

**SÉRIE ANTROPOLOGIA**

**375**

**POST-IMPERIALISM.  
A LATIN AMERICAN COSMOPOLITICS**

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In the last fifteen years, two major historical events have radically impacted upon the dynamics of the world system and have led to different discourses and policies in international relations. First, with the end of the Cold War (1989-1991) a triumphant capitalist global integration started to unfold in a so-