jazz Ambassador program was launched as response to anti-Americanism(s) during the Cold War Period, whereas The Rhythm Road project represents a follow-up response to the global image loss of the U.S. during the Bush Administration after September 11. By contrasting mass market strategies with more individualized and democratized forms of production and distribution and government sponsored programs with grassroots movements, one contextualizes the analysis of cultural flows in a framework of ideological and hierarchical differences within global circuits and displays asymmetries of power relations within inter-American entanglements.

## **In Conclusion: Multilingual, Dialogic, and Horizontal Futures**

To conclude let us imagine Paul Simon and Ruben Bladés in a new collaboration perform a joint version of the search for America/América, and, as both have done before, include musicians of diverse cultural and musical backgrounds into the band. In such an imagined jam session multiple voices would not only be heard but cross-related in the chorus line, other languages beyond English and Spanish certainly would enter into a dialogue of difference, Amerindian, Arab, Jewish, African, Asian, Nahuatl, Creole words would be sung simultaneously, melodies and rhythms from the rain forests of Brazil to the Hawaiian Islands would have to be juxtaposed in harmony and discordance. Cultures in the Americas continue to struggle for survival in times of globalization. We may think of Garifuna cultures in the Caribbean and Gullah cultures along the U.S. Atlantic coast as just two examples. Their multiple stories and neglected histories would echo with fragmentation, difference as well as with conflictive inventions of tradition. As John Carlos Rowe reminds us, “colonial semiosis depended crucially upon the destruction of the Amerindian archive of knowledge and the repression of that history, just as slavery depends on the systematic denial of African retentions, including languages, religions, and cultural practices. A similar colonial semiosis is structurally integral to Creole nationalisms, as even the casual tourist cannot help but notice in the plethora of signs that testify to various nations’ presumed “rootedness” in their Amerindian histories, even as their policies toward indigeneous peoples have been consistently genocidal” (332). What critics like Earl Fitz and Ralph Bauer have repeatedly hinted at is the immense language diversity hidden by the imperial legacy of the history of the Americas. Hemispheric American studies, as Bauer advises, “must engage not only with historical documents but also with their critical and philosophical tradition in the present, even though they may be published in languages and venues different from those that American studies scholars are accustomed to reading (243) This ties in within Mignolo’s deconstruction of Latin American area studies that calls for diversity rather than homogeneity. To “think ‘Latin America’ otherwise, in its heterogeneity rather than its homogeneity, in the local histories of changing global designs is not to question a particular form of identification (e.g. that of ‘Latin America’) but all national/colonial forms of identification in the modern/colonial world system” (Local Histories, 170-71). “Who needs Inter-American Studies and who profits from it?” Walter Mignolo asked during the inaugural conference of the Entangled Americas project funded by the German Ministry for Research and Education at the Center for InterAmerican Studies (CIAS) at Bielefeld University in May 2013. In times of globalization and growing global studies programs, localities as well as areas remain important microcosmic reference points to investigate global politics, processes, and flows. Areas redefined as fluid, mobile, and transversally connected provide microcosmic paradigms to understand global



processes related to locality as well as region. Through a horizontal and dialogical lens, new knowledge paradigms along an Inter-American dialogical exchange are bound to emerge as contrastive and complementary fields of knowledge production to the field of Atlantic and Pacific Studies. Inter-American study paradigms, hence, serve us well in attempting to comprehend the interrelations within the Americas as well as their global connections. As I hope this essay has shown, Inter-American area studies need dialogical models within individual scholarship, between disciplines, within and across area(s). Inter-American scholarship is bound to mobilize the concept of area as porous, mobile, multiply connected; it is bound to challenge the artificially drawn boundaries between academic fields, disciplines, and departments. Certainly Inter-American scholarship is not to replace American Studies, Canadian Studies, Caribbean Studies and Latin American Studies per se but it is there to complement, bridge, and fuse the insights gained. Working also in the interstices between the confined area studies approaches frequently emphasizing the national, Inter-American scholarship provides ways out of Eurocentric based transnational studies. With the focus on the “inter” within the Americas, new dialogical paradigms are bound to emerge to add “optional” narratives to Atlantic as well as Pacific studies approaches to the Americas. And the focus on “inter” within the Americas also provides an affirmative answer to Winfried Fluck’s concern that we should be careful not to risk “dissolving America” as emptied signifier in global studies approaches (30). On the contrary Inter-American scholarship intends to give voices back to those who narrate the multiple and diverse stories from the geographically distant and multiple locations and cultures from within the Americas in a dialogical and hopefully horizontal mode with those outside. José David Saldívar’s concept of “Trans-Americanness(xvii)” certainly provides food for final thoughts. In his words:

My focus on the “comparative” as a strategy for the study of the United States, Latin America, and the hemisphere and beyond means not the familiar model of comparative literature or comparative history but, rather, a structure of comparability based on what Wallerstein and Quijano call Americanness’s “spatiotemporal” matrix. I am using the idea of comparability in Trans-Americanness to see how comparability also entails a theory of space and time that recognizes the conjunctural present—where multiple times exist simultaneously within and across the same planetary location or co-exist as uneven, subaltern temporalities. (xxviii)

Saldívar’s ideas coincide, I think, with Mignolo’s concept of optional narratives that should exist simultaneously. With respect to area studies this means an opening to the plural version and a thorough application of place, locality and area as broader reference point yet mobile and fluid concept at the same time. While Inter-American Scholarship should profit from the expertise that each one of the area studies related disciplines have provided throughout decades of scholarly achievement it should build upon its potential to fill the gaps between the disciplines in a transdisciplinary fashion. As John Carlos Rowe points out with respect to the inherent problem with “area” as a structural, geographical, or conceptual unit, “we must begin to think less in terms of the

pertinent 'rims'—Pacific, North Atlantic, mid-Atlantic, Caribbean—and more in terms of certain 'flows' describing the terrestrial, maritime, modern avian, and postmodern transits of outer (military and communication satellites) and inner (bodily prostheses and virtual realities) spaces" (327). The Inter-American scholar, hence, works within and in-between disciplinary fields and looks for gaps to fill and links to establish that expose the Americas as hemispherically connected and as microcosm of even larger global processes. Inter-American Studies by large mobilizes the knowledge production to bridge, connect, and transcend the disciplinary boundaries thus also redefining our understanding of area studies. As goes without saying, Inter-American studies as a collaborative project involves many scholars from various disciplines studying the history(ies), societ(ies), culture(s), language(s) and politic(s) of the Americas in dialog. The Inter-American project at large can only function as a transcommunal scholarly endeavor. On that note, let us converse, share, exchange, debate, but first and foremost work together.

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**Decolonizing the Plantation Machine  
as the Curse of Coloniality in Caribbean Theory and Fiction**

**Abstract:**

Starting with the machine concept by Deleuze and Guattari, the Cuban critic Antonio Benítez-Rojo develops a Caribbean machine concept that he calls the 'plantation machine.' It designates the diverse plantation economies across the Caribbean that have strongly influenced its different societies. Manifesting itself in the plantation machine, coloniality is not a matter of the past but still influences the present in the Caribbean and beyond. Based on Aníbal Quijano's concept of *colonialidad* and Walter D. Mignolo's border thinking, this paper links these theoretical conceptions with Junot Díaz's novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* and examines its strategies to decolonize this oppressive machine's manifestation in the dictatorship of Rafael Leonidas Trujillo in the Dominican Republic.

**Keywords:** plantation, decolonization, Caribbean, Deleuze, Benítez-Rojo, Quijano,

Caribbean fiction is written in the border space between European, American, African, and Asian knowledges, which have creolized into a Caribbean epistemology. One of the common elements of works of Caribbean literature is 'coloniality,' a metaphor for that which is the plantation machine. First of all, it is essential to distinguish colonialism as a historical period from coloniality, an ideology of colonialism. Aníbal Quijano's concept of 'coloniality' emphasizes that, "in spite of the fact that political colonialism has been eliminated, the relationship between the European - also called 'Western' - culture, and the others, continues to be one of colonial domination" (Quijano 169). Coloniality, above all, keeps up Western domination in the field of knowledge and epistemology "as a very efficient means of social and cultural control, when the immediate repression ceased to be constant and systematic" (Quijano 169). Therefore, coloniality expresses European and US-American cultural and epistemic universalism and Eurocentrism as the norm that has been abused to repress other modes of knowledge and is prevalent as racism until the present day.

This paper looks at the plantation machine, a concept by the Cuban critic Antonio Benítez-Rojo that he has based on Deleuze and Guattari's machine concept, as a manifestation of coloniality that is still dominant in Caribbean history, theory, and literature. Firstly, it is necessary to acknowledge and unmask the plantation machine's presence. Secondly, this paper shows how it can be resisted in both Caribbean theory and literature. By using Antonio Benítez-Rojo's critical work *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective* (1992; Spanish original, *La isla que se repite*, 1989), and Junot Díaz's novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar*

*Wao* (2007), this paper demonstrates that Caribbean theory and literature complement each other by challenging and resisting Western notions, as in this case Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's machine concept, and appropriate it for the Caribbean by means of creolization. The Caribbean thus introduces a decolonial perspective that neither denies Western theory nor mimics it, but creolizes it into a Caribbean epistemology. Thereby it resists a dominant Western position of universality and reduces it to one local perspective among many others, while raising its own voice. After explaining the French poststructuralists' machine concept, this paper will show how it has been appropriated by Benítez-Rojo for the Caribbean. Finally, the shortcomings of this theoretical approach will be complemented by the curse and countercurse of coloniality in Junot Díaz's novel, which results in decolonizing the plantation machine.

## 1. (De)Colonizing Deleuze and Guattari's Machine

In the work of the French poststructuralists Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, everything is part of a machine of flows and interruptions (cf. Deleuze, *Anti-Oedipus* 6). Processes connect Man and Nature, subject and object, and erase any strict separations between opposites. Rather, everything is linked in production processes, in which production and producer are one (cf. Deleuze, *Anti-Oedipus* 2-5). They also include literature into these machinic assemblages since “[a] book itself is a little machine [...]” (Deleuze, *Thousand* 4) that is coupled, for instance, to a war machine, a love machine, or a revolutionary machine. Thus, literature cannot be considered as ‘art for art’s sake,’ “[b]ut when one writes, the only question is which other machine the literary machine can be plugged into, must be plugged into in order to work” (Deleuze, *Thousand* 4). The same is true for historical ages or periods that cannot be regarded separately as one following the other in an evolutionary, linear way. Rather, “[t]hey are assemblages enveloping different Machines, or different relations to the Machine. In a sense, everything we attribute to an age was already present in the preceding age” (Deleuze, *Thousand* 346). History as becoming “is like the machine: present in a different way in every assemblage, passing from one to the other, opening one onto the other, outside any fixed order or determined sequence” (Deleuze, *Thousand* 347).

In their *Anti-Oedipus* (1972), Deleuze and Guattari argue against the universality of Freud’s Oedipus complex that has become repressive of what they call the desiring machine. Freud elevated his model to a norm that applies to all individuals, regardless of culture. The French poststructuralists, however, reduce its applicability to capitalist societies, in which “[p]sychoanalysis as a therapeutic institution therefore operates, in this account, as a policing agent for capitalism” (Young, “Colonialism” 81). Furthermore, Deleuze’s and Guattari’s desiring machine emphasizes that desire is not subjective but rather separate from the individual, intersubjective, and social, thereby refuting Freud’s opposition between the psychic and the social, materialism and consciousness (cf. Young, “Colonial Desire” 168; cf. Young, “Colonialism” 81). In Deleuze and Guattari’s view, the individual production of desire and the social production are inseparably linked, coupled machines that cannot be reduced to a single source. Rather “desiring-production is pure multiplicity, that is to say, an affirmation that is irreducible to any sort of unity” (Deleuze, *Anti-Oedipus* 45).

Robert J. C. Young extends Deleuze’s and Guattari’s theory of capitalism to the discourse of colonialism and colonality, which he describes, referring to David Trotter, as a text or a signifying system without an author (cf. Young, “Colonialism” 80; cf. Young, “Colonial Desire” 166). Since, as

a discourse, it cannot be reduced to a single source, he concludes that “[c]olonialism [...] becomes a kind of machine” (“Colonial Desire” 166). As a social process, colonialism and coloniality are closely entangled with the economic, political, and historical machines. The colonial machine[1] especially extends into the field of writing as the production of knowledge and thus becomes a violent writing machine, which first erases the indigenous discourse and then writes its own upon the colonized (cf. Young, “Colonial Desire” 170). As a consequence, it is important to emphasize the entanglement of the colonial machine and the capitalist machine with the writing machine as the production of knowledge (cf. Young, “Colonial Desire” 170). Connecting all of them, the machine constitutes a theoretical paradigm for analyzing coloniality not as separate histories of colonizers and colonized, but rather as the complex entanglement of territories and bodies, materialism and consciousness (cf. Young, “Colonialism” 86), which strongly influences the production of knowledge as well as its acknowledgment.

The notion of coloniality as a machine of the Eurocentric production of knowledge is the argument of the modernity/coloniality/decoloniality research project. One of its leading members, the Argentinian critic Walter D. Mignolo, argues that the West during the modern age, from about 1500 to the current stage of globalization that he calls “colonial modernities” (Mignolo 13), has built a frame and a universal conception of knowledge that subalternized other forms of knowledge (cf. Mignolo 13). Thus, a decolonial machine becomes necessary to transform this process of subalternization of knowledge by turning former objects of study (for instance, ethnological, Third World cultural knowledges) into new loci of enunciation, into subjects with the aim of generating “an energy and a machinery to transform differences into values” (Mignolo 13). Therefore, the Caribbean becomes a locus of enunciation that produces theory and literature as a decolonial machine. Mignolo calls this perspective ‘border thinking,’ which “erase[s] the distinction between the knower and the known, between a ‘hybrid’ object (the borderland as the known) and a ‘pure’ disciplinary or interdisciplinary subject (the knower), uncontaminated by the border matter he or she describes” (Mignolo 18). A border thinker knows both Western and his respective non-Western cultures and knowledges, which enables her to make use of both traditions instead of silencing or marginalizing non-Western knowledges, as well as to criticize both as a double critique. Therefore, Caribbean theory and literature as border thinking constitute a decolonial machine that exposes and resists the plantation machine.

Historically, the colonial machine produces and is produced by the slavery machine (cf. Deleuze, *Thousand* 457-58).[2] This idea constitutes the basis of a Caribbean concept, the ‘plantation machine,’ for “colonialism operated through a forced symbiosis between territorialization as, quite literally, plantation, and the demands for labour which involved the commodification of bodies and their exchange through international trade” (Young, “Colonialism” 85). As Young criticizes, Deleuze

and Guattari's machine simplifies "the complexities of the way in which cultures interact, degenerate and develop over time in relation to each other" (Young, "Colonialism" 85). Additionally to simplifying complexities, Deleuze's and Guattari's model criticizes modernity from within. Since Eurocentrism has worked as "a powerful machine for subalternizing knowledge [...], and the setting up of a planetary epistemological standard" (Mignolo 59), a perspective from outside of modernity can help to gain a broader perspective. A Caribbean perspective in both theory and literature provides a critique of Eurocentrism from outside of modernity. The Cuban critic Antonio Benítez-Rojo's conception of the plantation machine and its manifestations in the Dominican American Junot Díaz's novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* offer a way of understanding the plantation machine from within by interpreting and modifying Deleuze and Guattari's machine concept in the Caribbean context.

## 2. Caribbean Theorizing: Benítez-Rojo's Plantation Machine

In his study *The Repeating Island*, Antonio Benítez-Rojo employs Deleuze's and Guattari's machine concept, theorizing it into a Caribbean machine (cf. Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating* 6). He depicts the concept as the "machine of machines, the machine machine machine machine; which is to say that every machine is a conjunction of machines coupled together, and each one of these interrupts the flow of the previous one [...]" (Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating* 6; cf. Deleuze, *Anti-Oedipus* 39). By describing the Caribbean as a machine coupled to the colonial machine, he emphasizes the complexity of its historical emergence, the multiplicity of factors that have come together and produced it. Through the conjunction of the mining machine, above all in South America, the fleet machine (cf. Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating* 8), and the plantation machine, colonialism became the "Grandest Machine on Earth" (Benítez-Rojo 6), a machine that produced European wealth and power, since

it is possible to defend successfully the hypothesis that without deliveries from the Caribbean womb Western capital accumulation would not have been sufficient to effect a move, within a little more than two centuries, from the so-called Mercantilist Revolution to the Industrial Revolution. In fact, the history of the Caribbean is one of the main strands in the history of capitalism, and vice versa (Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating* 5).

The capitalist machine is coupled to the colonial machine, which is again coupled to the Caribbean machine, "[a] machine of the same model [...], with an extra bolt here and a bellows over there, [which, RF] was installed in Puerto Rico, in Jamaica, in Cuba, and in a few miserable settlements on terra firma" (Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating* 6). Thus, all machines coupled to the Caribbean machine



are, in Deleuze's and Guattari's manner, seen "in terms of production (flow and interruption)" (Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating* 8). Spatially, the Caribbean machine is "coupled to the Atlantic and the Pacific" (Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating* 7) and thus to the global realm of imperialism and coloniality produced by Europeans. Colonialism, which Benítez-Rojo also designates as "Columbus's machine" (*Repeating* 6), has produced the Caribbean machine, which in turn "usually produces the Plantation, capitalized to indicate not just the presence of plantations but also the type of society that results from their use and abuse" (Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating* 9). In turn, the Plantation produced and was produced by the slavery machine and, as a product of imperialism, in turn again produced imperialism (cf. Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating* 9).[3] The reason for the plantation machine's resilience is the diversity of plantation models which differ from island to island and "it is precisely these differences that confer upon the Plantation its ability to survive and to keep transforming itself, whether facing the challenge of slavery's abolition, or the arrival of independence, or the adoption of a socialist mode of production" (Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating* 74). The Plantation machine has been highly adaptable to the proper local conditions. However, the regularity, the rhythm of violence is a commonality of all plantation machines in the Americas whose ruins "have affected American cultures all around" (Glissant, *Poetics* 72). Therefore, the rhythms of the plantation not only establish a link between colonial histories in the Americas, but also between their societies today and exist as what Glissant calls the "second Plantation matrix [...] after that of the slave ship" (Glissant, *Poetics* 73).

The Caribbean machine, however, goes beyond the poststructuralists' machine, since it exposes the dominance of the colonial machine, here the plantation machine, against which it produces the decolonial machine. It is "a technological-poetic machine" or "a metemachine of differences" (Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating* 18) with its own logic, its own codes, its own manual. Benítez-Rojo links the machine to his own conception of polyrhythm, influenced by chaos theory, which he defines as "rhythms cut through by other rhythms, which are cut by still other rhythms" (Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating* 18). While poststructuralism is a postindustrial discourse, "Caribbean discourse is in many respects prestructuralist and preindustrial, and to make matters worse, a contrapuntal discourse [...]" (Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating* 23), since rhythm as a Caribbean code is "something very ancient and dark" (Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating* 18), in which traditional and foreign rhythms interact. The main idea of polyrhythm is its displacement of a central rhythm by others' interactions, which results in a de-centered "state of flux" (Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating* 18). This decolonial aspect of de-centering does not permit a machine such as coloniality or imperialism to dominate other

machines. As a polyrhythmic metamachine, “[t]he Caribbean rhythm is in fact a metarhythm which can be arrived at through any system of signs, whether it be dance, music, language, text, or body language, etc.” (Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating* 18). The poetic as rhythmic interruption serves as a means of decolonizing the dominant machine of coloniality, which will be explored with a literary example below as a means of “defusing violence, the blind violence with which the Caribbean social dynamics collide, the violence organized by slavery, despotic colonialism, and the Plantation” (Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating* 23). Thus, Benítez-Rojo’s Caribbean machine transcends the machine’s negative aspect of exploitation and emphasizes its poetic productivity as its potential to decolonize the colonial machine’s universal epistemology and power in line with Brathwaite’s anticipation “that the pessimistic/plantation view [...] may very well not be the last word on Caribbean society” (4). [4]

Benítez-Rojo’s Caribbean machine becomes an alternative perspective to interpret history (cf. Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating* 5). He argues that the Caribbean machine “exists today, that is, it repeats itself continuously. It’s called: the plantation” (Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating* 8). As a manifestation of coloniality, it has not stopped to exist with the end of colonialism, but rather, “the plantation machine, in its essential features keeps on operating as oppressively as before” (Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating* 73). The plantation as the Caribbean machine’s main manifestation has become “a central leitmotif in Caribbean thought” (Bogues 169) and the subject of Caribbean thinkers such as Kamau Brathwaite from Barbados and Lloyd Best from Trinidad (cf. Bogues 169).[5] Just like his fellow Caribbean critics, Benítez-Rojo’s merit is his theorizing of the Caribbean from within, which explores “new knowledges at sites which are not formally and conventionally considered as knowledge repositories [...]” (Bogues 171). He thereby criticizes modernity/coloniality from an outside perspective, a non-Eurocentric position, which can add new insights to understanding the Caribbean as “an important historico-economic sea [...]” (Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating* 9) and as a locus of theoretical enunciation with global relevance.

According to Benítez-Rojo, who sees himself as “a child of the plantation” (Benítez-Rojo, “Three Words” 162), the plantation machine unified and founded the Caribbean in spite of its inherent diversity and constitutes the common origin of the Caribbean region, since without it, the parts of the Caribbean might have become simple foils of their European colonizers (cf. Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating* 38-39). The Caribbean’s complex syncretism that he calls ‘supersyncretism’[6] “arose out of the collision of European, African, and Asian components within the Plantation [...]” (Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating* 12). Thus, the title of his book of criticism, *The Repeating Island*, points to a repetition, a rhythm, which provides a structure of order in the chaos of the Caribbean meta-archipelago which was founded by the plantation and, thus, by coloniality (cf. Benítez-Rojo,

*Repeating* 2). The omnipresence of the plantation machine in Caribbean literature and theory reveals the writers' need to come to terms with the violence in their pasts in order to understand and finally improve the present situation of Caribbean peoples in their home countries and in the diaspora. As mentioned above, Deleuze and Guattari argue that machines produce and are produced at the same time. Thus, Caribbean writers who might to a certain extent be produced by the plantation machine, are empowered to produce a decolonial machine through their writing.

### 3. The Plantation Machine's Dominance

In his epilogue of *The Repeating Island*, Benítez-Rojo writes that "[t]he objection could be made that my work does not encompass all of the Caribbean" and justifies himself that "due to the area's extremely complex cultural spectrum (a soup of signs), no one could really claim to be a full specialist in Caribbean culture" (Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating* 269). In spite of the Caribbean's complexity, he uses the plantation machine as a central, defining feature of the Caribbean. This is problematic for the plantation machine as a Western concept of coloniality is "the master's creation, figure of power and exploitation, apparatus of discipline and violence, [that] is converted into a representation of Caribbean identity" (Muñiz Varela 108).[7] But Benítez-Rojo avoids drawing parallels between the colonial past and the post-colonial political situation in the Caribbean, or in Cuba in particular.[8] This silence more fixedly anchors the plantation machine in the past and complicates the act of knocking it off its central position. As a result, the plantation machine runs the risk of becoming itself a universal, absolute, fixed point of reference that defines the Caribbean machine, unites its differences, and becomes central in discourse about the Caribbean. In Kamau Brathwaite's words, "[t]he plantation model [...] is in itself a product of the plantation and runs the hazard of becoming as much tool as tomb of the system that it seeks to understand and transform" (4).

This, as the critic Miriam Muñiz Varela argues, results in the closing in on itself of the discourse (cf. 106; also cf. Russ 4). She traces the concept of the plantation system back to dependency theory and anthropology in the 1950s, which formulated it as a totalizing concept, in which "the subject at least reached the rank of an interesting object of study [...]" (Muñiz Varela 106).[9] As a colonial machine, "the plantation presents itself as a 'machine' that determines, constructs, and neutralizes its own opposition. The 'outside' [...] is in the emancipated slave, in the peasant, the palenque (palisade), in racial hybridity [...]. But, these spaces of escape do not succeed in de-centering the plantation; it persists as a backdrop, a phantom, arrested in the same binary logic" (Muñiz Varela 109; also cf. Bagues 171). Thus, the plantation machine continues to objectify the people in the

Caribbean, while becoming the subject of representation of the Caribbean rather than, as a Caribbean concept, empowering the Caribbean from within. Furthermore, it is important to emphasize that the plantation is not the origin of the Caribbean. All of the peoples and cultures brought together on the Plantation have their origin in Africa, Europe, or Asia. Even if Caribbeanness is a creolized, syncretic new culture that cannot be reduced to its original elements, it does not constitute a beginning but has always been a process (cf. Sprouse 81).

Therefore, the oppressive presence of the plantation machine both in Caribbean histories, cultures, and societies as well as in the discourse about the Caribbean render it essential to find strategies of resisting this machine and challenging its negative aspects of exploitation from within. While Muñiz Varela proposes to destroy the plantation by examining the Haitian Revolution (cf. 109), this paper pursues a different strategy, namely challenging the plantation machine in literature by first acknowledging its existence and then finding means of resistance that turn Caribbean literature into a decolonial machine that gives voice to silenced subjects, a resistance “where the possibility of identity lies” (Muñiz Varela 109), a Caribbean identity that is not reduced to the plantation machine.

Thereby it becomes obvious that the plantation machine as such is not a thoroughly negative concept. Certainly, it includes the violent establishment of the colonial exploitation system and coloniality. Yet, it can also be regarded as forming relations between connected elements. Any machine connects to other machines and forms relations, not a synthesis (cf. Schwieger Hiepko 143). In terms of his poetics of relation, Glissant asks:

How could a series of autarkies, from one end to the other of the areas involved, from Louisiana to Martinique to Réunion, be capable of kinship? If each Plantation is considered as a closed entity, what is the principle inclining them to function in a similar manner? (Glissant, *Poetics* 64).

Instead of perceiving each Plantation system as a single entity, it is more helpful to see the commonalities and connections among them and regard the Plantation as “one of the focal points for the development of present-day modes of Relation. Within this universe of domination and oppression [...] forms of humanity stubbornly persisted” (Glissant, *Poetics* 65). As it is important to face the past, this humanity and forms of resistance must be remembered and celebrated as tactics of survival. The rhythm connecting all Caribbean cultures aims at sublimating the plantation’s violence transhistorically by ritually coming to terms with it in literature (cf. Schwieger Hiepko 165-67). As a literary example that connects the plantation during colonial times and the post-colonial, dictatorial aftermath, Junot Díaz’s novel focuses on the Dominican Republic under the dictatorship of Rafael Leonidas Trujillo (1930-1961). The following analysis exposes the

machinery's prevalent power structure in order to relativize it as a part of the violent Caribbean history rather than as constitutive of Caribbeanness. In Caribbean fiction as a poetic decolonial machine, the power of the plantation machine is not only made visible but at the same time limited, which results in the uncoupling of the plantation machine as central Caribbean discourse and its politicization as an option of border thinking.

#### 4. The Plantation Machine in Literature as the Curse of Colonialism

In Junot Díaz's novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, the plantation machine becomes manifest in what he calls the "[f]ukú *americanus*, or more colloquially, fukú – generally a curse or a doom of some kind; specifically the Curse and the Doom of the New World" (Díaz 1). The curse of colonialism and coloniality has haunted Dominicans in the Dominican Republic and in the US diaspora from Columbus's time to the present. The designation 'fukú *americanus*' hints at the fact that the curse is not only a Dominican or Caribbean phenomenon, but a problem of the Americas as well as a global one, turning the fukú into a global machine.[10] The fukú has not stopped at the Dominican border, but transcends it (cf. Díaz 4) and stands for "US and Eurocentric structures of hegemonic thought and representation that continue to dominate the globe today" (Saldívar 133). As the curse of colonialism as well as of coloniality, the fukú is also called "the fukú of the Admiral because the Admiral was both its midwife and one of its great European victims [...]" (Díaz 1). The machine of coloniality was launched by Columbus and has been in effect "within the matrix of the fukú and the coloniality of power" (Saldívar 126). Consequently, it is a temporal and spatial machine that is fed by the coloniality of power and Eurocentrism, above all to dominate subaltern knowledges and influence decisions, since "[w]hat curses do is punish certain choices severely [...]" (Díaz qtd. in Jay 8), above all choices that contradict the coloniality of power, here the Trujillo dictatorship. [11]

In the novel, all Dominicans are designated as Trujillo's children,[12] since the dictator has been "a local version of the legacy of the New World, which all of us who live in this hemisphere carry upon our heads" (Díaz qtd. in O'Rourke n.p.). Trujillo who "treated the country like it was a plantation and he was the master" (Díaz 2) is a carrier of the curse that makes him omnipresent for Dominicans in

the Dominican Republic and in the diaspora across time and space. The time of his reign

becomes a force neither temporally contained in the thirty-one years of Trujillo's rule, nor bound by the geographic limitations of the Haitian-Dominican border and the Caribbean Sea. Instead, the spectral dictator is an omnipresent malevolence that marks Dominicanos/as, even those who were born after Trujillo's assassination on continents of thousands of miles removed from the island. (Cox 108)

As Columbus's heir, Trujillo has become the curse's "high priest" (Díaz 2) and thus the one who ensures the continuation of the fukú as the colonial machine that has repeated itself with a difference across the Caribbean and Latin America and constitutes a rhythm in Caribbean fiction (also cf. Mahler 120). As a manifestation of the plantation machine, the fukú "ain't just ancient history, a ghost story from the past with no power to scare" (Díaz 2). Rather, it has been passed on in silence trans-generationally from colonial times to the era of the Dominican dictatorship from 1930 to 1961, and even to the following generations, namely to the novel's protagonist Oscar in the 1990s.

The act of theorizing the fukú allows the novel's narrator Yunior "to think of knowledge and history in terms of dominant and subaltern positions in the field of knowledge (or epistemology)" (Saldívar 127). The machine of coloniality has been used to "Admiral Colón's unleashing the hegemony of Eurocentrism as a mode of both producing and controlling the Global South's subjectivity and knowledge" (Saldívar 127), as the novel testifies. In this context, Díaz states,

the real issue in the book is not whether or not one can vanquish the fukú - but whether or not one can even see it. Acknowledge its existence at a collective level. To be a true witness to who we are as a people and to what has happened to us. That is the essential challenge for the Caribbean nations - who [...] have been annihilated by history and yet who've managed to out themselves together in an amazing way. (Díaz qtd. in Danticat, "Junot" n.p.)

The invisible fukú continues to haunt Oscar's mother Beli and her children because she never talks about it and thus perpetuates its hidden power. She "[e]mbraced the amnesia that was so common throughout the Islands, five parts denial, five parts negative hallucination. Embraced the power of the Untilled" (Díaz 258-59). By completely repressing, silencing, and trying to undo her past, Beli has started a new life in America where she "forged herself anew" (Díaz 259). But the fukú cannot be ignored since "no matter what you believe, fukú believes in you!" (Díaz 5). Díaz's novel shows that silencing the past and denying one's violent heritage does not solve the dilemma since "[t]hese are strategies that add to the legacy's power, that guarantee its perpetuation" (Díaz qtd. in O'Rourke n. p.). Thus, the fukú as the machine that controls knowledge and memory has to be un-



silenced and acknowledged first. Then, a decolonial machine can be coupled to it to de-centralize the colonial machine's dominant position in discourse.

The hidden power of the fukú becomes visible as soon as open resistance against the dictator and his system of power and control is articulated, since "[i]t was believed, even in educated circles, that anyone who plotted against Trujillo would incur a fukú most powerful, down to the seventh generation and beyond. [...] Which explains why everyone who tried to assassinate him always got done, why those dudes who finally did buck him down all died so horrifically" (Díaz 3). The insurgents are captured by the dictator's henchmen and driven to the dreaded canefields, which happens to both Beli and later to her son Oscar. Here, the plantation machine as the curse of coloniality manifests itself in a space, where during colonial times slaves were forced to work, suffered, and died. The cars in which the dictator's henchmen and his postcolonial heirs drive their victims to the canefields turn into time machines with which the victims are literally driven back to slavery times. During Beli's drive, "the urban dropped off, as precipitous as a beat, one second you were deep in the twentieth century [...] and the next you'd find yourself plunged 180 years into rolling fields of cane. The transition between these states was some real-time machine-type shit" (Díaz 146). The plantation machine becomes a time machine, synchronizing the post-colonial present with the dictatorial past and with slavery times, which becomes a recurrent rhythm in the text. Furthermore, the beatings in the canefields remind of the violence on sugar plantations. The thugs beating Beli and Oscar become overseers abusing disobedient slaves when they beat Beli "like she was a slave" (Díaz 147). Even for Oscar who grew up in the US and had never seen a canefield before, the scenery of the canefields "seemed strangely familiar [...]; he had the overwhelming feeling that he'd been in this very place, a long time ago. It was worse than déjà-vu [...]" (Díaz 298). In the time machine drive to the canefields, Oscar dives into a collective memory of slavery and violence, in which the fukú becomes a painful reality in the present.[13]

The plantation machine as the curse of coloniality entangles the present and the past by creating a rhythmic pattern of violence, another result of which is Beli's scar that she received as a child. After her parents' death who were killed by the dictatorship, she was sold by her mother's family to become a 'criada' or 'restavek,' a child slave, and almost killed by her foster parents who scarred her back with hot oil (cf. Díaz 253). The scar she wears for the rest of her life is a physical reminder of her own enslavement.[14] In an interview, Díaz describes Beli's scar as a sea (qtd. in Lannan Foundation), which evokes images of the Middle Passage and the transatlantic slave trade. The scar symbolically forms a relation across time and space, a map, connecting slavery, dictatorship, and diaspora across the Americas to the present.[15] The continuing acts of violence demonstrate the enduring power of the plantation machine in the Caribbean and its diaspora. Not even Beli's escape to the United States could save her and her children from the fukú, which turns haunting

memories of slavery, violence, and death into physical reality. Still haunted by the plantation machine as a time machine, the past and the present become, at times, indistinguishable in the Caribbean, which emphasizes the urgency of coming to terms with it by acknowledging the power of the machine of coloniality.[16] However, in its manifestation as a curse, the machine's power is limited by a countercurse that de-centers the concept from its dominant position in discourse and has the potential to sublimate its violence.

## 5. Decolonizing Fukú: Remembering and Writing as Countercurse

After acknowledging the existence of the fukú and unsilencing its implications as the plantation machine, a decolonial machine can be coupled to it that begins with confronting and remembering the past and, as a second step, writing against the amnesia of the 'Untilles.' The countercurse to fukú in Díaz's novel is called 'zafa.' The Spanish verb 'zafar' means to loosen, to untie, to get free of something (cf. "Zafar"), in this case from the fukú and its machinery that still haunts the people in the Caribbean and its diaspora. Zafar in Urdu means victory and is the pen name of Bahadur Shah II., "the last Mughal Emperor, and the direct descendant of Genghis Khan [...]" (Dalrymple 2) (1775-1857) during the time of British colonialism in India. Zafar was not only an emperor but also a mystical poet in the Sufi tradition who was a great supporter of the arts (cf. Dalrymple 2). Even though he never was an anti-colonial hero or revolutionary leader, Zafar "remains [...] an attractive symbol of Islamic civilisation at its most tolerant and pluralistic" (Dalrymple 483). Thus, the word zafa is connected to coloniality, liberation, and writing, which turns it into the perfect countercurse against the fukú.[17]

In contrast to Beli and the narrator Yuniór, Oscar finally consciously faces the horrors of the canefields that he constantly has to endure in his dreams, in which it is not only him who is beaten up but also his mother and his sister in an endless perpetuation of violence (cf. Díaz 306; also cf. Mahler 128). In the beginning, he runs away in his dream when the violence does not stop until finally, he "forced himself to do the one thing he did not want to do, that he could not bear to do. He listened" (Díaz 307) – to the screams and this subaltern story of violence. There is no escape from his nightmares, since "you can never run away. Not ever. The only way out is in" (Díaz 209). Thus, Oscar's only option is to face his destiny, the confrontation with the fukú, which means returning to the Dominican Republic and to his lover Ybón even though he knows some thugs could kill him because she is the lover of a 'capitán.'

Oscar is not left alone by the “Ancient Powers” (Díaz 315), the power of the fukú coupled with the love machine and the decolonial machine, writing. While he chased Ybón, he researched and wrote almost three hundred pages (cf. Díaz 320). Therefore, in contrast to his mother’s suppression of the horrors of the past, Oscar risks a second drive to the canefields (cf. Díaz 320-21) for his love to Ybón, which is stronger than his fear. However, his second encounter with the plantation machine in the canefields results in his death. But Oscar becomes a true decolonial hero and tells his tormentors that “if they killed him they would probably feel nothing and their children would probably feel nothing either, not until they were old and weak [...] and then they would sense him waiting for them on the other side and over there [...] he’d be a hero, an avenger” (Díaz 321-22). The fukú thus also turns against the dictator’s men since even though Trujillo and the fukú have a sort of arrangement, “[n]o one knows whether Trujillo was the Curse’s servant or its master [...]” (Díaz 2-3). Mahler writes that Oscar’s writing is anticolonial and also mentions *The Empire Writes Back* (1989) as a “discussion of the way in which post-colonial writing attempts to wrest power and authority from the colonial culture [...]” (137). In contrast, this paper reads the novel as decolonial and Oscar as a decolonial character. The fukú as an ambiguous force cannot be stopped by an anticolonial countercurse, which is why it is necessary to move on to a more complex and productive critique by using both Western and non-Western knowledges in border thinking as a decolonial double critique. The plantation machine as a Western construction can nevertheless be displaced from its central discursive position by creolizing Caribbean and Western knowledges.

After listening to the memories, the second step against the plantation machine’s manifestation is writing about it and breaking the silences around the fukú, which was “like all the most important things on the Island, not something folks really talked about” (Díaz 2). The most efficient zafa is literature about Caribbean history from within Caribbean epistemology. Both Oscar and the narrator Yunior are writers who try to come to terms with their heritage of violence as chroniclers of Caribbean history. In a metafictional sense, the novel that Yunior narrates represents a counterspell against colonialism and its aftermath and above all against silencing Caribbean history. Since Oscar’s manuscript is lost (cf. Díaz 334), Yunior writes down the story and asks himself and the reader “if this book ain’t a zafa of sorts. My very own counterspell” (Díaz 7). Even if Oscar dies, his story is not lost and his niece Isis has to be protected from the fukú, which is Yunior’s self-imposed task. He collects everything, Oscar’s writing and writes his own account, in order to give her all the knowledge he and Oscar have gained, “add her own insights and she’ll put an end to it” (Díaz 331), dreaming of a final victory, a zafa through literature and knowledge even though he also knows that the world cannot be saved, not even in a comic book (cf. Díaz 331).

Nevertheless, Caribbean literature provides a means of starting to decolonize knowledge and of de-centering the plantation machine as a concept of coloniality. The novel as “a fukú story” (Díaz 6) constitutes a zafa and thus breaks the spell of the fukú, which in this case turns against coloniality. The plantation machine thus loses its central position in Caribbean discourse. As a curse, the colonizer from outside of the Caribbean imposed it, but it can be resisted from the inside, by using memory and retelling history in Caribbean fiction as a countercurse. The act of remembering the fukú and acknowledging its power reminds of what Edouard Glissant wrote about South American and Caribbean writers who, in contrast to most European writers, have “a tortured sense of time” and are occupied with “the haunting nature of the past” (*Caribbean* 144). While Europeans write about history as a single moment, writers of the Americas and the Caribbean regard time differently, as something that continues as “a kind of future remembering” (Glissant, *Caribbean* 144). Thus, Caribbean literature constantly finds new ways of dealing with the plantation machine and the ongoing influence of coloniality, which Derek Walcott explains with the following words:

The Caribbean sensibility is not marinated in the past. It is not exhausted. It is new. But it is its complexity, not its historically explained simplicities, which is new. Its traces of melancholy are the chemical survivors of the blood which remain after the slave’s and the indentured worker’s convalescence. It will survive the malaria of nostalgia and the delirium of revenge, just as it survived its self-contempt. (Walcott 54)

Due to the Caribbean’s newness and complexity, the plantation machine is only one aspect of Caribbeanness, not its founding principle. In its ambiguity the discourse about the plantation machine can also turn against coloniality and become decolonial.

Furthermore, it is essential to stay aware of the danger of the colonial machine’s truth and authority claims, which the narrator Yunior falls prey to, when he admits openly that he does not know the full story about Beli’s father Abelard’s imprisonment (cf. Díaz 243) and thus ignites doubts about his sincerity and trustworthiness in the reader. Thus, it is the reader who has to decolonize the machine of coloniality in the end. Even if the narrator undermines his truth claims by providing evidence in his footnotes, the reader should always be suspicious of any authority since any story can become authoritarian and any writer runs the risk of becoming a dictator. In an endless act of reading, interpreting, and always critically questioning, the novel asks the reader to read anything with caution since the fukú cannot be eliminated, “[n]othing ever ends” (Díaz 331). The machine of coloniality keeps on working, which is why the decolonial machine has to continue as well.

## Endnotes

[1] With 'colonial machine,' I refer to the 'machine of coloniality.'

[2] Deleuze and Guattari distinguish machinic enslavement from social subjection. Slavery is a machine that consists of bodies and turns them into *parts of* the machine, while social subjection just subjects human beings *to* the machine. Both machines, however, symbolize the triumph of the modern state and capitalism (cf. *Thousand* 457).

[3] For a closer interpretation of the plantation machine as coupled to the 'sugar discourse machine,' see Schwieger Hiepko (142-44).

[4] In her interpretation of Benítez-Rojo's machine concept, Andrea Schwieger Hiepko only focuses on the technological aspect of his Caribbean machine, but does not extend it into the poetic realm as a polyrhythmic space, see below. Even though she argues that his machine transcends the negative aspects of the exploitation machine of colonialism, by valuing the high productivity of the Plantation Machine, which paradoxically constitutes the basis of the globality of Caribbean culture in the present (cf. Schwieger Hiepko 131), she does not further explain this productivity. This, in my opinion, constitutes the main point of Benítez-Rojo's machine conception.

[5] Brathwaite's concept of the 'inner plantation' (1975) emphasizes the necessity of further dealing with the plantation concept in cultural life and expression, above all the creative arts (cf. 9). He bemoans the dominance of the outer plantation, "the concern with our constitutional and economic relationship with the metropolises, and our reaction for/against the norms and styles of the (former masters)" (Brathwaite 6). For an overview of Best's models of plantation economy, see Best.

[6] An example of supersyncretism is the cult of the Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre (cf. Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating* 12-16).

[7] Furthermore, as Efraín Barradas notes, the plantation "can also be found in areas outside of the geographic Caribbean" (85).

[8] Elizabeth Russ writes that aside from comparing Cuba to other Caribbean states as products of the plantation, he almost completely avoids political commentary, and "[a]s a Cuban living in exile since 1980, Benítez Rojo's opinion of Castro's regime is encapsulated in the phrase, 'unfree' [...]. Yet, even though *The Repeating Island* consistently privileges Cuban cultural production, it touches only briefly on the theme of post-1959 Cuba [...] and never refers to Castro by name" (98). The second silence in Benítez-Rojo's work is the almost complete absence of the United States from his work (cf. Russ 98-99), thus ignoring the plantation machine's neo-colonial manifestation.

[9] Benítez-Rojo borrows the concept of "the Plantation" from the American anthropologist Sidney W. Mintz who employs the Plantation as a source of modernization and occidentalization (cf. Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating* 38; cf. Muñiz Varela 106, 108).

[10] In a footnote, the narrator Yunior explicitly mentions the US occupation of the Dominican Republic in 1916 as a potential origin of the curse (cf. Díaz 211), extending coloniality from Spanish colonization to US imperialism as different manifestations of the fukú (cf. Mahler 121).

[11] Trujillo's takeover was supported by the US (cf. Suter 23).

[12] About Dominicans, Lola says: "Ten million Trujillos is all we are" (Díaz 323).

[13] Silvio Torres-Saillant writes that "[b]lacks and mulattoes make up nearly 90% of the contemporary Dominican population. Yet no other country in the hemisphere exhibits greater indeterminacy regarding the population's sense of racial identity. [...] Dominicans have for the most part denied their blackness" (1086), which is why a direct link between Dominicans and their slavery past is often ignored in public discourse.

[14] Beli's scar on her back reminds of Sethe's scar in Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* (1987). Anne Garland Mahler also associates the scar with the fukú since "it remains a constant reminder of the suffering she endured and of the unleashing of the curse [...]" (126).

[15] In Edwidge Danticat's novel *The Farming of Bones* (1998), the protagonist Amabelle describes her body as "a map of scars and bruises" (227).

[16] This idea of history reminds of Deleuze's time concept in film studies (cf. Rodowick's *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine*, 1997), since "[t]he direct presentation of time is fundamentally paradoxical. Because time passes, and cannot do otherwise, the present will coexist with the past that it will be, and the past will be indiscernible from the present it has been" (Rodowick 82). Even though this time concept would be very interesting in the context of this article, since, as will be explained below, the plantation machine also coexists in the past and in the present, this paper cannot deeply look into Deleuze's filmic conception of time. This topic could be the focus of a future paper.

[17] In my research, I could not find an etymological meaning of the word 'fukú,' even though some critics maintain it derives from 'fuck you' (cf. Mahler 123; cf. Flores-Rodríguez 103) because Oscar, says "Fukú. He rolled the word experimentally in his mouth. *Fuck you*" (Díaz 304; emphasis orig.). But in an interview, Díaz says that fukú does not mean 'fuck you,' but is a real Dominican word meaning bad luck.



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## **A Dangerous Excess? Rethinking Populism in the Americas**

### **Abstract:**

In this paper, I advocate a rethinking of the conceptualization of populism, a political phenomenon that is frequently discussed in inter-American debates, but rarely explained in a convincing way. The characterization of political actors as “populist” should not be considered sufficient. Sometimes, especially when it is used as an umbrella word for left-wing and right-wing mobilizations, it can even be an obstacle for the discussion of political contents. Based on the works of Ernesto Laclau, I propose to understand populism not as a type of regime, movement or person, but as a political logic that can occur in many different ways and contexts. This logic, which can reach different extents, starts with a crisis of the hegemonic power block and decreasing legitimation of its discourse. Heterogeneous demands of dominated societal sectors are expressed against the status quo. These demands have to be brought together for a broader mobilization and the possibility of a new hegemony. In the article, the example of the MAS in Bolivia is used to illustrate how the populist logic presents itself.

**Keywords:** populism, E. Laclau, political logic, MAS

## Introduction – Overcoming the Condemnation of Populism

One of the terms frequently used in political and scientific debates, but rarely explained, is populism. Calling somebody a populist in many cases means to denounce his or her idea as irrational, mere rhetoric and evokes the image of a charismatic leader seducing the masses. Within the context of the Americas, this expression is often applied to Latin American governments. Today especially the governments of Hugo Chávez and now, after his death, Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela, Evo Morales in Bolivia, Rafael Correa in Ecuador and sometimes also Néstor Kirchner and now Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner in Argentina are being put in this category. Sometimes, analysts contrast these leftist regimes, which they denounce as demagogic, nationalist and populist, to a pragmatic, realist and modern Left, represented by Lula Da Silva and Dilma Rousseff in Brazil, the Frente Amplio government in Uruguay and the Concertación in Chile (Ramírez Gallegos 2006). In addition, the term “populism” can also be found in the language of Interamerican relations. The United States are concerned with the Latin American governments that are said to follow a populist agenda – the ex-secretary of state, Condoleezza Rize, even declared: “Our enemy in Latin America is populism (quoted from Follari 2010:47)”.

But what characteristics are these governments supposed to possess that other ones do not share? And why is “populism” declared an enemy? This becomes clearer if we take a look at an analysis of the changes in Latin America since the turn of the millennium, written by Hal Brands for the Strategic Studies Institute of the United States. Brands draws a negative image of populism when referring to the endangered implementation of US-American interests:

Leaders like Hugo Chávez, Evo Morales, Rafael Correa, and others angrily condemn the shortcomings of capitalism and democracy, and frame politics as a struggle between the “people” and the “oligarchy.” They promote prolific social spending, centralize power in the presidency, and lash out at Washington. This program is, in some ways, strategically problematic for the United States. Populist policies ultimately lead to authoritarianism, polarization, and economic collapse, and certain populist leaders have openly challenged U.S. influence and interests in Latin America (Brands 2009:V).

This example shows that the labeling of regimes as populist camouflages the debates over the actual political issues, in this case US-American interests in Latin America. By creating certain images connected to the expression “populism” or “populist”, the arguments made by certain political protagonists are in danger of being seen in another light because they are linked to an alleged dangerous ideological excess. It is not Brands’ criticism of the Latin American governments that catches my attention here, but the way he embeds his foreign policy analysis into nebulous references to populism.

Politics and science are often linked closely. In many cases, the same kind of strategic condemnation connected to the term “populism” that is frequently made in politics can be found in scientific analyses as well. In this article, I do not give an overview of all the existing literature on populism. Instead I wish to highlight certain tendencies in the analysis of populism and advocate for a rethinking of this phenomenon. I base my argumentation on the concepts of the Argentinian sociologist Ernesto Laclau who takes sides against the understanding of populism in many political and scientific debates as “[a] dangerous excess, which puts the clear-cut moulds of a rational community into question (Laclau 2005: X)”. Analytically it is not very constructive to simply label regimes, politicians or movements populist. The key element of Laclau’s analysis is not to think of populism as a characterization of a group or an actor – like for example liberal, conservative, socialist etc. – but as a political logic that can be of all shades. In this article, I present the key elements of this political logic and apply it to the case of the rise of the Morales government in Bolivia and the social movements attached to it.

### **Who Is Considered Populist in the Americas?**

Peter Imbusch (2012) distances himself from universal definitions of populism because of numerous regional differences. Nonetheless he tries to find general characteristics and defines populism as

a widespread, but highly controversial, political phenomenon, which is not limited regionally, but which occurs most prominently in the Americas and Europe. [...] movements or groups termed as populist appeal to the population in contrast to the elites, speak to the ‘common people’ in a way which transcends class boundaries, present themselves as being anti-elitist and are against the ‘establishment’. [...] As a discourse strategy, it is compatible with both right-wing and left wing political matters.

This definition refers to important elements of populism and tries to establish it as a serious category of analyses without denouncing it as something dangerous, primitive or the like. Nonetheless, in my view, there are certain shortcomings in this definition. Throughout the article, I will make some suggestions how to rethink some of these aspects. At this point we avoid a further definition. We will first take a look at phenomena that are usually taken into account when talking about populism in the Americas and then formulate a critique of this kind of categorization.

Imbusch and others (for example Priester 2006:78-91) identify a protest movement from rural areas in the United States during the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century as an early form of populism. This so-called agrarian populism was a protest against the transition from competitive to organized capitalism. [1] The farmers involved tried to articulate their interests



against the political superiority of the larger cities [...]. The early American populism can [...] be understood as a revolt of small and medium-sized entrepreneurs against Big Business and the one-sidedness of a capitalist economic system, which might have failed as a revolt, but which enjoyed success as a persistent demand for reforms (Imbusch 2012).

This demand for reform could take all kinds of forms. It was present in the Roosevelt's New Deal policy after the world economic crisis at the beginning of the 1930s, as well as in the appearances of some famous political figures in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, like George C. Wallace, Ralph Nader, Henry Ross Perot and Jesse Ventura, whose discourses can be described as mixture of very different ideological elements (some argue for state intervention, others against). Imbusch (2012) stresses that "[c]ore elements of populism are found in all of these movements and parties [named above]; to some extent, populism has even become an integral part of US mass democracy".

In Latin America, the notion of populism has for a long time been linked to the construction of a strong centralist state in opposition to the landowning oligarchy which controlled the post-independence integration into the world economy as suppliers of raw materials. In some cases – Irigoyen in Argentina, Ruy Barbosa in Brazil, Alessandrini in Chile, Madero in Mexico, Battle y Ordoñez in Uruguay – it was possible to absorb the increasing demands by the subaltern classes for social and political integration by introducing moderate reforms (Laclau 2005:192-193). These possibilities of absorption came to an end with the global economic crises after 1929, when the income of the exports fell and the economic situation worsened. Since this point in time, Imbusch proposes to distinguish between three major waves of populism in Latin America.

The first one is often referred to as "classical populism". It occurred between the economic crises of 1930 and beginning of the neoliberal epoch in 1980. Carlos M. Vilas offers a list of characteristics of this "classical populism": a strong political mobilization, the integration of the popular classes into a multi-class political project, industrialization, an interventionist state, non-alignment in foreign policy, nationalism and the existence of a leadership figure (Vilas 2004:136). The most prominent representatives of this first wave include Getúlio Vargas in Brazil, in power between 1930 and 1945 and again between 1951 and 1954, Juan Domingo Perón in Argentina, in power between 1946 and 1955 and between 1973 until his death in 1974, as well as José María Velasco Ibarra who was five times president of Ecuador between 1934 and 1972. [2]

Whether Imbusch's second populist wave during the 1990s, sometimes called neopopulist, can really be thought of in these terms, is contested. Different from the regimes that were listed as part of the first wave, its orientation was neoliberal, that is to say strongly market-oriented. Imbusch lists

Carlos Saúl Menem in Argentina, president between 1989 and 1999, Alberto Fujimori, Peruvian president between 1990 and 2000 and Fernando Collor de Mello, Brazilian president between 1990 and 1992 as representatives of this second wave. [3] Carlos M. Vilas does not consider these regimes populist because he thinks that this would be a reduction to the self-presentation of these presidents, leaving aside their actual political program. Vilas agrees with Denise Dresser (1991) in stating that this style of government “was a remake of populist practices which tried to improve the governability of the neoliberal reform process (Vilas 2004:137)”. For Vilas, Latin American populism is clearly defined by its classical historical examples and their interventionist, progressive politics. These argumentations are of some importance for our topic and I will come back to it during this article when I criticize the misleading direction of these kinds of debates.

The third populist wave is again closer to the tradition that Vilas and others see in “classical populism”. It is situated at the turn of the millennium, after strong popular resistance against the neoliberal model. When describing these governments, Roberto Follari (2010:103-104) uses similar attributes like the ones suggested by Vilas to describe “classical populism”. Differences in comparison to the latter are the economic focus in the neo-developmental or neo-extractivist approaches and the importance of regional integration. As already mentioned above, usually Chávez respectively Maduro in Venezuela, Morales in Bolivia, Correa in Ecuador and sometimes the Argentinian Kirchners are considered representatives of this third wave.

As we have seen, there are several attempts to classify movements, governments or politicians in the Americas as populist. For the US-American case, social movements and certain persons are usually considered populist and for Latin American cases, this notion is often used to characterize governments. (In his definition, Imbusch refers to movements and groups in one sentence and in another one to discourse strategies, but his examples rather refer to the first, not the latter). But what enables us to consider these actors as part of one analytical category? What are the differences to actors that we do not consider populist? I agree with Laclau when he states that “[a]ll the attempts at finding what is idiosyncratic in populism in elements such as a peasant or small-ownership constituency, or resistance to economic modernization, or manipulation by marginal elites are [...] essentially flawed: they will always be overwhelmed by an avalanche of exceptions.” That is why he refuses to understand populism as type of movement or regime, “identifiable with either a special social base or a particular ideological orientation”. Populism should instead be seen as a “*political logic*” (Laclau 2005:117). To different extent, this logic is present in all political struggles. With this understanding of populism, it would not make sense to label some political actors as populist and others not. It would rather be about looking at the extent to which the logic is present in different political lineups. Let us now have a look at what the elements of this logic are.

## Populism as a Political Logic

The approaches on populism by the two well-known sociologists Gino Germani (1965) and Torcuato di Tella (1970) are criticized by Laclau because of their teleological approach. The two authors perceive populism as the political expression of groups from underdeveloped countries that do not possess class consciousness. But if populism occurs more often in peripheral countries, this does not mean that this is due to a certain level of development. It is rather that they are affected by more political crises because of the way they are integrated into global capitalism. These crises are the starting point for the emergence of populism. It “can either be a result of a fracture in the power bloc” or of problems “of the system to neutralize the dominated sectors – that is to say, a crisis of transformism. Naturally, an important historical crisis combines both ingredients (Laclau 1977:175)”. [4] Argentina, as well as other Latin American countries, experienced this kind of crisis from 1930 onwards. In these cases, the dominant power bloc at that time, the landowning oligarchy, and its liberal discourse had increasing legitimization problems.

When the power bloc is not able to marginalize anti-status quo activities, the opportunity for a change in the societal power relations is given. In order to replace the power bloc and establish a new hegemony, heterogeneous social demands have to be brought together, so as to define what *the people*, “a concept without a defined theoretical status” (Laclau 1977:165) is supposed to mean in a specific context. “The people” is a part of society that claims to be the only legitimate representative of society as a whole (a *plebs* that claims to be the *populus*). It is “not a *given* group, but an act of institution that creates a new agency out of plurality of heterogeneous elements” (Laclau 2005:224). Who “the people” are and what they represent cannot be said a priori because it depends against which hegemonic bloc their demands are directed. It is, first of all, something negative that allows different actors to form a populist alliance: “their opposition to a common enemy (Laclau 1996:40-41)”. This lets us rethink one of the aspects in the discussion on populism mentioned above. Populism is not, as in Imbusch’s definition, necessarily a left-wing or right-wing phenomenon. Every form of populism forms itself through its antagonistic opposition to the dominant discourse. It certainly *can* have what one might consider left-wing or right-wing tendencies, but it can also be a mixture of contradictory elements. This means that, different from what Vilas suggests, we are also able to discover the populist logic in Imbusch’s second populist wave in Latin America which ended up being neoliberal (here, just to name an example, a new fiscal policy is presented as an opposition to the hyperinflation during the mandate of the regimes that were in power before). [5]

In the next step, we have to observe, if and how heterogeneous social demands, that are isolated from each other, become unified. For this matter, empty signifiers are used. According to the Swiss

linguist Ferdinand de Saussure one has to distinguish between the signifier and the signified. In the act of articulation the former is the expression used and the latter is the object described (the signifier would be the word “flower” and the signified would be the mental image of a flower). What does this mean for politics? In Laclau’s theory empty signifiers are not “a signifier without a signified” because

it could only mean ‘noise’ and, as such, would be outside the system of signification. When we talk about ‘empty signifiers’, however, we mean something entirely different: we mean that there is a place, within the system of signification, which is constitutively irrepresentable; in that sense it remains empty, but this is an emptiness which I can signify, because we are dealing with a void *within* signification (Laclau 2005:105).

Empty signifiers like “justice”, “progress” or “democracy” – expressions which possess connectivity to many different parts of society – are used during the forming of a political identity. The empty signifiers can also be described as antagonistic in the Aristotelian sense, that is to say “those terms which have quite distinct meanings, but in which we can find reference to a common element which constitutes the analogic basis of all possible uses of the term” (Laclau 1977: 164-165). For Laclau, the use of these empty signifiers is a necessity to unify demands and does not stem from an ideological underdevelopment, for example one could not claim that “peace, bread and land”, which constituted the famous revolutionary Bolshevik slogan, were

the conceptual common denominator of all Russian social demands in 1917. As in in all processes of overdetermination, grievances which had nothing to do with those three demands nevertheless expressed themselves through them (Laclau 2005:97-98).

I wish to illustrate this process with an example from the Americas of somebody who usually is not declared populist: Barack Obama. After eight years of the Bush-Administration, many different social groups found themselves in a dissatisfying situation. The tactic of Obama’s 2008 electoral campaign was not to make detailed references to every possible reform for each of these groups. Instead Obama’s campaign chose a phrase that was supposed to express the desires of all these groups in a very vague way. In the slogan “Change we can believe in” (as well as “Yes, we can”) it found a formula to represent the heterogeneous demands and to create the idea of what “the people” might be. This example strengthens Laclau’s thesis that “any popular identity needs to be condensed around some signifiers (words, images) which refer to the equivalential chain as a totality” (Laclau 2005:95-96).

All this should not be considered as some purely linguistic operation. Certain rhetoric is important for populism, but it is more than a certain use of verbal and non-verbal communication. Populism is

more than a kind of “political style” (like suggested by Alan Knight (1998)). There are many different struggles that can lead to (re-)definitions of a “people”. It is rather a wide range of political practices that builds identities and constructs hegemonies. [6] Laclau’s understanding of discourse (that he also uses to explain populism) “involves the articulations of words and actions, so that the quilting function is never a merely verbal operation but is embedded in material practices which can acquire institutional fixity” (Laclau 2005:106).

The case of Barack Obama mentioned above brings us to the next aspect which is often associated with populism: the role of a single charismatic person or a leadership figure. Without a doubt, this is a very problematic aspect of many movements or regimes and they can be criticized for a cult of personality or simply for the focus on this single person from all kinds of perspectives. As we can currently observe in Venezuela, for instance, the focus on the figure of Hugo Chávez brings his movement into trouble after his death. Nonetheless, what we are asking for here is the analytical suitability for the study of populism. Like the special role of Obama as a person shows, we should not simply relate this aspect to authoritarian or totalitarian experiences. To use a different example: who could deny the role of leadership figures like Mahatma Gandhi or Nelson Mandela for their emancipatory movements?

If we apply Laclau’s concepts of populism, we describe a process. We go beyond simply labeling a regime as populist – and also beyond calling a person populist. This is also where Laclau lacks clarity when he, in one of his works, states that “it is possible to call Hitler, Mao and Peron simultaneously populist” (Laclau 1977:174). This evokes certain critique, for example Karin Priester accuses Laclau of overstressing the definition of populism: “It is misleading to evenhandedly refer to Hitler, Mussolini, Mao, Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher, Fidel Castro, or de Gaulle as populists (Priester 2006:43)”. It is quite obvious that it is foolish to refer to all these names in the same way and the politics attached to these persons are very different. But this is an important point that was mentioned before: by referring to somebody as populist, we are not able to know what the politics attached to him or her are. So it is not fruitful to study these persons as populists, but the role these persons play within the populist logic. Often the leadership figure has the task to bring the heterogeneous parts of a group together, be it through concrete actions or in a symbolic way. In some sense, he or she has a similar task to the empty signifiers – there are even cases in which the person him- or herself can become the empty signifier. With the help of the case of Perón during his exile from Argentina, between 1955 and 1972, Laclau demonstrates that a person him- or herself can become the populist empty signifier. The person Perón was the only aspect that somehow glued together the very different leftist peronist guerilla and the rightist peronist trade-union bureaucracy in the political struggle of that time (Laclau 2005:214-221). As we have seen by now in various examples, populism can occur in very different manners. Laclau states that

“[p]opulism starts at the point where popular-democratic elements are presented as an antagonistic option against the ideology of the dominant bloc. Note that this does not mean that populism is always revolutionary (Laclau 1977:173).” So while Laclau thinks that Populism *can* be revolutionary, Slavoj Žižek denies this. In his opinion, “for a populist, the cause of the troubles is ultimately never the system as such but the intruder who corrupted it” (Žižek 2006:555). Žižek criticizes the focus of Laclau’s theory on social demands and asks critically: “Does the proper revolutionary or emancipatory political act not move beyond this horizon of demands? The revolutionary subject no longer operates at the level of demanding something from those in power; he wants to destroy them (Žižek 2006:558)”. At this point it would be difficult to discuss the meaning of revolution or the different opinions of Žižek and Laclau about leftist politics which are connected to their different attitudes towards Marx and Hegel as well as their readings of Lacan. What is important for us is that Žižek’s critique made Laclau elaborate in more detail about the different paths populism can take. Laclau takes the ambiguous meaning of the word “demand” in English as a point of departure: it can mean “request” as well as “claim”. For Laclau, the transition from on the first to the latter is important:

[...] when the demands do not go beyond the stage of mere requests, we have a highly institutionalized arrangement. Social actors have an ‘immanent’ existence within the objective locations delineating the institutional order of society. (Of course this is a purely ideal extreme; society is never so structured that social agents are entirely absorbed within institutions.) The second scenario is one in which there is a more permanent tension between demands and what the institutional order can absorb. Here requests tend to become claims, and there is a critique of institutions rather than just a passive acceptance of their legitimacy. Finally, when relations of equivalence between a plurality of demands go beyond a certain point, we have broad mobilizations against the institutional order as a whole. We have here the emergence of the people as a more universal historical actor, whose aims will necessarily crystallize around empty signifiers as objects of political identification. There is a radicalization of claims that can lead to a revolutionary reshaping of the entire institutional order. This is probably the kind of development that Žižek has in mind when he speaks of not demanding anything from those in power, but wanting to destroy them instead. (Laclau 2006:656).

As Laclau points out, the transformation of isolated demands into “a large set of simultaneous demands presented as a unified whole” (Laclau 2005:82) is necessary for the success of the forming of a “people”. Like this a broad mobilization and a challenge of the status quo can be achieved.

It was now mentioned several times, that heterogeneous demands have to be brought together. But the very success of this operation bears dangers. Laclau describes why the alliances formed within the populist logic can be fragile:



Let us suppose that a workers' mobilization succeeds in presenting its own objectives as a signifier of 'liberation' in general. (This, as we have seen, is possible because the workers' mobilization, taking place under a repressive regime, is also seen as an anti-systemic struggle.) In one sense this is a hegemonic victory, because the objectives of a particular group are identified with society at large. But, in another sense, this is a dangerous victory. If 'workers' struggle' becomes the signifier of liberation as such, it also becomes the surface of inscription through which all liberating struggles will be expressed [...]. As a result of its very success, the hegemonic operation tends to break its links with the force which was its original promoter and beneficiary (Laclau 1996:44-45).

So what is described here is how the process of becoming the signifier of a political struggle can turn into the change of the original content of the signifier or an alienation of the group behind this content. This is also a reason why the constructed "people" in populism is usually unstable. In addition, the dependence on a common political enemy can turn into a problem for an alliance based on heterogeneous demands as soon as this enemy is defeated:

There is no clear-cut solution to the paradox of radically negating a system of power while remaining in secret dependency on it. It is well-known how opposition to certain forms of power requires identification with the very places from which the opposition takes place [...] (Laclau 1996:30).

If the heterogeneous demands only function as an opposition and do not transform themselves sufficiently into a new political identity, the alliance behind these demands might fall apart easily under a new power constellation.

### **The Case of the MAS in Bolivia**

After these theoretical elaborations, in the following we will see how the populist logic works in a specific case. I chose the case of the rise of the MAS (Movimiento al Socialismo) party in Bolivia. Its candidate, Evo Morales, was elected by overwhelming 54 % of the voters in the elections of December 2005. He became the first indigenous president of this country. This was not simply the consequence of a good electoral campaign, but the result of a complex process. Ethnicity does play an important role here, but nonetheless we can observe far more than voting along ethnic lines. In addition, it is misleading to only speak about "the indio" in general since there are about 35 different cultural identities in Bolivia. It was the achievement of the MAS to align diverse indigenous movements, nationalist, trade unionists and leftists (in the broader sense) for a new political project.

The Bolivian Revolution of 1952, led by the MNR (Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario), can be seen as the establishment of nationalism in the political scene of the country. The MNR, at least in its early phase, represented developmentalism, nationalization of national resources, universal voting rights and a critical stance towards liberal democracy and its institutions. Since the 1952 Revolution, indigenous people were increasingly integrated into the political system without becoming a central actor in it. The MNR changed overtime and split up into different political projects. After being elected president in 1985, Paz Estenssoro guided a neoliberal turn of the MNR which constituted the definite break with the parties' roots. There were also leftist parties who participated in neoliberal policies, like the MIR (Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria) and the PCB (Partido Comunista Boliviana). Those of the Bolivian left who were not willing to contribute to these political contents, either reaffirmed their orthodox (for example Trotskyist) position or amplified their vision towards rural-indigenous and nationalist topics. This latter left became an important part of the MAS, most prominently represented by Álvaro García Linera, vice president of the Morales government (Salerno 2007).

The economic results of Bolivia's neoliberal phase were disastrous and worsened the situation of this poor country even more. The privatization programs were backed by a wide range of political parties. Protest against this free market fundamentalism was labeled anti-democratic. Within these political circumstances, it was not just neoliberalism which entered a severe crisis but also the institutions of this limited democracy and even politics themselves (Carrizo 2009). The preconditions for populism were clearly given.

As we have already seen, parts of the nationalist and leftist forces found their place in the dominant block and its ideology, others did not. In the 1990s, there were also intends to absorb demands of indigenous groups by promoting multiculturalism and giving land to indigenous peasants. In addition, Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada, president between 1993 and 1997, chose an Aymara, Víctor Hugo Cárdenas, as his vice president. In the end, these measures could not rescue the dominant block. Isolated demands could not be absorbed. In the next step, we can observe how heterogeneous demands were united.

The 1980s and 1990s changed the role of nationalist and leftist forces in Bolivia. Those in opposition to neoliberalism were not able to create a new influential political project. But ultimately, their classical topics like redistribution and economic nationalization could be expressed through indigenous social movements. One of these movements, the Coca peasant syndicates of the Chapare region, gained influence and attention during the 1990s. Their political actions were directed against the violent elimination of coca fields which was promoted by the Bolivian and the US government (because of the latter's involvement the tone of the protest was often anti-

imperial). It was also this context of the coca syndicate struggle, in which Evo Morales as their speaker became an important figure. Morales as a person combines trade unionism with indigenous issues as well as anti-colonialism and in this way brings the different demands attached to the MAS together. This is what allowed him to fulfill the special role of a leadership figure in the populist logic discussed above.

In addition to the coca issue, there was a whole series of protests that spread all over the country since the year 2000 (García Linera 2010:72-76). The most prominent event was maybe the so-called “water war” which had its origin around the city of Cochabamba in April 2000, when the government of Hugo Banzer wanted to privatize water supply. Throughout a whole month, rural workers blocked the main roads of the country. Evo Morales negotiated the renunciation of this privatization with the government. Other protests followed which were violently suppressed by the government, especially in El Alto in 2003 with at least 67 people killed.

There have been protests for a long time in Bolivia, but it was since these years that they formed a common picture. Different from the past, the protests were now under indigenous leadership and parts of the urban middle class joined them. The protests against the neoliberal destruction of local economic structures (like the coca agriculture) were taken to the regional and national level. Morales’ anti-imperialist discourse, in which the notion of “national sovereignty” functioned as an empty signifier, was not only seen as the expression of local coca peasant protest. Instead it became a signifier for the national sellout to foreign interests in general. Something similar happened with the protest against the privatization of water: it was considered as the expression of the struggle against the commodification of basic requirements at large.

The antagonistic enemies, which Laclau defines as a crucial element in the process of forming a new ‘people’, were in this case the Bolivian oligarchy (situated in the resource-rich Eastern provinces, the so-called Media Luna) and the governments which collaborated with the USA. [7] Morales’ party, the MAS, capitalized from the neoliberal turn of the MNR and other nationalist and leftist parties and renewed their classic demands (the nationalization of gas, for instance) within a wider anti-colonial discourse. The MAS is not a party in the traditional sense, but rather a collecting pond for various political struggles and movements. In 2002, Morales, as the presidential candidate of the MAS, almost won the elections and in 2005, with more time for preparation, he and his party achieved this aim.

Now we have seen, along general lines, how the rise of the MAS and the election of Evo Morales were possible. But, as Laclau points out, there are certain dangers in the very success of creating a new “people”. In the Bolivian case, there has been a restructuring of the organizational form of

the state and later on, in 2009, a new constitution has been established. Nonetheless, there is a steady tension between the establishment of a strong state in contour to the neoliberal model and the state as a historical symbol of colonial and neocolonial exploitation (Carrizo 2009, Svampa 2010:40). It remains a question of continuous negotiations which role the state and which role other forms of indigenous political organization may play. The same can be said about social movements in general. Since they brought the government to power, they are not willing to accept an exclusion from the important decision-making processes. The new regime often calls itself “a government of the social movements”. Vice President García Linera (2010:87) recognizes the contradiction in this expression but nonetheless defends it. He thinks that the Bolivian state on the one hand needs a strong influence of social movements to circumvent the building of a new bureaucratic political class but on the other hand needs a strong administration for important decisions.

In addition, conflicts about the economic model can be observed. Despite the government's references to an indigenous ecological consciousness, the main characteristics of the economic policy can be described as developmentalist, based on the extraction of natural resources. In this sense, the MAS represents far more its classical nationalist and leftist elements than new forms of an ecological communitarianism (Svampa 2010: 42-50). These tensions can be observed, for instance, when the government plans to build highways through nature protection areas.

Like shown above, there are conflicts in the heterogeneous alliance that brought Morales to power. Nonetheless, the regime was able to consolidate its position and was reelected in 2009 with an even better result than that of 2005 (64 % of the votes). The alliance is not only held together by the reforms of the regime, but also by the still existing social antagonism between itself and the local oligarchies. The latter and their political representatives steadily try to destabilize the country and even attempted a coup d'état.

## Concluding Remarks

In some debates, populism has become a swearword for an alleged dangerous ideological excess. These condemnations are not helpful for any kind of analyses. In this article, I formulated suggestions on how to establish populism as a fruitful scientific category for various disciplines (I especially think of sociology, political science and history). Following the argumentation of Ernesto Laclau, we are able to describe a certain political logic with it, which I explained in outlines in this article. This logic, which can occur to different extent, starts with a rupture between the dominant power bloc and parts of the population, that is to say a crisis of the hegemonic political-ideological

discourse (for our Bolivian example, neoliberalism). The movement that tries to establish a new hegemony uses interpellations to bring together the heterogeneous demands of different parts of society. For this purpose, empty signifiers are used, that is to say certain words or images which possess connectivity for different societal groups. This connectivity is sometimes also provided by a leadership figure. Although this can be a problematical aspect for political groups, we are not able to exclusively link this to authoritarianism.

Populism can occur in all political entities – for the Americas, that is to say that we cannot distinguish between a populist south and a non-populist north or vice versa. Peter Imbusch's doubts about the possibility of a universal definition of populism are understandable and should be taken seriously. But the conceptualization of populism as a political logic is a possibility to pay tribute to all kinds of regional differences that should be considered in every analysis. Used in the way proposed here, populism is not an umbrella word for the characterization of regimes, persons or movements but an analytical tool for investigating power relations and the practices behind them.

The concept can be applied to various political struggles in the Americas in past and present, for example to the way parties absorb, successfully or not, demands of different social groups or movements. In this article, I mentioned how Obama was able to bring different demands together in his campaign, but the Republican Party also offers possibilities to observe populism. In current US-politics one might ask for the tactics of the Grand Old Party to deal with the agenda of the Tea Party movement. In many Latin American countries one might study the relation of social movements and the governments they brought to power. This is a tension already mentioned in our Bolivian example, but, in a very different constellation, already existed in historic examples (I think, for example, of the relation between the leftist Peronist guerilla and the relation to Perón's government after his comeback from exile). Those are a just some of the numerous possibilities for analyses of populism in the Americas that allow us to get a better idea of important aspects within the political logic called populism and how they change in different places and times.

## Endnotes

[1] While Imbusch (2012) characterizes the farmers as people with „backwards-looking, anti -modernist traits“, Priester (2006:79) states: “The attitude of the populists towards the initiating industrial society was not reactionary and backwards-looking. They only criticized the excrescences of industrial capitalism and the banking system connected to it.”

[2] Roberto Follari (2010:102) also adds Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán in Guatemala (president between 1951 and 1954) and Paz Estensoro in Bolivia (1952-56 and 1960-64) to this list. Often the Mexican president Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940) also appears in the considerations about classical Latin American populism.

[3] The Mexican president Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994) is also often mentioned in this context.

[4] “Transformism” is a term used by Antonio Gramsci to describe the assimilation of rivals or subaltern sectors of society by the power block.

[5] All this does not mean to deny the disastrous results of this neoliberal phase that later orcaused new centrifugal social forces.

[6] María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo (2002:297-303) gives an interesting example of what a signifier can be. She shows how silence became the signifier of Indian difference in the discourse of the Zapatistas in Mexico.

[7] Morales’ confrontations with US-embassador Manuel Rocha reminded of Perón’s conflict with the US-ambassador in Argentina, Spruille Braden, in 1945.



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**Decolonizing American Studies  
Toward a Politics of Intersectional Entanglements**

**Abstract:**

This paper aims to initiate a dialogue between several theoretical-methodological angles in light of their productivity for a Hemispheric American (studies) approach. The paper argues that (Hemispheric/inter-) American endeavors can gain from an intersectional sensitization – or framing – widening the perspective towards the simultaneous and interrelated dimensions of both macro structural levels such as patterns of knowledge circulation, localities or citizenship and micro structural levels such as racialization, socio-economic status and en-gendering. The respective postcolonial, intersectional, critical occidentalist and gender take on a Hemispheric American approach is decidedly sensitive to issues of power. It does not attempt to provide a ready-made frame or method, but rather a methodological framing or tool box for discussions of persistent and new transnational entanglements and inequalities in the Americas. It may be of use regardless of disciplinary or “regional” specificity, and therefore contributes to a theorizing in more general conceptual terms while remaining sensitive to the situatedness of knowledge in terms of thinking alternative units of analysis and new forms of connectedness.

**Keywords:** decolonial thinking, hemispheric American Studies, postcolonial, transnational

*Power is the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person. (...) The consequence of the single story is this: It robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar.*

Chimamanda Adichie 2009 [1]

## Introduction

In her TED speech, “The Danger of the Single Story”, Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie recounts her experience of being raised and guided by the dominating Eurocentric experiences in literature with which she could not identify. Adichie stresses that the danger of telling “single stories” lies in the precondition of a power asymmetry whereby some have the “power not just to tell the story of another person [or region], but to make it the definitive story of that person” (2009). As a critique of such knowledge asymmetries, the scientific focus on single groups, countries or nation-states, or their mere comparison – a phenomenon commonly referred to as “methodological nationalism” – has increasingly been rendered problematic in recent years. [2] In the context of hemispheric constructions, a growing academic interest in a transterritorial understanding of the Americas has emerged during the last two decades, as a number of publications demonstrate. [3] Based on the increasingly popular insight that national stories and boundaries no longer suffice in order to grasp current processes and interrelations, former US-American Studies Association (ASA) president Shelley Fisher Fishkins in her 2004 speech to the ASA has even called out a “transnational turn” in American Studies. Susan Scott Parrish speaks of a “hemispheric turn in colonial American Studies” (2005). At first sight, these recent trends sound very promising. While the advantages and promising aspects of transnationalization are evident, however, I see an inherent danger:

1. A transnational “turn” suggests a paradigmatic shift on a rhetorical level, as if the explanation of “transnationality” as such would already imply a critical stance and would automatically signify something positive. Historical examples such as colonization and the transatlantic slave trade and its legacies or recent phenomena like multinational co-operations, or North-to-South sex tourism prove otherwise. Respectively, to consider transnationality as something new runs the risk of

blinding out approaches and politics, which have already been negotiating and questioning national and other boundaries for a long time. The concept of a – presumably all-encompassing – “turn” further bears the risk of rendering one’s own disciplinary locatedness invisible and of erasing the discipline’s history.

2. Theorizations on respective concepts are predominantly US-American and stem from US discourses and institutions. They are embedded in a history of American Studies which came into being at the same time as the increasing power and influence of the US as an imperial power and were founded in light of US-American exceptionalism, and, in the US, dedicated to the mission of spreading US-American knowledge and civilization all over the globe. Outside of the US, American Studies programs were implemented as part of the US-American endeavor of practicing “cultural diplomacy” during the Cold War, with its strongest bastions in Great Britain and Germany. In turn, Latin American Studies as an academic discipline emerged in the twentieth-century mostly in Europe and North America. In the USA, Latin American Studies was boosted by the passing of Title VI of the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) of 1958, which provided resources for Centers of Area and International Studies. Implicitly, then, and apart from interventions from postcolonial, Critical Race and gender studies among others, American Studies as well as Latin American Studies follow the paradigm of the “intellectual division of labor” that emerged at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and a “geopolitical distribution of scholarly tasks in function of their pertinence to Western modernity [and US-American exceptionalism or ‘the concept of Americanness’, respectively] still paves the way for present-day research” (see Costa and Boatcă 13).

3. If the theorizations which in “the academy” are considered legitimate and relevant on a larger scale continue to come predominantly from certain privileged positions and institutions, and the respective publications in certain languages with regard to knowledge circulations, the power structures remain intact and the respective asymmetries prevail. Anti-colonial thinkers like José Martí have already been criticizing the geopolitics of knowledge in the Americas for a long time, but their contributions have largely been excluded from the canon of relevant theorizing in the West.

Theoretically speaking, the attempt to change “not only the content but also the terms of the conversation” implies going beyond received versions of methodological nationalism (focusing on single countries and/or nation states or a simple comparison between these). However, the terms of the conversation are not changed by telling multiple stories, if these stories are told by the same storytellers (and regardless of their connectedness). The decolonization of received modes of doing knowledge production – and of American Studies respectively – rather requires listening to

new and heretofore marginalized or silenced storytellers as well, and hence reflecting upon and scrutinizing the dominant positions of the power to define and represent, and to alter the theoretical frameworks, parameters, and the respective units of analysis. At the same time, however, against the backdrop of an increasingly neo-liberalized academy, it has become mandatory to cater to fashionable terms such as “interdisciplinary” and “transnational” in the hunt for funding. A sole celebration of multiplicity, diversity, or difference might hence not suffice in order to not only change the content, but also “the terms of the conversation”, as Walter Mignolo has it (Mignolo 2009). The neoliberal appropriations of “diversity” and “hybridity” as a marketing strategy has recently been rendered problematic by post-/decolonial and queer thinkers (cf. e.g. Ha 2005 and 2010, Engel 2002 and 2009). A purely strategic catering to such paradigms and a purely positivist understanding of transnationality, however, not only blinds out the negative aspects related to such processes, but also runs the risk of becoming what Jacques Derrida has termed “doxographic discourse.” According to Derrida, “doxographic discourse” is based on “academic capitalism” and a “quotation market” (cf. Derrida 1990), and reigned by the secret underlying imperative ‘don’t use that concept, only mention it’ (cf. Derrida 1990; Knapp 254), thus serving in order to be politically correct while keeping received power hierarchies and privileges and one’s own conscience intact, selling a similar content under a slightly different label in order to continue doing what one has always done.

For the length of this paper, I will therefore pretend that a Hemispheric American (studies) Theory (or Perspective/Methodology) is interested in doing something new than what we have always done and change the terms as well as the content of the (Hemispheric American) conversation(s). I do so from a privileged white academic position. It is here that I see a great opportunity for those of us interested in new conceptualizations of received paradigms to ask ourselves what the aim of our critical endeavor is or can be:

Are we interested merely in finding new terminologies for our research in order to name inequalities, and name or quote excluded voices, while remaining politically correct and feeling better? Or do we attempt to contribute and work towards overcoming such received hierarchies and inequalities based on the fact that few people are in the position to tell the definitive stories of most other people and places, and hence to decolonize our minds and create more just conditions for all? What can a hegemony-critical endeavor indebted to a focus on entanglements gain from decolonial and intersectional gender approaches?

To contextualize and historicize our disciplines and methods (in American Studies or other disciplines engaged in “studying”, or “producing knowledge about” the Americas) provides an important dimension of such an endeavor. It implies to render established concepts such as “Area



Studies” – and “American Studies” respectively problematic. Simultaneously, it requires going beyond and overcoming the power asymmetry I term epistemic Occidentalism (see Roth 2013).

I will first elaborate shortly on the history of Inter-American (or Hemispheric American) relations/asymmetries. In the attempt to find a way of “doing Inter-American Studies” in a way that implies to change also the terms of the conversation, this paper then seeks to propose the following three angles as framings or sensitizations for a Hemispheric Entangled Approach of the Americas as different sorts of “corrective methodologies”, which in combination work towards that aim :

1. Hemispheric American Entanglements // Entangled Inequalities

2. Hemispheric American Intersectionalities

3. Decoloniality in the Americas // Critique of Occidentalism

The paper aims at elaborating on a perspectivization of (Hemispheric/inter-) American Studies stemming from and indebted to focus on intersectionalities and a politics of intersectionality. In order to address the first aspect, methodological nationalism, the concept of entanglements as coined by Shalini Randeria (and Sebastian Conrad) seems to be of interest. To pay attention to the intertwined character of “entangled histories of uneven modernities” promises to provide a wider framework of global (and local) interrelations for a hemispheric perspective; I will then in a second step propose an intersectional perspectivization (or: sensitization) in order to consider the simultaneous articulation of different axes of stratification also on the micro level. It is therefore important to take the historicity, that is, the making and becoming of, and thus the constructed and processual character of, such places and spaces into account and in particular the power dynamics at work and the asymmetries produced thereby.

To further address the (more structural) level of epistemological Occidentalism – or the Coloniality of Knowledge – a decolonial perspectivization might prove helpful. Such a perspective enables us to include the historical dimension as well as the structural and historically produced character of colonially and ongoing power asymmetries at once. A critical Occidentalist perspective which brings into view and focuses on the privileged side as proposed by Critical Whiteness studies might be useful in the endeavor of the critical reflection and decolonization of American Studies as we know it – that is, as rooted in and marked by the colonial power hierarchies inscribed in the disciplination, segregation, and hierarchization of knowledges expressed in its orientation on nation-states, national languages, and national cultures/imagined communities and the respective loci of enunciation as expressed in the conceptualization of “Ares Studies”.

Promising concepts such as José David Saldívar's "Trans-Americanity" and many of his decolonial peers do not take gender into account as a central dimension. It is in such omissions especially, that I see the necessity for a combinatory approach or methodology. As I will elaborate on later, auspicious decolonial feminist and queer approaches are oftentimes treated as separate or additional fields. Such omissions become suspiciously reminiscent of the old quarrel over *Hauptwiderspruch*/principal contradiction and *Nebenwiderspruch*/side contradiction in Marxist discourses, which usually agreed on subsuming gender hierarchies as subordinate to class hierarchies. An intersectional lens on inequalities might serve as a decisive corrective towards thinking in different axes of oppression, not as additive or subordinated to one another, but as mutually constitutive and simultaneously articulated, though in different ways and in different contexts.

Before I will return to the importance of an intersectional gender take in decolonizing American Studies, let me shortly discuss the historical becoming of the concept of *America*. I will then briefly introduce and discuss the concept of Americanity (rather than "America" as a quasi-neutral geographical entity) as a unit of analysis for hemispheric American Studies interested in a power and hegemony critical project. In the following, I will elaborate on a genealogy of the name and concept "America" from a gender perspective as I consider it crucial for an Entangled American approach in order to place the related naturalized inequalities under scrutiny.

### **"Americus meets America": Colonization as En-Gendering**

The very name "America" to refer to the regions between the North pole and Tierra de Fuego goes back to a colonial appropriation: it is the female version of Italian seafarer Américo Vespucci's (1454-1512) first name who is supposed to have been the first in 1501 to circle the Brazilian coast and to refer to the conquered spaces as a new continent. This feminization of the name suggests that the colonial project is built upon an implicit gender dimension and the colonial hierarchy justified and made intelligible through racialized gender hierarchies. [4] Many travel narratives of the Conquest equate the colonization of continents with the domination of the female body via the gaze as a medium of penetration and appropriation. [5] Christopher Columbus (1451-1506) already described the conquered spaces in specifically gendered terms. Anne McClintock accordingly speaks of Columbus' "breast fantasies" (McClintock 1995).

The following table provides a schematic overview of the different phases of colonization as en-gendering, racialization and alienation from an intersectional world-system perspective:

| Time                                       | Global Design        | Racialization / Ethnicization | En-Gendering            | Ver-Fremdung [Alienation]     | Binary Opposition            |
|--|----------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 16 <sup>th</sup> -17 <sup>th</sup> Century | Christian Mission    | Spatial                       | New World as Virgin     | »People without Religion«     | Christians vs. Barbarians    |
| 18 <sup>th</sup> -19 <sup>th</sup> Century | Civilization Mission | Temporal                      | The Exotic is Female    | »People without History«      | Civilized vs. Primitives     |
| 20 <sup>th</sup> Century                   | Development          | Spatial / Temporal            | Tradition is Passivity  | Underdeveloped People         | Developed vs. Underdeveloped |
| 21 <sup>st</sup> Century                   | Global Market        | Spatial / Temporal            | The Local is Irrational | Undemocratic People / Regimes | Democratic vs. Undemocratic  |

*Boatcă 2009 (cf. Mignolo 2000, Grosfoguel 2006, Shiwuy 2007, translation JR)*

Theodor Galle's copperplate engraving *America* from 1580 provides one of the earliest and most well-known examples envisioning the colonial encounter as such an – intrinsically asymmetrical – encounter between two genders. 'America' is depicted in a primitivizing manner as a bare-breasted Amazon in a hammock while her European 'visitor' is fully and elegantly dressed:



*Theodor Galle, "Americus meets America", copper engraving, 1580*

Americus carries a flag, with a cross and a compass – from a Eurocentric perspective representing the powerful insignia of state, (Christian) religion and science, of civilization and superiority, which

authorize him as narrator of the single story of the conquest. The encounter is a structurally unequal one, as Europa, who would be the counterpart of America is nowhere visible. Marisa Belasteguigoitia Rius argues that in this drawing, America opens her mouth attempting to speak to the European conqueror, but is refused to reply and silenced. “To colonize,” Belausteguigoitia points out, “is to freeze response.” [6] The colonization of spaces and bodies is accordingly closely connected to questions on who can reply and what counts as an answer. The long trajectory of colonization as en-gendering brings into view a multi-layered hierarchy of gender positions: as the copper engraving indicates, the conquered spaces and their inhabitants were feminized and thereby downgraded. Indigenous masculinity was thereby turned into an abject, non-sufficient masculinity according to European standards, exploitable and in need for European guidance and civilization. While Gabriele Dietze speaks of a “racial quartet” (around the ‘pyramid’ white men – white women – black men – black women) at play in the “counter-productive competition between race and gender politics” (Dietze 2013: n.p., my translation) for the US-American context, the Latin American regions have been marked at least by a “racial sextet” (white men – white women – indigenous men – indigenous women – black men – black women). In fact this holds true also for the US, where the Native populations have completely left out of the picture, in a similar way as black Latin Americans for a long time in the South. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the male-female dichotomy between Europe and “America” depicted in the copper engraving can be found in numerous cartoons which depict the USA as powerful masculine “Uncle Sam” and the Latin American republics as women (or blacks and/or children respectively, see Johnson 1980). The dimension en-gendering of colonial hierarchies is crucial for examining entangled histories and inequalities in the Americas. A respective sensitization is hence required in order to take this structural basis of constructions and narrations of hierarchies and Othering in and about the Americas into account.

Based on the conviction of the superiority of European technologies and knowledge productions, naming practices as expressed in the – deeply en-gendered – term “America” and from the 19<sup>th</sup> century later also “Latin America” made pre-existing names and concepts invisible. [7] The naming was an expression of the brutal appropriation and marginalization of the conquered inhabitants and their cultures. By transferring the names and concepts to colonial geographic (world) maps, Occidental geopolitics established them as presumably “neutral”, a-historical geographic entities, which could reproduce “reality”. They contributed to ensuring the position of telling the “single stories” of the newly conquered spaces and people and of the Conquest itself. As Mignolo has underscored: “The ‘idea’ of America was indeed a European invention that took away the naming of the continent from people that had inhabited the land for many centuries before Columbus ‘discovered’ it” (Mignolo 2005, 21). Octavio Paz has famously elaborated on the imaginary function

but also the related colonial power of the concept of America, which he defines rather as a discourse than a geographic entity:

[L]o que llamamos América [...] [n]o es una region geográfica, no es tampoco un pasado y, acaso, ni siquiera un presente. Es una idea, una invención del espíritu europeo. América es una utopía, es decir, es el momento en el que el espíritu europeo se univerliza, se desprende de sus particularidades históricas y se concibe a sí mismo como una idea universal que, casi milagrosamente, encarna y se afinsa en una tierra y un tiempo preciso: el porvenir. (Paz 183)

[What we call America is no geographic region, neither is it a past and, maybe, not even a present. It's an idea, an invention of the European spirit. America is a utopia, that is, it the moment in which the European spirit universalizes itself. Uncouples itself from its historical particularities and conceives of itself like a universal idea, which, almost magically embodies and settles down at a land and a precise time: the future. [Translation JR]

In Wallerstein and Quijano's words, then, this idea of futurity and newness became associated with the United States, and all other American regions were positioned at another temporal and spatial level as expressed in terms like "developing" countries or "traditional cultures" or disciplines like "American Studies" or "Latin American Studies" as separated from "anthropology" which was dedicated to study everything that did not belong to and was not included in this "newness".

It was supposed to better incarnate "newness" and be more "modern". The US constituted itself as a nation at the same time as it was developing a dominant role as a hegemonic power, and, based on the doctrine of the "Manifest Destiny", started to impose a "quasi-protectorate" (as Quijano and Wallerstein have it) over the countries of the Caribbean and Central America (556) which played a geopolitical key role for the rich countries of the so-called global North. The term "America" is today usually used synonymously with the United States in hegemonic contexts. This use of the term expresses the shift in the power dynamics from the East-West (Europe vs. the Americas) to the North-South (USA vs. Latin America) axis of power, starting with the final decline of Spain as a colonial power at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. With related increases in economic, military and cultural-political hegemony after independence in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the US became increasingly perceived as diverging from Latin America.

Not coincidentally, the patriotic anthems "God Bless America" and "God Save America" as well as the presidential phrase "God Bless America" to end a public speech explicitly relate to the USA: Further, 'America' (as USA) is often used as demarcation from a hostile "Other": During the Cold War, there was a House Committee for "Un-American Activities" (HUAC), and after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the TV channel CNN first broadcasted the headline "America Under Attack" and shortly afterwards "America's New War."



In spoken language, there is usually a distinction between North America (USA, Canada, Mexico) and South America, Mexico and the South and Central American states. The Spanish speaking states of the Caribbean (Cuba, Dominican Republic, partly also Haiti) are often also subsumed under the term “Latin America” due to their official languages. The Caribbean is geographically officially independent, but the English, French and Dutch speaking countries are oftentimes subsumed under the umbrella term “Latin America “ as well, when it is about underscoring their economic “underdevelopment” in order to thus confirm and reconstruct once again the US American and/or Western European standard. [8] Simultaneously, the “epistemic violence” acted out thereby served to establish the “homo oeconomicus” as a norm (beyond cultural particularities), while pathologizing all other subjects who would impede profit maximization as “backwards” or “underdeveloped.” (see Castro-Gómez 2007).

The countries perceived as developing countries or “threshold countries” from a European perspective, require the prefix “South” “Central” or “Latin” Americas, and they do not have the same prototypical position. The former European colony of the United States hence becomes one of the few states to become a significant imperial power. Significantly, in the US, only US citizens of European origin are referred to simply as ‘*Americans*’. US citizens of South American origin are referred to as *Latinos* and *Latinas*; if they have a Mexican background as *Chicanos* or *Chicanas*. In turn, citizens of the countries South of the USA count as ‘*Mexicans*’, ‘*Ecuadorians*’ or ‘*Chileans*’.

The term “Latin America” came up in the colonial context of European claims of power and conquest. It was first used by Torres Caicedo (a representative of the European exile elite) in 1856 in order to underscore European roots and thereby appear superior. [9] The term “Latin America” was meant to highlight the Latin (and, implicitly, white) cultural-linguistic origins of the Creole inhabitants. In this way, the term subsumes the inhabitants of the thus constructed continent as descendants of a “Latin” European tradition. The manifold languages and cultures of *Pueblos Originarios* of the thus named territories and Afro-“Latin”-American traditions were thereby structurally excluded. *Latinité* became early on associated with a culturally superior *race latine*, racialized and naturalized respectively. A further function of the term “Latin America” and the described related concept has been the demarcation from “Anglo Saxon America” and the US’s growing attempts of expansion. However, while the Criole elites were considered privileged in the South American territories in comparison to the Afro-“Latin” American inhabitants and the *Pueblos Originarios*, from the viewpoint of the European metropolis and the Anglo-Saxon colonies, however, they still counted as subordinated. José Martí’s famously turned “Latin” America into a strategic “Our America” aiming at a politics of solidarity between the formerly colonized against US supremacy and Eurocentrism. He located the discourse on the two unequal Americas as legacies of Spanish colonialism and US imperialism. Since the time of independence, “Latin” America



according to Mignolo became a site for critical reflection for intellectual decolonization (Mignolo 2005, 45 and 91). From the 1960s on liberation movements and dependency theorists initiated a radical shift in the idea of Latin America.

From the Conquest on, *Pueblos Originarios* have resisted the European violence, appropriations and one-sided representations – which the absence of America's story as told by herself in Galle's copper engraving indicates. However, it was only in the course of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Conquest in 1992 that numerous revisions of the Eurocentric history of discovery began to reach wider attention – increasingly also from hegemonic perspectives. More and more activists, organizations of *Pueblos Originarios* and political joint/solidary groups more visibly and collectively started to organize and resist the century-long appropriation and domination. These groups fought for their land rights and the recognition of their own cultural values and traditions. In the year 1975, the *Consejo Mundial de Pueblos Indígenas* (CMPI) was founded, a worldwide non-state union of communities of *Pueblos Originarios* in the regions termed as 'America(s),' South Pacific and Scandinavia (opening a truly transnational scope). Instead of "Latin America," the CMPI suggested to use the term Abya-Yala as a self-designation. Abya-Yala in Kuna refers to the entire "American" continent; the Kuna had used the term already before the Conquest. Aymara-speaker Takir Mamani suggested using the term Abya-Yala in official documents and declarations. He has emphasized the problematic character of naming in the colonial context: "Llamar con un nombre extranjero nuestras ciudades, pueblos y continentes equivale a someter nuestra identidad a la voluntad de nuestros invasores y a la de sus herederos" (NativeWeb: "Abya Yala Net." In: URL: <http://www.abayala.native-web.org/>) [To call our cities, people and continents by a foreign name equals to subsume our identity to the intention of our invaders and their heroes. (Translation JR)]. The continuous power to name and define Mamani mentions here indicates that the critical and academic parameters have largely remained structured along the lines of historically produced national boundaries and the respective hierarchies.

The coexistence of diverse traditions, practices, and histories, and the overlapping and interdependent nature of political and cultural phenomena and disciplines has rarely been discussed as entanglements. A focus on entanglements past and present might help bring into view the interrelations, dialectics, inequalities and subordinations. In a second step, I will elaborate on the similarities and parallels between a focus on entanglements and an intersectional gender approach to connect the macro and micro dimensions of transnational (and Trans-American) social stratification.

## 1<sup>st</sup> Angle: Hemispheric American Entanglements // Entangled Inequalities

In 1999 Shalini Randeria coined the notion of *entangled histories* (of uneven modernities) as a historical concept of transcultural relations. [10] The concept goes back to Sidney Mintz's elaboration on the history of sugar as a decisive factor for power structures between the European colonial nations and the colonies (Mintz 1986). This notion seems to provide a helpful frame for conceptualizing new categories of analysis and new epistemes, because of its historical dimension and the attention to historically produced and persistent colonial asymmetries. Based on the idea of a "shared and divided" history, the notion of entangled histories focuses on the interrelations and exchanges between the regions of the world. The approach examines the interconnectedness and intertwining of different regions, while accentuating that not only the colonizing countries had an impact to the colonized regions, but that the transfer has been happening vice versa as well. However, such exchanges were often marked by structural asymmetries and inequalities. [11]

The concept aims at rendering problematic the notion that Europe/the West would have developed independently from the "rest" of the world. On the contrary, Randeria and Conrad (2002; 2014) argue that the evolving contours of a transnational postcolonial world order are still marked by imperial and colonial legacies as expressed in an ongoing Eurocentrism. Randeria and Conrad point out that Eurocentrism provides the "constitutive geoculture" of the modern world (Randeria, et al. 12; cf. Wallerstein). The capitalist world system, on which according to World System theorist Immanuel Wallerstein Eurocentrism is based, is no European invention. Rather, it is a formation that depended on forces from the outside such as colonies. Thus, the figure of the world system already implies the global scale of the formation of the modern world. And it is here that critical approaches on space can tie in: current geopolitics and body-politics continue to be based on the assumption that the "West" and the related paradigms and epistemes (such as "democracy", "nation-state", or "modernity") are superior and unproblematically transferable to other spaces and places. Even though this model is characteristic for European and North American societies, it provides the model of organization for histories and social formations for *all* societies. Further, Randeria and Conrad problematize the separation of different times and different regions into different disciplines, for they avoided creating a methodological space for the multi-faceted relations and interdependencies between different geographical regions. As they argue, the focus on colonial interactions does not offer a coherent map, but temporally and spatially differing constellations (Randeria, et al. 39).

Randeria hence promotes a conceptualization of history of entanglement – or, rather, history as entanglement (Randeria, et al. 17) – in order to think new forms of connectedness. Such a notion is framed by a postcolonial perspective which avoids exchanging the essentialism of “Western” discourse with alternative essentialisms. Further, differing scales of entanglements at different times and in different places and spaces are of importance, as well as the related ruptures, boundaries, and particularities. The model of entangled histories aims at generating not only new answers, but also new questions in the direction of the “genealogy of a globalized present” (42) based on alternative visions and practices on a transnational scale which contribute to a ‘counter-hegemonic globalization’ and new forms of collective action (3; cf. de Sousa Santos). She considers it as important to take asymmetries into account, as the pure existence or marcation of entanglement does not imply reciprocity of relations. An intersectional gender focus – stemming from an understanding of addressing and fighting “interlocking systems of oppression” as the Combahee River Collective (1979) had it – goes in the same direction and might thus be a fruitful corrective in order to include a gender dimension.

Such a perspective requires the consideration of differences as power structures and taking the asymmetrical and dynamic character of transnational and transcultural entanglements in their historical and spatial dimension into account. Sérgio Costa’s elaborations on “entangled inequalities” might provide a valid starting point in this direction. Costa’s (2011) concept of entangled inequalities refers to the global linkages between social categorizations that determine social inequalities, which create asymmetries between positions of certain individuals or groups of individuals in a relationally (not spatially) determined context (such as economic positions and/or political and legal entitlements). Costa considers it thus important to link social and transregional aspects with historical ones as relevant factors for inequalities. A categorization can be advantageous in one context (e.g. quota) and disadvantageous in another (e.g. discourse, patterns of conviviality). Costa sees a strong necessity of relational units of analysis that are dynamically defined in the process of inquiry itself. However, Costa argues, the interplay of social categorizations cannot be articulated *ex ante* in a formula, but only be examined in the respective specific context. The conceptualization of entangled inequalities can serve as a dynamic unit of analysis, enabling us to take up the interdependencies between social categorizations and between different regions of the world. Further, Costa emphasizes that the examination of interrelated regimes of inequality over time allowing for the consideration of the historical construction of inequalities. I will in the following argue that an intersectional sensitization to a transnational approach to entangled inequalities might prove productive to that end. It serves in order to avoid the one-dimensional concept of inequalities turning simply into a kind of “class struggle on a global scale” or a “global version of class” without accounting for the numerous

feminist and postcolonial interventions that have happened since Marx, which are often rendered invisible or marginal in classical social science approaches to inequality. In order to further avoid the aforementioned hierarchization of different axes of stratification into the aforementioned binary between *Hauptwiderspruch* (principal contradiction) and *Nebenwiderspruch* (side contradiction) an intersectional framing of elaborations on entanglements and entangled inequalities seems crucial.

## 2nd Angle: Hemispheric American Intersectionalities

In Europe and the United States, “intersectionality” has recently become a widespread and celebrated concept in feminist and gender studies, and ultimately also in the social sciences in general. The concept has been transferred and travelled to numerous different contexts and spaces, and means different things at different places and for different actors. Generally, approaches dedicated to an intersectional perspective examine how various axes of stratification mutually construct one another and how inequalities are articulated through and connected with differences. An intersectional perspective always takes a multidimensional character, the entanglements, the analogies and simultaneities of various axes of stratification into account, rather than examining gender, race, class, nation, etc. as distinct social hierarchies. Accordingly, research carried out from such a perspective considers every constellation as “always already” marked by various factors, for example, race and racial hierarchization/racist exclusion as “always also” and “always already” defined by other dimensions of inequality such as gender, sexuality, social class, citizenship, or religion. An intersectional perspective considers constellations furthermore as differing from locality to locality and from context to context. An intersectional perspectivization hence aims at giving due diligence to the structural and simultaneous entanglement(s) of different axes of inequality.

The term “intersectionality” was originally coined by African American lawyer Kimberlé Crenshaw for a concrete juridical context: to make visible the double discrimination experienced by black female American ex-employees of the car firm General Motors who had been made invisible by existing juridical terms. General Motors did hire blacks, but they were all male; the firm also hired women, but these, in turn, were all white, thus the black women could neither make a claim on the basis of racial discrimination, nor on the basis of gender discrimination. Long before, African American feminist activist groups such as or *Mulheres Negras* in Brazil (1975), or the Combahee River Collective (1979) in the US had insisted on the need to fight the “interlocking systems of

oppression.” Such interventions stand in a tradition of resistance to dominant discourses and the negotiation of representative rights. Right after the French Revolution of 1789, the revolutionaries who built the first independent Latin American state in Saint-Domingue (today Haiti) pointed at the contradiction between ideas of human rights and freedom, and the system of institutionalized enslavement. Around the same time feminists like Olympe de Gouges (1791) and Mary Wollstonecraft (1792) highlighted that the presumed newly introduced “human rights” were limited to white male citizens. At the Women’s Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio, USA, in 1851, Sojourner Truth in her speech “A’in’t I a Woman?” questioned the universality of white bourgeois feminism by pointing at her intersectional experience as a black (and formerly enslaved) female worker. In her statement, Truth anticipated the problem of differences between women and the entanglement of different axes of stratification such as class, racialization and gender by opposing the presumed universal and collective female experience with her subjective personal experience. [12] Counter-narratives such as counter-chronicles (for instance Guaman Poma de Ayala’s *Nueva Corónica y Buen Gobierno*), women’s autobiographies, slave narratives or testimonios build a long trajectory of resistant story telling from the Conquest onward (see Roth 2012). In Chandra Mohanty’s words,

“[T]he recognition of subalternized forms of knowledge such as (women’s) testimonios, essays, or autobiographies as valid epistemic contribution; [...] storytelling or autobiography [...] [provides] a discourse of oppositional consciousness and agency. (Mohanty 2003, 84)

It is important to note, then, that intersectionality is itself embedded in processes of knowledge circulation and “travelling theories” and the related asymmetrical power hierarchies that define what counts as “legitimate” (scientific/academic/discursive) knowledge, and who can speak as an expert and is authorized to produce and define such “legitimate” knowledge. An analysis of interdependent inequalities dedicated to an intersectional understanding must thus reflect its own positionality and situatedness within the dynamics of global knowledge circulations in an unequal world. Such a self-critical positioning provides an enriching framing also for American Studies.

Understood as a frame for epistemic sensitization, an intersectional approach might serve for taking into account the respective varying and context-specific interlocking dimensions of stratification and inequality. It might thus serve as a valid tool for processes of transnationality, migration, citizenship, and, more generally, changing conceptualizations of nationhood, as well as the dynamics by which these dimensions mutually intertwine and constitute each other as in the Americas. Anne McClintock (1995) has coined the term of “articulated categories” such as race and gender in colonial contexts. Transnational interdependent feminist approaches taking into account the interrelations and structural analogies of gender hierarchies with colonial and racial hierarchies and their structural entanglements in the global economy might provide a useful complementary framing. This is true in particular for their insistence on the need to embed feminist

struggles within a critique of capitalism (see e.g. Anzaldúa 1987, Mies 1986, Mohanty 2003a and 2003b) and seek ways of transnational feminist solidarity across differences in the vein of Gayatri Spivak's notion of a "strategic essentialism" or Judith Butler's (1992) elaborations on the necessity of "contingent foundations." Furthermore, the concept of "intersectionality" as it has been discussed predominantly in European feminist circles is problematic, because when applied regardless of concrete contexts, the concept runs the risk of re-inscribing privileged positions and *loci* of knowledge and theory production. The concept itself needs decolonization in order to pay credit to practices and theoretizations in the same vein, but not labeled under the same heading, which have been part of non-hegemonic African American, Chicana and Amerafrican feminisms in the Americas for a long time (see e.g. Anzaldúa 1987, Castillo et.al. 2009, Espinosa Damián 2009, 2010 and 2011, López-Springfield 1997). An intersectional perspectivization might accordingly serve also for a productive critique on the considerable and often uncritically accepted asymmetries of knowledge production and circulation – of which the concept is itself part. Therefore, to assure this function, a decolonial sensitization provides a further – and/or simultaneous – useful corrective methodology:

### **3rd Angle: Decoloniality in the Americas**

Decolonial perspectives are based on the coloniality/modernity paradigm. Coloniality – other than colonialism, which describes a concrete historical era of imperialist expansion while coloniality describes the persistent structural power asymmetries created thereby – is thus considered as a structural world design closely intertwined with capitalist expansion. Coloniality is hence understood as the underside and the precondition of Modernity, not its outcome. Further, coloniality is a regime of domination of knowledge production and circulation which situates the colonized as the 'object' of study, and then makes such couplings invisible and destroys them. A decolonial approach aims to empower the marginalized and objectified and to get rid of the underlying matrix of power that endlessly reproduces the related hierarchies and is expressed also in current regimes of academic disciplines and theory writing. American Studies and Latin American Studies are no exclusion. [13]

A common misunderstanding has it that decolonial thinking is often considered as being opposed to postcolonial approaches. On the contrary, decolonial thinking elaborates on postcolonial theories by shifting the perspective to other times, places and paradigms. Both approaches aim to



critique and overcome colonial legacies. I chose a decolonial lens here, because the respective theorists have elaborated more on the Americas.

Decolonial thinking (not very different from postcolonial approaches) is first and foremost a political project. It is based on the conviction that in spite of administrative independence, there is a strong necessity for epistemic, political, economic decolonization. Decolonial thinking is hence based on the concept of the described structural *Coloniality* of power and knowledge and the notion that coloniality has been constitutive for European modernity and Eurocentrism (or Occidentalism).

Moreover, decolonial thinking provides a theoretical *perspective*. However, in contrast to postcolonial studies, which has found its way into numerous curricula and institutes, decolonial thinkers usually oppose becoming something like “decolonial studies”, as this would entail becoming part of the asymmetrical system they seek to overcome (this might also be an aspect from whence a misunderstanding stems, when decolonial thinkers refuse to provide coherent theories or talks which others could apply and exploit). Following the initial attempt of the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group, who claimed that Latin America had been absent from the map of postcolonial thinking, decolonial thinking focuses on Iberian Colonialism since 1492. Fernando Coronil in his path-breaking text “Latin American postcolonial studies and global decolonization” poses the problem of the absence of a corpus of Latin American postcolonial studies as “a problem not of studies on Latin America, but between postcolonial and Latin American studies“, and approaches the discussion of postcolonial studies in the Americas “by reflecting the relationship between these two bodies of knowledge” (Coronil 2013). Such a critical reflection seems also productive for American Studies and Inter-American Studies endeavors dedicated to a decolonial aim. As a consequence, Coronil pleads for pluralizing “colonialism – to recognize its multiple forms as the product of a common historical process of Western expansion” and for treating capitalism and modernity as

a global process involving the expansion of Christendom, the formation of a global market and the creation of transcontinental empires since the sixteenth century. A dialogue between Latin American and postcolonial studies ought not to be polarizing, and might range over local histories and global designs, texts and their material contexts, and subjective formations and structures of domination. (...) (T)actical postcolonialisms serves to open up established academic knowledge towards open-ended liberatory possibilities (...) in order to decolonize knowledge and build a genuinely democratic world. (Coronil 2013)

From a decolonial perspective, the European Conquest is taken to be the initiator of the structural Coloniality of power, based on the Modernity/Coloniality paradigm. Eurocentrism (Occidentalism) is hence considered a result of European colonialism. Decolonial approaches go back to anticolonial thinkers (e.g. José Martí, Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire) liberation theorists (e.g. Enrique Dussel)

and World System theorists (e.g. Immanuel Wallerstein, Aníbal Quijano) as well as to Border Thinking as introduced by Chicana feminists. Such a decolonial perspective requires an epistemic de-linking (see Mignolo 2009) and (self-critique) of those privileged by coloniality of power. A perspective of a strategic “critique of Occidentalism” (Dietze 2010) might be a further useful angle for that matter:

### **Critique of Occidentalism in the Americas**

According to Coronil the concept of Occidentalism describes the condition of possibility for Orientalism (the construction of the exoticized Other) as

the expression of a constitutive relationship between Western representations of cultural difference and worldwide Western dominance (...). (T)he ensemble of representational practices that participate in the production of conceptions of the world, which 1) separate the world’s components into bounded units; 2) disaggregate their relational histories; 3) turn difference into hierarchy; 4) naturalize these representations; and thus 5) intervene, however unwittingly, in the reproduction of existing asymmetrical power relations.

(Coronil 1996, 57)

Based on Coronil’s notion, the concept of a critique of Occidentalism [14] follows the gesture of Critical Whiteness to shift the critical gaze from “the observers to the observed” (as Toni Morrison has it), or, from the colonized to the colonizers and the process of colonization. A perspectization in the sense of a critique of Occidentalism contextualizes knowledge and requires a re-thinking of dominating regimes of knowledge production, circulation and evaluation. Further, it aims at the critical reflection of one’s own locus of knowledge production and the choice of categories or axes chosen has to be explained – also in relation to the categories not set center stage. It is in this vein that I see epistemic Occidentalism – as the continuing predominance of Western/Occidentalist, knowledges, theories and paradigms – at work. A perspectization of Hemispheric American Studies in the sense of critical Occidentalism helps to critically reflect and eventually reduce this hegemony. [15] Moreover, such a sensitization renders the oftentimes unquestioned position of the researcher problematic and points at the danger of re-inscribing knowledge asymmetries. An approach critical of the hegemony also forces researchers 1) to render their own position problematic, include the invisibilized (white/Occidental/heteronormative) norm and the related paradigms, languages, publications, genres, formats, of what counts as theory/knowledge in their reflections and put them under scrutiny, and, 2) to consider contributions which have been excluded by this very logic towards multiple stories of the Americas. The politics of the dominance

of English-language publications and peer-review journals and the fact that predominantly texts by writers whose texts are written in or translated into English are highly problematic points in the Inter-American context. Coronil respectively emphasizes the necessity to “involve not only self-reflection (...), or granting subjectivity to the subject studied (...) but the integration of these two analytical endeavors into one unified intellectual project directed at countering this unequal, colonizing relationship” (Coronil 2013). A decolonial perspectivization can provide a helpful tool in the endeavor to decolonize established notions of knowledge production and create a more complex and less hierarchical approach to grasp the multi-level and transregional interactions of social divisions. However, as I have mentioned in the beginning of this paper, even though building on insights stemming from Chicana and transnational feminism, decolonial approaches for the most part lack an intrinsic (intersectional) gender dimension. As Escobar emphasizes, “the treatment of gender by the MC group so far has been inadequate in the best of cases (...) an engagement with feminism and environmentalism would be fruitful in terms of thinking the non-discursive side of social action.” (191-2). It is therefore necessary to bring decolonial approaches into a more explicit dialogue with transnational intersectional and queer perspectives in order to then provide a framing for an (Hemispheric/inter-)American Studies, which is able to grasp a greater spectrum of complexities.

### **Towards a Politics of Intersectional Entanglements: Some Recent Approaches**

Numerous recent studies have provided insightful alternative conceptualizations of spaces and units of analysis, which might serve as examples for new American Studies approaches indebted to a decolonial framing interested in “changing the terms of the conversation” as well. However, it remains clear that concrete methodologies can only be drawn from the concrete contexts and cases they are applied to, and thus out of “the material at hand”. A decolonial intersectional framing or sensitization, however, is likely to change the epistemological horizon and hence questions asked of/to the material and the researcher’s self-positioning in relation to it and the modes and institutions of knowledge production and circulation. The following examples shall serve as a sort of starting point for respective further projects:

### **En-gendering Decoloniality: The Marginalized Legacy of Chicana Feminism**

One of the founding texts of Chicana feminism is Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La frontera. The New Mestiza*. The book is written in three languages interchangeably (English, Spanish, Nahuatl) and thus confronts the reader with the traps and gaps of translation and intercultural encounters also on a formal level. The text leaves the reader with an “intranslatable remainder”, which is paradigmatic for encounters, constellations and experiences at the crossroads, or border, of

different concepts and axes of stratification. Anzaldúa's concept of a border space or *borderland* describes at the same time the concrete physical territory between Mexico and the US and the fragmented, hybrid Mestiza identity which Anzaldúa designs for herself as Mexican lesbian woman for ambiguous spaces and identities between the established binary categories. Anzaldúa further introduced the concept of *Nepantla* (*border crossing*), which defines a space and a speaking position for hitherto marginalized Chicana and Latina voices. Simultaneously, *Nepantla* stands for a new epistemology, as this quote indicates:

[*Nepantla* is] the Nahuatl [Aztec] word for the space between two bodies of water, the space between two words. It is a limited space, a space where you are not this or that but where you are changing (...) – you are in a kind of transition. [...] It is very awkward, uncomfortable and frustrating to be in that *Nepantla* because you are in the midst of transformation. (...) *Nepantla* is a way of reading the world. You see behind the veil and you see these scraps. Also it is a way of creating knowledge and writing a philosophy. (Anzaldúa 237) [16]

A decolonial agenda is interested in such an epistemological shift. Its aim is a critique of Occidentalism, taking *Transmodernity* – the overcoming of the power logics inherent of European modernity – as its goal. [17] Her *Nepantla* concept can help to critically reflect also inequalities and asymmetries on the level of knowledge and theory production and circulation and to think alternative and more inclusive ways of thinking and conceptualizing the Americas. Octavio Paz' notion of "America" as "an invention of the European spirit [...] the moment in which the European spirit universalizes, separates itself from its historical particularities and conceives itself as universal (...): the future" (Paz 1950, 183) quoted earlier provides the basis of the critique of José David Saldívar's term and concept of "Trans-Americanity" in his book by the same title. Saldívar elaborates on an article entitled "Americanity as a Concept, or the Americas in the Modern World-System" (1992) by dependency theorists Quijano and Wallerstein. Quijano and Wallerstein take an implicitly entangled perspective and hence follow the main argument that "[t]he Americas were not incorporated into an already existing capitalist world-economy. There could not have been a capitalist world-economy without the Americas" (549). Such an understanding brings into view the mutual influences, interdependencies and interchanges between the spaces. Saldívar hence introduces the concept of Trans-Americanity as a way to contest U.S. American (and "Western"/Occidental) hegemony on knowledge, epistemic and cultural production (in the Americas) controlled by the cultural industry and academe as expressed in Quijano and Wallerstein's notion of Americanity as a logic of domination marked by structural racism and coloniality. Like many of his peers, Saldívar leaves gender out as a central dimension. As I have argued, it is in such a decolonial and intersectional omissions especially that I see the necessity for a combinatory approach. Such an approach brings into view the necessity of other than the

established units of analysis tied to certain conceptualizations of nationality, identity, culture, but also hybridity, difference and diversity.

Fernando Coronil (1996) in his illuminating essay “Beyond Occidentalism: Toward Non-Imperial Geohistorical Categories” examines the interaction of history and geography and promotes redrawing the “imperial maps” of modernity, on which – according to Coronil – time was “freezed” in space (as expressed in notions of “progressive” and “backwards” locations, “modern” and “non-modern” societies, or “developed” and “underdeveloped” regions – a notion that becomes pretty obvious in phrases like Latin America as “the backyard of the United States”. He argues:

This spatialization of time serves as the location of new social movements, as well as of new targets of imperial control; it expands the realm of imperial subjection, but also of political contestation. [...] Collective identities are being defined in fragmented places that cannot be mapped with antiquated categories. The emergence of new relationships between history and geography may permit us to develop a critical geography and to abandon worn imperial maps shaded in black and white. (Coronil 1996, 80)

A further example is Ella Shohat and Robert Stam’s “multichronotopic” perspective, which takes the simultaneity of different temporal and spatial conjunctions into account and focuses on the use of an “intercolonial” framing to cope with the “multiple dimensions of these transnational/translational intersections” (xv). In a critical self-reflective decolonial stance, Ella Shohat and Robert Stam remind us, the “Anglo-Saxon/Latinist cultural dichotomy [...] that still haunts the race/colonialism debates” (xv). Such a sensitization is of major relevance with regard to texts, theories, institutions, publications, and canons alike, and for an Inter-American or Hemispheric American perspective especially. They are interested in “the ‘transversalities,’ or the hierarchical and lateral syncretism and dialogism taking place across national spaces” (xx). Such a framing is also essential for (and could inspire?) conceptualizations of Entangled Americas. It might thus be at the crossroads and intersections of notions (in varying combinations) or angles such as Entanglements / Entangled Histories, Inequalities / Entangled Inequalities, Intersectionalities (of simultaneous and interlocking axes of stratification), Decoloniality (de-linking), Critique of Occidentalism (self-)critique of hegemony) that useful framings for Hemispheric American approaches dedicated to critique of domination emerge.

The histories of the Americas show that transnational processes are in no way new and specific to 20<sup>th</sup> century processes of globalization as the calling out of a “transnational turn” suggests. Such a narrow view neglects the colonial history that brought America into being in the first place. This narrative ignores spaces like the Caribbean which have been transnational for at least five centuries – and not necessarily voluntarily. Moreover, such a view suggests that there had been no

transnational exchange before (thereby also emphasizing the fantasy of national “container” cultures in Europe untouched by migration and encounters). Thus, the history of transnationality has to be understood at least as dialectical, as Shohat and Stam remind us, when they point out that “[s]lavery too was transnational, and Atlantic waters harbor the corpses of the enslaved thrown overboard” (Shohat and Stam xx).

Further, approaches like that of Ana Ester Ceceña, who proposes “El Gran Caribe” as “Umbral de la geopolítica mundial” as a unit of analysis or Paul Gilroy’s notion of a “Black Atlantic” point in a similar direction by proposing alternative analytical categories, and Stefan Rinke (2012) defines the shared history of the USA and Latin America as one “between spaces”. Michael Zeuske’s global history of Slavery (2013), which refers to “slaveries” in plural form and puts oceans instead of nation states and transculturations center stage provides a further example of a useful transnational approach which a Hemispheric American approach could draw on. And Luz María Martínez Montiel’s two-volume book *Afroamérica* (2006 and 2012) is very insightful for the Americas especially, as she includes the topics afrodescendants, enslavement and resistances in Canada, the US, Mexico, Central America, Guatemala and Belize, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, the Caribbeans (Martínez Montiel refers to the British Caribbean, the Spanish Caribbean, the francophone Caribbean and the Dutch Caribbean), Chile, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Uruguay, Paraguay, Argentina, and Brazil.

However, an intersectional gender dimension so crucial for bringing micro and macro levels into a dialogue is nowhere foregrounded in the mentioned examples. The work of Black, Chicana and transnational and decolonial feminisms (see e.g. Anzaldúa 1987, López-Springfield 1997, Rubiera Castillo/Martriatu 2011, Hull/Bell Scott/Christian 1982, Christian 1987, Suárez Návaz/Hernández, 2008, Mohanty 2003, Lugones 2009 and 2010) provides excellent examples for that matter, as Belausteguigoitia emphasizes:

“En el centro de esa confrontación de binarios, el sistema de género funciona como una lógica organizadora que impone un orden simbólico donde priva la exclusión, la segregación, la discriminación, la necesidad de inferiorizar, desconocer, controlar y, con demasiada frecuencia, incluso eliminar al otro. Por eso ha resultado tan iluminadora la perspectiva de los feminismos de las mujeres ‘de color’; los que discurren desde la subalteridad, desde la periferia, desde la doble discriminación, o la triple o inclusive cuádruple [...] para traer al centro de la discusión esas ‘sutiles’ diferencias que al feminismo metropolitano se le escapan te manera tan natural.” (10)

[In the center of this confrontation of binaries, the gender system functions like an organizing logic which imposes a symbolic order in where exclusion, segregation,



discrimination, the necessity to inferiorize, deny, control and, much too frequently, even eliminate the other rules. Translation JR].

She further underscores the value of the contributions by indigenous feminists at the southern border of Mexico, as well as by Chicana feminists to the North, who, as she highlights “representan muchas fronteras como límites cuya función no es sólo separar, sino también conectar” (Belausteguigoitia 2009, 14) [represent many borders as limits which function not only to separate, but also to connect. Translation JR]. They hence provide insightful examples for thinking new forms of dialogue and connectedness in the Americas.

Further, Belausteguigoitia underscores that in order to overcome persistent inequalities also on the level of knowledge and theory production, such a dialogue requires a critical reflection of the respective disciplines, their histories, methodologies, and entanglements with colonial power structures: “Me refiero a las fronteras entre México y Estados Unidos, entre idiomas, entre culturas; y también a las fronteras disciplinarias que su producción teórica y narrativa cuestiona.” [I refer to the borders between Mexico and the US, between languages, between cultures; and also to the disciplinary borders that their theoretical and narrative productions put into question. Translation JR].

The volume *Translocalities/Translocalidades. Feminist Politics of Translations in the Americas* (2014) offers a further collection of case studies, theorizations and possible dialogues for decolonial, intersectional inter-American endeavors. The volume’s structure around the subchapters “*Mobilizations/Mobilizing/Theories/Texts/Images*”, “*Mediations/National/Transnational Identity Circuits*”, and “*Movements/Feminist/-Social/Political/Postcolonial*” points at the multi-level character of the examinations and units of analysis and the focus on various levels of entanglements and intersectionalities. As editor Sonia E. Álvarez states in the introduction, the volume is based on the knowledge that currently manifold sorts of “Latin/o-Americanidades – Afro, queer, indigenous, feminist, and so on – are constructed through processes of translocation” (Álvarez 2) as people “increasingly move back and forth between localities, between historically situated and culturally specific, though increasingly porous, places, across multiple borders, not just between nations” (Pratt, book cover). Building on the feminist concept of “the politics of location”, the editors aim at tracing, analyzing and theorizing these multidirectional movements and crossings and the engendered positionalities they term translocalities/*translocalidades*, and at “linking ‘geographies of power at various scales (local, national, transnational, global) with subject positions (gender/sexual, ethnoracial, class etc.) that constitute the self” (Álvarez 2). Such an endeavor is in line with what I understand as a decolonial intersectional focus on the Americas.

With regard to an intersectional gender perspective, Floya Anthias further promotes conceptualizing intersectionality together with what she calls “translocational positionality”, which she describes as a move away from presumed group identities towards “a social process related to practices and arrangements, giving rise to particular forms of positionality for social actors [...] social spaces defined by boundaries on the one hand and hierarchies on the other hand” (Anthias 27). Anthias has also underscored the importance of avoiding the separation of the cultural from the political – or, the “texts and their material contexts”, as Coronil has it (see above) – as both dimensions are also deeply entangled and intersecting. I see this as an especially enriching aspect for an (Hemispheric/inter-) American studies perspective, as cultural studies approaches have recently tended to consider cultural texts and productions as too far separated from the respective culture industries and economic and political power regimes in a capitalist, globalizing, and deeply stratified world.

## Outlook

None of these approaches or perspectives provide concrete methods or ex ante formulas that could be applied to any given context. Rather, I would like to propose them as helpful frames to sharpen an epistemic sensitization. The concrete and relevant interrelations of these different angles must be considered for every specific context individually and with regard to the concrete contexts, cases, actors, and questions at hand. For a truly Hemispheric perspective in the sense I have depicted throughout this paper, it does not suffice to speak from a “cultural studies,” “sociology,” or “history” perspective, but to start from the problem one seeks to examine and open up to respective patterns of thought that go beyond national, cultural or disciplinary boundaries. This does of course not mean that one cannot focus on the proceedings in one country or region or apply a certain methodology, but, rather, that the approach offers a different view on the respective material and processes, automatically linking them to transnational or global entanglements that have an impact on the local scale.

The proposed sensitization serves to bring into focus the historical entanglements at play in the Americas as well as the persistent and changing axes of stratification such as social status, racialization, sexuality, religion or en-gendering. All these perspectivizations point toward the importance of taking the power dynamics in their historical constructedness into account when theorizing hemispheric frames for researching the Americas. For the Americas in particular, Coronil’s suggestion of a dialogue between approaches like American Studies, Latin American Studies and the respective perspectives such as postcolonial or decolonial thinking seems a productive starting point. Moreover, and implicitly, as I have pointed out, a decolonial framing can gain from an intersectional gender dimension in order to reflect upon the relationship between the

two bodies of knowledge of an intersectional gender and a post- or decolonial approach. Such a combinatory – or dialogical – endeavor might help to work towards a decolonization of persistently unequal structures of knowledge production and circulation in the Americas and towards conceptualizing alternative epistemologies paying credit to multiple and manifold translocalities, intersectionalities and the respective interdependent inequalities. Including knowledges from heretofore excluded epistemic locations such as the Caribbean might further contribute to dismantle persistent narrations of unity and pureness and reveal how the exchange between Europe, Africa and the Americas as well as between North and South America have contributed also to the “creolization” of the so-called Global North (see Boatcă 2011). It might further provide a frame to critically reflect upon disciplines, their histories, methodologies, and entanglements with colonial power structures. By doing so, such a sensitization serves to render privileges problematic and provide a framework for the necessary critique of hegemony in the sense of a “critical Occidentalism”.

Moreover, it seems necessary to strengthen categories/axes of social stratification, which are especially relevant for transnational processes, such as citizenship entitlements and to think further transversal ones. These are, however, to be separated in relation to their specific local situatedness and articulation. In sum, being indebted to the explicitly political paradigm of African American, Indígena and Chicana feminisms and feminist thinking produced in other languages and locations, Critical Race and Critical Whiteness approaches and Queer of Diaspora interventions, an intersectionality perspective can function as a hegemony or power- sensitive tool. Taking into account the colonial legacies of power and knowledge in and between the Americas, it is hence important to continue scrutinizing established traditions of positioning subjects and objects of knowledge. As such an intersectional sensitization can frame and enrich the research of Hemispheric American processes on various levels. Thereby, intersectionality – or intersectionalities – can provide an important epistemic sensitization to an (Hemispheric/inter-) American Studies approach, a “Thinking Technology” and a means of self-reflection in doing research.

An intersectional approach indebted to the political origins of the concept further puts established divisions between the cultural and the political, between theory and practice – and academically “relevant” and “irrelevant” forms of knowledge respectively – and between hermetically separated disciplines under scrutiny. The added dimension of opening up of the privileged places of knowledge production and a radical critique of unequal knowledge circulation and an evaluation of these plays an important part in this endeavor. In combination or as a sort of “corrective methodology” or “epistemic sensitization” with the aim of decolonizing, de-linking and unlearning epistemes which reproduce hierarchies and inequalities, such a sensitization might work towards a

greater “pluriversality” of stories, positionalities, and epistemologies. A decolonial intersectional Hemispheric American (studies) approach might hence work towards overcoming the related asymmetries and established exclusions to “change the terms of the conversation” and overcome “single stories”.

## Endnotes

[1] Chimamanda N. Adichie “The Danger of the Single Story”, lecture given at the TED Global Conference in Oxford, July 21-24, 2009.

[2] The research project “The Americas as Space of Entanglement(s)” at the Center for Inter-American Studies at Bielefeld University is engaged with this problematic constellation of academic traditions, terms and methodologies that no longer suffice to describe the complex interrelations and inequalities in a globalized world. This paper is based on a talk given at the colloquium of the project at Bielefeld University on May 21, 2013.

[3] See for instance Brickhouse 2004, Fitz 2004, Braig 2005, Birle/Braig/Ette/Ingenschay 2006, Gilbert et.al. 1998, Gillman 2007, Fitz 2010, Fluck/Pease/Rowe 2011, Grewal 2005, Herlinghaus/Riese 1997, Kaltmeier 2013, Levander/Levine 2006 and 2007, McClennen 2005, Pease 1994, Raab 2014, Rowe 2000 and 2010, Saldívar 1997 and 2012, Sullivan 2000. For an overview see Bauer 2009.

[4] See Trexler 1995, Schülting 1997, Belausteguigoitia 2009, Roth 2014.

[5] See McClintock 1995.

[6] Notes taken at her talk “Inequality and decolonization: From Disgust as Separation to the Hermeneutics of Love” at the conference “Social Inequalities and Global Interdependencies: Latin American Configurations”, on December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2010 organized by the *desiguALdades.net* research network at Iberoamerikanisches Institut, Berlin.

[7] See e.g. Pratt 1992.

[8] On the terms “America” and “Latin America”, see Roth 2011a und 2011b, 2014. On the history of the name “America”, see Lehmkuhl/Rinke 2008.

[9] This explicitly Eurocentric naming of all countries South of Mexico goes back to the French occupation of Mexico (1862-67) and has been preserved in many languages and contexts. The prefix “Latin” refers on the one hand to the Latin origin of the Roman languages. At the same time, it calls to mind connotations of the Roman Empire, from which Latin stems, and which functions as an ancient European original myth. Moreover, the idea of “Latin America” is closely linked to the “civilizatory” concept of *latinidad* (or *latinité*), through which the elites of European origin authorized their brutally paternalistic actions. (see Mignolo 2005).

[10] Randeria 1999, Randeria and Sebastian Conrad elaborated on the concept in their 2002 volume. New edition 2014 cited below with Regina Römhold.

[11] One of the defining factors of global inequalities are citizen regimes, see e.g. Shachar 2009, who examines “citizenship as a birthright property.”

[12] For the genealogy of intersectionality see Brah 2004, Roth 2013.

[13] For an overview of decolonial approaches, see the volume *Coloniality at Large* edited by Moraña, Dussel, Jáuregui 2008.

[14] “Critical Occidentalism” or a critique on/of Occidentalism is a concept coined by Gabriele Dietze (e.g. 2010) as a attempt to adopt a hegemony critical perspective as represented by Critical Whiteness Studies to European contexts.

[15] In the Americas in particular, this hegemony is evident e.g. in the predominance of US-American and European theories and texts, the power of the related academic institutions and publications as sole relevant sites of knowledge production and circulation and the English language in the academy

[16] The Latin American Subaltern Studies group founded the journal “Nepantla: Views from the South”, which was published from 2000 to 2003. Also, Walter Mignolo’s concept of “border thinking” owes to Anzaldúa’s work. Further, there an e-journal called “Nepantla: A Journal for Queer Poets of Color” has recently been founded and is still seeking (crowd-)funding, see <https://www.facebook.com/Nepantla>.

[17] The concept of Trans-modernity has been coined by Enrique Dussel, see e.g. Dussel 2002.



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## **Inter-American Perspectives for the Rethinking of Area Studies**

### **Abstract:**

In the context of the re-newed academic, political, and public interest in Area Studies, this article explores the spatial-political perspectives of inter-American Areas Studies. In a first step the article discusses the construction of the “area” of the Americas in regard to the triangular of power-space-knowledge. In a second step it proposes a framework to rethink hemispheric Area Studies relying on the concept of the Americas as space of entanglement. Thereby the article proposes three heuristic approaches towards a spatial framework of the space of entanglement. First, the concept of flows allows addressing the transregional mobilization and circulation of people, objects, commodities, and media. Second, geopolitical imaginaries allow us to understand the articulation of several spatial fragments into a broader concept of space and its representation. Third, with the emphasis on environment the article address the aspect of the materiality of space. The article ends with a plea for entangled methodologies in terms of pluritopical, transversal, dialogic, and horizontal approaches.

**Keywords:** Area Studies, geopolitical imaginaries, space of entanglements

Since the end of the 1990s we have been facing a new conjuncture in globalization driven by a liberalization of trade, an expansion of the financial markets, and innovation in information technologies. With the collapse of the Soviet Empire and the end of the bi-polar macro-geopolitical world order,, geopolitical visions of World society and global governance emerged. In these visions the “end of history” as proposed in the neo-Hegelian framework of Francis Fukuyama went hand in hand with an “end of geography” and a “timeless time” of a global network society (Castells 1996). This has lead to the recognition of a time-space compression and a growing feeling of global interconnectedness which finds political expressions in global governance regimes and cosmopolitan attitudes. In this context area-based knowledge has lost its importance, and Area Studies were considered old-fashioned compared to the emergent global studies. They were harshly criticized for their lack of theory and methodology, while the disciplines reclaimed their primacy in the order of knowledge hinting at their universal scope.

Nevertheless, there are also dynamics that hint at a new importance of Area Studies. In this article I want to highlight three of them that are mainly articulated by hegemonic discourses. First, I would like to mention the growing importance of migration as well as cultural and ethnic diversity in the so-called “age of migration”. (Castles and Miller 1993) Diasporic cultures, migrant communities, and language diversity show the interconnectedness with remote areas, just as cross-border media flows and cultural production do. Specific Area-based knowledge is necessary in order to understand the specific cultural patterns of people, things, and ideas “on the move” and its articulation with other societies and communities. This finds its expression in the recent debates on interculturality and (post-)multiculturalism (Kaltmeier, Raab and Thies 2012).

Second, the world-wide organized economy is based not only on universal rule in a global social system, instead, knowledge of particular regions is needed to improve the success of economic enterprises and to understand dynamics in political economy, such as competing regional integration processes in form of NAFTA, the failed FTAA, or UNASUR Latin American integration. (Schmalz 2013) This is the point at which area-specific knowledge comes in – in critical and affirmative ways.

Third, political knowledge of conflictive areas is needed in order to control and, as possible, pacify conflictive areas. Facing the proliferation of “small wars” not foreseen in the Fukuyama vision – it is especially the military complex and NGOs engaged in peace-keeping missions that advocate Area-based knowledge. (Kaldor 1999) A debate on the use of anthropologist knowledge in the military complex and in counterinsurgency strategies arose in the midst of the 2000s in regard to the military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq (see González and Price 2007; as well as the debates in *Anthropology Today*, especially in 2007 and 2008).

In this context several public and private foundations have made a plea for area studies. The program “Crossing Borders: Revitalizing Area Studies” that the Ford Foundation initiated in 1997 has been of particular importance (Dirlik 2010: 7, Mirsepassi 2003: 5)..In Germany the Area Studies program of the Federal Ministry for Education and Research (BMBF), initiated in 2008, has the goal to “maintain and improve Germany’s competitiveness in the globalization process” (BMBF 2008, translation by the author).

Partly related to these programs, we can observe a new, self-reflective turn in Area Studies in academics. Despite the utilitarian dimension in Area Studies, postcolonial scholars have defended area studies by hinting at another aspect: The close knowledge of regions may serve to challenge the Eurocentrism in theories and practice, and thus allow a diversification in the dominant geopolitics of knowledge. In a more practical and material sense Mirsepassi has argued that Area Studies have often been an opener for the academic field for Postcolonial scholars (2003: 9), because it is in Area Studies where Western Academia, in the US empowered by politics of affirmative action, concedes non-Western scholars a place in the academic field. Indeed, for our argumentation the epistemological impacts are more relevant. Ludden has argued that Area Studies challenge simple conceptions of universalism by hinting at the plurality of knowledge in the global knowledge society. Thereby he makes the point that every knowledge is contextual knowledge (Ludden 2003: 131-5). With Walter Mignolo we can underline this perspective and make the point that the construction of situated knowledge itself – depending of the speakers locus of enunciation - takes place in a power-laden geopolitics of knowledge where Western knowledge has been positioned – with colonialism and imperialism – on the top of the power matrix (Mignolo 1999).

In the following part of this article I would like to focus on two aspects of particular relevance for Area Studies in the Americas. In a first step I discuss the construction of the “area” of the Americas especially in regard to the triangle of power-space-knowledge. In a second step I propose a framework for rethinking hemispheric Area Studies proposing the – still fuzzy concept – of the Americas as space of entanglement.

### **Construction of the Americas: Power, Space, and Knowledge.**

The formation of area studies in Europe is closely linked to colonial projects. Counting, mapping, classifying, and representing the other were basic operations in the creation of power-knowledge complexes about the other and its space (Tuhiwai Smith 1999). Area Studies scholars Goss and Wesley-Smith pointed out that “area studies was an integral part of a modernist project that sought

to remake the world in the image of the West” (xii). The specifically Western production of knowledge implied that the other did not serve only to produce the self, instead, the self was universalized and set a standard to measure other societies. In making representations of the other, the Western image of culture and space was constructed. The power of definition was in the hands of the European colonizers. This mutual operation of Othering in the production of geocultural units was analyzed by Edward Said in his seminal work on Orientalism, as a Western discourse and construction of the Orient. Latin American scholars such as O’Gorman and Walter Mignolo have pointed out that the basic “orientalist” operation is at work in the construction of the Americas. While Edward Said has focused on the construction of the Orient in power-knowledge-complexes in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Walter Mignolo argues that this construction of the Orient was only possible on the basis of the triumph of Christian Spain in the expulsion of Moors from the Iberian Peninsula and the conquest of the Americas (Mignolo 1999: 61).

This construction of the Americas had – as Aníbal Quijano argues – material and social impacts. Hand in hand with the economic and political conquest also a “coloniality of power” is established, that is based on identity politics. In the classification of the “racial” Other, the European self is constructed because the construction of the racial inferior Other served the needs of labor exploitation. For Wallerstein and Quijano this lies at the heart of the formation of the modern capitalist world-system. Therefore they point out: “Americanity has always been, and remains to this day, an essential element in what we meant by ‘modernity’” (Quijano/Wallerstein 1993: 549).

Also for approaches to the conception of modernity, inspired by Max Weber, the Americas mark a turning point. Sociologist Shmuel Eisenstadt has argued that the construction and colonization of the Americas has had far-reaching impacts for the development of modernity. The Americas are – following Eisenstadt – the first multiple modernities beyond Europe. Against the argumentation of traditional theories of modernization Eisenstadt points out that new modern dynamics and interpretations that must be seen as autonomous emerged on the basis of European patterns. He highlights that occidental patterns cannot be seen as the only “authentic modern” ones, although they serve as the starting point for alternative modernities in the Americas.

In classifying the paths to modernity in the Americas Eisenstadt relies on the colonial constitution of the American societies. “Indeed it was in the Americas – in the English colonies in the North which later crystallized into the US; in Canada where French and English settlements became interwoven; and in the Latin Americas in the Spanish and Portuguese empires as well as in the Caribbean – that such distinct patterns of modernity first crystallized.” Thereby Eisenstadt not only highlights the difference to Europe, but also – in a Weberian approach – the distinct paths to



modernity between the US and Latin America that “differed not only from one another, but also from Europe” (Eisenstadt 2003: 701-2).

Treating the US and Latin America as distinct units – as it is also the case in the Eisenstadt-approach - tends to ignore the inter-American entanglements. Early geopolitical imaginaries of hemispheric integration – from Simón Bolívar to the Monroe-doctrine – were applied in an anti-colonial sense and directed against Europe, although even between the 1830s and the 1850s certain imperialist patterns in US-policies towards the Latin American South were notable. When in the US the frontier and westward expansion ended (– in the realm of the westward expansion and the annihilation of indigenous peoples –) and after the 1860s with the conclusion of the civil war, Latin America and the Caribbean were declared a new South-frontier, initiating a new imperialism. The turn from 19<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> century marked a turning point in the Western hemisphere from a trans-Atlantic relationship with Western Europe towards a growing inter-American entanglement. In the Spanish, US-American and Cuban war in 1898, the last Spanish colonial domain ended the era of traditional European colonialism in the Americas. In 1867 the French left Mexico, and with the beginning of the works at the Panama Canal in 1904, the US triumphed over the French engineers (Parker 2008).

The shift from transatlantic to inter-American entanglements resulted in a new imperialist pan-American integration under US-hegemony. Since the 1890s the growing US-export economy tried to conquer new markets – especially in Latin America. This shift towards inter-American relations found its expression not only in economic and political entanglements but also in Area-specific knowledge production. In contrast to Europe – where geographical societies are related to colonial projects (Smith 2010: 24) - area studies in the US began to emerge later – in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century – and they mainly had a pan-American orientation, as is the case of the Pan-American Institute of Geography and History founded in 1928 in Havana and established in Mexico City.

This hemispheric geopolitical imagination under US-hegemony was not uncontested. Historian Michel Gobart (2013) argues that the recognition of the government of US-filibuster William Walker in 1858 by US-president Franklin Pierce fostered the idea of Latin America as a geopolitical and identitarian category against US-imperialism (Gobat 2013). This geopolitical imaginary was also expressed by anti-imperial writers such as Cuban José Martí or Uruguayan José Enrique Rodó. In this early dynamic of pan-Americanism we also find anti-hegemonic entanglements related to race, ethnicity and gender that – as David Luis-Brown (2008) has argued in regard to afro-American and certain indigenist movements – led to hemispheric waves of decolonization and ideas of hemispheric citizenship.

A specific conjuncture of Inter-American integration took place in the realm of the Good Neighbor Policy vis-à-vis World War II. In this geopolitical context the US was very concerned to establish good relations to its Latin American neighbors in order to impede the expansion of the fascist axis-powers in the Western hemisphere.

Nevertheless, after WWII (See Robert Hall's 1947 report "Area Studies with Special Reference for Research in the Social Sciences."), the global reconfiguration that made a world power out of the US and that produced the bi-polar geopolitical system of the Cold War, put an end to inter-American integration and lead to a new conjuncture of knowledge production in Area Studies. Goss and Wesley-Smith have argued that Area Studies in the US have been strongly related to the post-World War II and Cold War, (Szanton 2004, Cumings 2002) often with the aim to collaborate with the military intelligence arms. This is particularly the case for Latin American Studies in the US. Latin American Studies emerged in the United States related to the geopolitical or geo-economic aims of foreign policies, as is also the case in Latin American areas studies, due to the revolutionary movements in the "decisive decade" (Halperin Donghi) of the 1960s and 1970s because of the success of the Cuban revolution (Berger 1995). Even critical academic networks, such as LASA, had to position themselves in the Cold War power field in opposition to U.S. interventionism in Latin America and in Vietnam (Berger 1995, 173, Sadowski-Smith/Fox 2004, 12, Wesley-Smith/Goss xvi). Nevertheless, in contrast to other area studies, Latin American Studies in the US is characterized by a "double bind", on the one hand the common history of colonialism and nation-building, and on the other hand the reproduction of differentiated forms such as Protestant vs. Catholic, Anglo vs. Latins, North vs. South and later Empire vs. periphery (Mignolo 2003: 36). This dynamic had its repercussions in Western Europe. In Great Britain the establishment of Latin American Research Centers began with a state-sponsored program vis-à-vis the impact of the Cuban Revolution.

In this sense it is obvious, that power relations are inscribed in Area Studies. The production of knowledge – and its funding – is highly political. Thereby traditional Area Studies are characterized by an uneven geopolitics of knowledge which finds its expression in the fact that Western (European and US-American) scholars control the production of knowledge while Asian, African and Latin-American scholars are barely taken into account. Nevertheless, it is not only instrumental. The academic field – although it depends on private and public funding – still has a certain degree of autonomy from economics and politics, and it has a high potential of self-reflection. It can not only produce "knowledge to give economic and political actors orientation" or "Fernkompetenz" (BMBF 2008), it can also reflect upon uneven Geopolitics of knowledge and offer interfaces of knowledge exchange and cross-cultural dialogue.

## Space of Entanglement.

Since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century we can observe increasing processes of inter-American exchange, transfer, interdependence and entanglement. The latinoization of the US has changed not only demographics and cultural politics in the US but also the academy. The establishment of Chicano/a and Latino/a American Studies departments highlights that Latin American Studies is not a remote object but an urgent perspective in the midst of the US. The US-Mexican border is the most crossed border of the world, cross-cultural media flows shape consumer cultures in the North and the South of the continent, capital interest influences geopolitical imaginaries of hemispheric integration while drug and arms trade as well as its containments are other examples of the multiple forms inter-American relations can take.

The latinoization of the US, sub-regional integrations, and the growing importance of borderlands as “transfrontera contact zones” (Saldívar 1997) bring us to reflect upon the use of our spatial categories. In traditional area studies, space has often been understood in terms of a “container space”: as a recipient that contains specific cultural, economic, political, and social elements that distinguishes these spaces through discrete borders from other container spaces. The criteria for the identification of these areas vary depending upon the theoretical framework. The most widely known container space is – without any doubt – the territory of the nation-state, which is often conceived of as the basic unit of the post-colonial world after the end of empires (Ludden 2000). In regard to the Americas also definitions of cultural and religious areas are widely used. In resemblance to 19<sup>th</sup>-century theories of “Kulturareale” political scientist Samuel Huntington stated a “Clash of civilizations”. Also simple versions of dependencia-approaches with their juxtaposition of North and South fail to understand the new spatial dynamics.

In the light of recent debate on spaces, these approaches fail to give differentiated spatial insights as they conceive space as a given, independent variable that remains constant while cultural and social dynamics are the motors of change. Cultural and social elements are put in the container. Thus, the criticism of container-spaces does not mean to lose sight of the diverse forms in which space is fixed. Instead, our approach “puts the focus on a certain tension between fixity and fluidity, between the ways in which places, territories, and borders at all scales become comparatively fixed in space over a significant period and the ways in which such fixed entities are dissolved in favor of new fluidities and fixities” (Smith 2010: 29).

If we do not limit our understanding of space to absolute containers and if we take a relational understanding as a starting point for our spatial re-construction of area studies, we have to

introduce new spatial categories. Thereby we should not play off globalization against Area Studies. Instead, Mirsepassi suggests that “[t]he fluid concept of globalization can be made more precise and meaningful only by being grounded in area studies. It is precisely the relationship between global processes and area-based knowledge that opens up new perspectives on globalizing societies, nations and cultures” (2003: 13).

This cannot be achieved with a territorial concept of area. Therefore we propose the use of the concept of a space of entanglement. Entanglement becomes a key concept which allows the analysis of phenomena such as transfers between regions, regional intrinsic logics, deterritorialization and transculturation.

In our approach an area is not a given entity, instead it can only be described as a field of interaction and exchange that is relevant to the actors. In this sense areas have a “variable geometry” that is not limited by physical space. The constructedness of areas and their relations to others is highlighted by focusing on mutual observation, comparison, competence, interdependence and interplay. Areas are thus imagined spaces of interaction which are both addressed and influenced by the geopolitical strategies of institutional actors, economic interests, media, social movements and daily life experiences. As a result, entanglement also addresses power asymmetries without the schematics of older dependence theories.

In the following section of this article, I propose three heuristic approaches towards a spatial framework of the space of entanglement. First, the concept of flows allows us to address the transregional mobilization and circulation of people, objects, commodities, and media and their impact in the construction of an inter-American space of entanglement. While Manuel Castells has focused in his influential concept of the space of flows within an emerging age of information mainly on informational flows based on technological innovations, we propose here a broader concept of flows that includes the flow of people, animate beings, plants, things, ideas, etc....

This approach allows us to describe border-crossing dynamics and processes of deterritorialization as well as the intersection of local, national, regional and transregional horizons of interaction. In recent mobility studies we partly see the argument of an intrinsic teleology of acceleration (often related to modernity itself), instead we argue that flows have different velocities. They can slow down and even stop. In spatial terms the concept of flow needs to be substantiated. Terms like routes, itineraries, channels, etc. might be helpful for this task. The micro-research strategy to follow flows is a privileged option to analyze areas which puts dynamics, fluidity and agency in the center.

Nevertheless, it seems inadequate to limit area studies to only this micro-approach. Therefore, we propose, second, the concept of geopolitical imaginaries. This concept allows us to understand the articulation of several spatial fragments (including flows) into a broader concept of space and its representation (Gregory 1994). We are first interested in the entanglement of different discourses in the construction of these spatial imaginations. This may concern the articulation of different functional discourses (media discourse, political discourse, etc.) as well as the articulation of different regional discourses.

Secondly, we are interested in the multiple ways in which these geopolitical imaginaries circulate and how they are used strategically in political communication. Or, put in another way, how geopolitical imaginaries themselves become concepts that travel and circulate in flows. Here we can turn to the experiences of Latin American Cultural Studies – particularly scholars working on the analysis of medialized urban imaginaries (García Canclini 1995).

Several recent theories on space rely on the dualism of spatial practice and the merging of spatial elements into a broader imagination of space (Löw 2001, Freitag 2005). We would like to add a third dimension. With the emphasis on environment we address the aspect of the materiality of space: a space that surrounds us, and a space of which we are an integral part. To do this, we focus first on how material space is socially produced, appropriated and transformed, and secondly, on the ways in which material space shape social interactions and imaginations.

These heuristic approaches of flows, spatial fixes in geopolitical imaginaries and environment do not in any way lead to a description of an integrated space of the Americas without conflict. Spaces of entanglement cannot be understood as smooth spaces, instead they are highly fragmented, incoherent, and shaped by uneven power-relations. By addressing entanglements we are particularly interested in the nodal points where different strands and flows meet. Here the flows not only pass through, instead these are dense points where complex processes of translation, transculturation and intersection take place. We propose the concept of “interface” to focus on the sites where different flows cross, entangle, and compete, and where new imaginaries are produced in processes of translation and transculturation. These interfaces are by no ways a guarantee for successful communication and interaction, instead they are junctions where communication and interaction can also be cut off.

## **Dialogue in Area Studies**

In the last sections, I have offered elements for new spatial concepts in entangled area studies. Nevertheless, not only an un-thinking of area studies is needed, but also an un-doing. In this

sense, in place of a conclusion, I would like to present a final remark in regard to a methodology in area studies. Postcolonial thinkers such as Sebastian Conrad and Shalini Randeria (2002) have argued that colonialism has led to an entangled history, which entangles the local histories of different areas (colonizers and colonized) and which establishes a new colonial power-matrix. This is also the case for the Americas that have their origins in the European colonial expansion in the long 16<sup>th</sup> century, and that – especially since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century – have been shaped by inter-American entanglement. The latter creates a space of a common experience in the rejection of a European colonialism, and a Europe that has been politically divided by the imperialistic politics of the US in the Western hemisphere.

The plea for an entangled conception of the Americas has methodological impacts. One can hardly argue that it is possible to understand the area from the perspective of one single place of enunciation. Entangled spaces need entangled methodologies to be understood in their complex articulations (for a discussion of dialogical methodologies inspired by the task of decolonizing the geopolitics of knowledge see Corona Berkin and Kaltmeier 2012).

The most basic, yet essential requirement of critical Area Studies in the Americas is the acknowledgement of the multiplicity and simultaneity of knowledge production in different areas and various disciplines. We need to record the differences, juxtapose differences and similarities and mobilize the existing sources of knowledge.

In a first stance, it is important to understand the different meanings and connotations the same concept may have in different contexts and from the perspective of different loci of enunciation in unequal power relations. This means to decolonize the existing geopolitics of knowledge, where the “valid” knowledge is still produced in the West, e.g. in peer-reviewed US-American journals. In a self-reflexive manner we have to acknowledge that our research itself has to be understood as an interface in the space of entanglement.

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**Markus Heide** (Uppsala University) & **Guillermo Verdecchia** (Toronto)

### **Border Issues on Stage**

#### **Latino-Canadianness, the Americas, and the Representation of Arabs in the Theatre of the Canadian playwright Guillermo Verdecchia, an Interview**

#### **Abstract:**

Guillermo Verdecchia is a Canadian writer of drama, fiction, and film who has also been active as a director, dramaturge, and an actor for stage, screen and radio in North America and other parts of the globe. Among many awards, he is a recipient of the prestigious *Governor General's Award for Drama* for his *Fronteras Americanas*, the *Chalmers Canadian Play Award*, and *sundry film festival awards* for *Crucero/Crossroads*, based on *Fronteras Americanas* (dir. Ramiro Puerta). Verdecchia was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina and came to Canada as a young child. He grew up in Kitchener, Ontario. Verdecchia received an MA in Theatre Studies from the University of Guelph in Guelph, Ontario. Currently (2014) Verdecchia is Picador Guest Professor for Literature at the University of Leipzig, Germany.

Markus Heide spoke with the author in Toronto in October 2013.

**Keywords:** Guillermo Verdecchia, border thinking, diasporas, *The Adventures of Ali & Ali and the aXes of Evil*

MH: In 2013 the anthology *Fronteras Vivientes: Eight Latina/o Canadian Plays*, edited by Natalie Alvarez, was published by Playwrights Canada Press (Toronto). Your play *Fronteras Americanas* (1993) is included in the anthology. In what way do you see yourself at home in a Canadian-Latino/a community of writers or as part of a Canadian-Latino/a literary tradition? Is this ethnic context important for your self-definition as a playwright, director, and performer?

GV: The short answer is: Yes, I do see myself or have seen myself as part of that community. And, at one point I thought, that my work was -- I do not want to say seminal -- but an important first step in identifying this body of Latino-Canadian writing and in some way substantiating that body of writing. And this collection *Fronteras Vivientes* goes a long way in making this body of work manifest. It really identifies this body of work, but also this community.

But at the same time, like most artists, I do identify with a community while also intending to exceed the boundaries of this community. At one point it was important for me to understand that I was part of a community of Latino-Canadians. It is not so enormously important for me in my writing today. Although, as an artist in this community, I do feel that I want to make a contribution to the community. I want to see it grow and even to see it take off into directions that may not have much to do with me.

MH: When *Fronteras Americanas* came out in 1993 not much had been published in Canada that marked a specific Latino/a identity. In the US, however, this was different: Mexican-American literature and theatre had been published at least since the Chicano/a Movement of the late 60s and 70s. In drama the most influential figure most certainly was Luis Valdez and his *Teatro Campesino* of the 70s. In your play there are numerous intertextual references to the Chicano/a literary and theatrical history and Latino/a cultural practices. How important has this cultural context been for the play and for your work in general?

GV: The Chicano example – that is Chicano/a literature and cultural production – for me was a really important reference point. I was struck by their history and their creativity in terms of managing this bi- or tricultural tension. Their way of dealing with the “inbetween position” was for me something like an existential validation. I thought: Look, there is somebody else – practically on the other side of North America – asking the same kind of questions. What does it mean to have two tongues, two hearts, two memories? And how can you live with that without feeling “divided”? So, Chicano cultural production was to me a thrilling example of people wrestling with problems similar to mine, although in different contexts. Chicano literature, theatre and other cultural production had come up with very exciting solutions to problems I struggled with when I worked on *Fronteras*. In this sense it was a very important reference point for me.

MH: In what way have experiences of Othering, of racism, exclusion, and discrimination – each of them being reflected as central topics in the Latino/a literary and cultural production in the US – affected your work as a Canadian playwright, performer and writer?

GV: Well, actually, overt racism, exclusion and discrimination have never really been part of my life. I am rather privileged in terms of exclusion from mainstream society. I was mostly educated in Canada. I am white. I am male. I am straight. I can pass as a member of the dominant culture. So my experience is quite different from some of my friends who have noticeable accents, who are darker than I am, or who come from Central America being marked in a way that I am not marked. The things that I have experienced were much more subtle and more on the level of existential uncertainty, as to: Why do I dream, or imagine, in one tongue and live in another? Where do I belong? Why do I feel this way about certain things that are not visible? Why are things in my imaginary that do not exist in the external world? Things that I cannot see on film or TV here, that I do not see on the street, and yet they have this very powerful hold on me. So that is a feeling of dislocation, a kind of un-reality. I cannot say that I experienced much overt exclusion, more like moments of feeling “you do not belong”, or “go home” – although I did not know where my home was if not here.

MH: *Fronteras* is a play about borders and it employs imagery and iconography of the border – which in the work by such artists as Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Gloria Anzaldúa has grown out of the US-Mexico border context. With *Fronteras* you relate to this border discourse, including Canada and other parts of the Americas. At the same time one gets the impression that the play’s main character also desires to overcome any identity category.

GV: Absolutely. Border thinking is the key to *Fronteras* and my work. Simply said, it is the idea that I do not have to choose between Canada and Argentina. I do not have to settle for “Latino” – although this already is a hybrid identity. In a way I would say, I live in the hyphen, living and acting as Latino-Canadian. I claim this but it is the kind of simplifying representations that work in popular culture, this is much more complex. This is, I suppose what you see towards the end of *Fronteras*, an ambivalence, or as you put it, an “overcoming” of identity categories, a refusal to identify in pre-given ways. It is not that I simply want to claim Latin America for myself as a Canadian but I also claim Canada, and I claim Canada as part of Latin America. It is a more complex cartography than what was taught in public school or than we learn when we grow up, or as the mainstream mass media constantly reproduces it. Yes, absolutely, the idea and the concept of the borderlands was a solution for me. I noticed that I can live in this in-between space that thinkers like Anzaldúa, Gomez-Peña, and Bhabha have identified. It is a very productive and exciting space. It is a space that actually makes sense to me emotionally and speaks to my experience.

MH: By giving expression to the experiences of a Latino character who grew up in Ontario and by connecting this experience to Latino/a cultural traditions and histories, *Fronteras* positions Canada in the Americas. Your play suggests exploring Canadian experiences in the context of the Western hemisphere.

GV: It was a really important part of the play for me to articulate the idea that we are part of a continent whose name is “America”. Although we are constantly worried about our neighbor to the South and measuring ourselves against and comparing but we could also imagine fruitful economic, political and cultural relationships with the other parts of the continent: with Mexico, with Central America, with South America. So this is a really important part of the play, the idea that we can redraw the map, and we can configure new borders with the rest of the continent, instead of thinking of ourselves as isolated and only in close relationship with the United States.

MH: *Fronteras* made many critics read your work in the context of Border Studies and Latino/a Studies. In other plays these issues are not as obvious. *The Noam Chomsky Lectures* (1991), for example, shows a different approach to drama. Critics have discussed the play – and also the follow-up, *Insomnia* (1999) – in terms of meta-theatre, as a piece reflecting on power relations and ideology constructions. In your own words: What is your central interest in these plays? Do you see these plays as a break with the issues addressed in *Fronteras* or do you see continuity at work?

GV: I think there is a strong connection between *Fronteras* and *The Chomsky Lectures*, both in terms of content and formally. They are both interested in questions of power and in relationships between the North and the South, to put it in general terms. *The Chomsky Lectures* is concerned with Latin America, there is a whole section on the Contra war in Nicaragua and Canada’s relationship to that war, Canada’s relationship to Central America but also to Chile and other countries in Latin America. But it is also about the relationship to the United States that was the primary actor in these conflicts. So, it provides another look on geopolitics and the relationship of the North and the South. *Fronteras* perhaps looks at it in slightly more personal, psychological ways, and looks at the cultural politics, whereas the *Chomsky Lectures* is more interested in, let’s say, state politics.

MH: Your plays deal with questions of power asymmetries in society and in forms of representation. In this sense your work is very much part of the tradition of political theatre. How do you characterize your interest in politics and in political drama?

GV: In general terms I see myself in the tradition of socialism, although this is less obvious in my plays. On another level, I guess the politics I am most interested in is the politics of representation.



I fundamentally believe that the representations and images we create, circulate, and hold of one another authorize, permit, license, legitimize certain ways of behavior, policies, and actions. The images we have of one another have a kind of performative force, and they, in subtle, or not so subtle ways allow us to do things to other people. For example, – and this is something Marcus and Camyar and I spoke of in *Ali and Ali* all the time – in North America all we ever see are weeping Arab women, traumatized by the death of their children, or apparently very angry, menacing Arab men posing with machine guns in the streets. As these are the only images we see, we begin to think that these people need our help, they are either victims, or they are crazy. So we must intervene. This is a very limited repertoire of images that, in response to, we only have very limited options to react. So in *The Adventures of Ali & Ali and the aXes of Evil: A Divertimento for Warlords* (2010) we thought: Well, we need other images of Arabs, that are more complex that challenge the usual representations, that fall neither into the victim category nor into the – shall we say – maniac categories and tropes.

MH: You referred to Marcus Youssef's work – your partner in many of your plays, as, for example, the more recent *Ali and Ali*. In the introduction to *Ali and Ali* you use the term "agitprop" for characterizing the play. The issues addressed here and the way these issues are addressed on stage, I find, indicate a move from border issues of the Americas towards an interest in contemporary global politics and conflicts.

GV: We still talk about borders, and we still see borders and bordering as a problem, about inclusion and exclusion. We are now, however, facing securitized, militarized borders in this so-called post 9/11 world. We are now talking about borders that, on the one hand, seem to be highly mobile and, on the other hand, are incredibly rigid. Today we face a different kind of nomadism, a different kind of migrancy that seems to have an implicit threat in it. So I believe these ideas are still at work and I am still very much interested in exploring the lines, the arbitrary lines, we draw between the global North and the global South. So this is very much a question we are interested in in *Ali and Ali*. But I am also interested in how borders are actually enacted, enforced. Where large ideas about the world actually play out, ideas about identity, the nation, the globe. They actually play out in rooms. Like when you cross the border you encounter this guy in this little booth, this little three feet or four feet space. This guy has this tremendous power to enact the border, to perform the border. The border, and ideas about the state and security, are very powerfully at work in such spaces. So *Ali and Ali* raises these questions, particularly in the second one, *The Deportation Hearings*, where they are about to be deported from Canada. So, I believe the border is still an important issue in my work, although the border takes on a different form than in *Fronteras*.

MH: You addressed different forms of political criticism and how your work is linked to political issues. Could you please comment on the role of humor, comedy, and satire in your work, and in this context, also on dramatic self-reflexivity, on projections and other stage devices which particularly come up in *Ali and Ali*? How do you characterize the function of comedy in this piece and in others?

GV: First of all, it is a way I have of dealing with the world. I use irony and satire. I do like to turn things upside-down. This helps me feel better about the world, and this attitude shows up in my work. Obviously this attitude creates an opportunity, rather than to assault people, to disarm. Humor in this sense is disarming. It allows us, momentarily at least, to see things in a different light. Humor is often built on the principle of putting things in a wrong place. It allows you to put things into wrong places, to displace things. So we can put things to wrong places and regard this rearrangement and suddenly create a new understanding of the arrangement of things. In a way, we then reflect on social reality, the construction of social reality.

With the *Ali* performances we started by saying that we were going to refuse to take the so-called War on Terror seriously. I do not know what the news coverage was like in Europe. But here in North America we had quite a few people seriously discussing whether we should bomb Afghanistan and Iraq back to the Stone Age. It was a serious and sober discussion. It struck us as such an outrageous idea, obscene notion, not just a notion, actually an obscene action. One way to deal with it was to not take it seriously, to absolutely mock it, ridicule it, as much as possible. Because by taking it seriously, by arguing with it directly, we felt, you gave it some kind of power. We wanted to react with our own obscenity and outrage.

We went to see a hearing, here in Toronto, for one of the Muslim men who was being detained indefinitely without charges. They were never charged. He and a few other men were imprisoned for quite some time. These men did not even know what the actual reasons were why they were held in jail. They were held on a very obscure provision of the Immigration Act. We went to see one of the hearings. It was absurd. It was ridiculous. It was so surreal. We thought that the only way to react to this is with our own level of absurdity which is *Ali and Ali*: To let these two chaotic clowns into the middle of this; to make them reveal how absurd some of its premises are. So that is an aspect that shows how we use humor in our performances. Humor is tactical for us. We are really serious about these issues. It is hugely important. People's lives are at stake. Thousands of people have died. So it is very important, but we have to be careful about the terms under which we engage. We refuse their terms and instead offer our own.

Concerning our use of projections: We live in a highly mediatized world. A world where we constantly get our information and knowledge from screens, from images that come at us. What I

like to do, is “talk back” to these images, “talk back” to the screens. It is a quite a deliberate tactic on my part, not to make the projections appear cool. I do not want the videos to look sexy in these plays. In *Ali and Ali*, the projections we use do not look cool, and slick, and sexy. It is just a screen, a sheet, a piece of cloth, and it looks like a tent, and we throw the image up, I want to make it strange, to defamiliarize us with the images. It does not have that cool affect. I want to make us look at it critically, to make people think about it, to notice that this looks kind of unprofessional, that this does not look too powerful. “He looks like a fool.”

We are critical of the media, including theatre which has also been used as an ideological tool. It is kind of the air we breathe, a postmodern sensibility we have, self-reflexivity, yes. Because, somehow, we cannot even trust ourselves, and the tricks we are up to. But it also is a tactic, a political tactic we use.

MH: In 2007 you published *Another Country* and *Bloom*, two plays that concentrate on Argentina, the military rule in Argentina, and on different forms of violence. Could you please comment on these two plays and how they are connected to your own family history?

GV: Argentine history and, if you want, family history, are important for me and these issues come up again and again in various ways in my work. *Another Country* was my first drama. It has a focus on Argentina. It is fairly realist. So formally it is different from my later work but, again, the concerns are: Who has power? Who has privilege? And how is this power and privilege executed? And at what cost to whom? *Another Country* is a play that arose out of my feeling that if we had not left the country I would have been old enough to be in the Dirty War with the period of military dictatorship from 1976 to 1983. I would have to do my military service. So I would have been either a young man in the army, potentially rounding people up, forcing them into a truck, beating them up, or taking them to a detention center. Or I would have been on the other side, being the guy beaten up, put into a detention center, disappearing. Somehow I couldn't help feeling that I had this ghostly existence that I had lived this experience somehow. This was also influenced by the fact that I certainly got to know Argentinians who had gone through torture and jail, who had been exiled to Canada, and so on. It was very close to me. Although it did not touch me physically, it touched me in my imagination. It was a fluke— pure chance—that this did not happen to me. And I have carried this idea to most of my other work. I ask myself, for example, why does this or that happen to a young Palestinian boy? With such questions and such personal – if you want – family history in mind, we wrote the play *A Line in the Sand* – which looks at the life of a Palestinian boy. In our play it is a Palestinian boy but it is actually based on another event: The torture and murder of a young Somali boy by Canadian soldiers in 1993.

And we – people I write and perform with – have discussed the feeling that it is merely a fluke. It is just pure chance that we are not rotting in some jail cell somewhere, and that somebody else is. That it is not us but somebody else going through such horrific experiences.

In contrast we are provided with that tiny little opportunity to speak, that bit of room, the freedom to speak publicly. We live in a free and democratic country. Because of these conditions of privilege, next to oppression, injustice, suffering, we have the responsibility to make use of that freedom, the responsibility to speak up. It might make a difference to the lives of others somewhere else, or in our own society, who do not have that same kind of freedom.

*In Another Country* is about the relationship between the North and the South, although it is very disguised. However, I deliberately did not make it sound like Argentina. I tried to make it sound and look like anywhere “middle class.” She is an advertising executive. He is a kind of civil servant. They are kind of successful. They want to buy a house, and this and that. And then it turns out, of course, that he is torturing people for a living. The idea here is: This could be anywhere. We were not *especially* crazy in Argentina. They are not especially crazy anywhere else where atrocities occur. The conditions just form, and this terrible thing happens. So, I guess, the play is a kind of warning. Because I do not think that neither in the South nor in the North are we safe of such torture, atrocities, cruelty.

MH: Thank you very much.

## **Works by Guillermo Verdecchia (selection):**

### **Theatre:**

Verdecchia, Guillermo and Daniel Brooks. *The Noam Chomsky Lectures*. Toronto: Coach House Press, 1991.

Verdecchia, Guillermo. *Fronteras Americanas/American Borders*. Toronto: Coach House Press, 1993.

Verdecchia, Guillermo and Marcus Youssef. *A Line in the Sand*. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1997.

Verdecchia, Guillermo. *Insomnia*. Toronto: Scirocco Drama, 1999.

Verdecchia, Guillermo. *Another Country/bloom*. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2007.

Verdecchia, Guillermo and Marcus Youssef and Camyar Chai. *The Adventures of Ali & Ali and the aXes of Evil: A Divertimento for Warlords*. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2010.

### **Fiction:**

Verdecchia, Guillermo. *Citizen Suárez*. Buraby (B.C.): Talon, 1998.

### **Anthologies:**

Alvarez, Natalie (Ed.). *Fronteras Vivientes: Eight Lationa/o Canadian Plays*. Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2013.

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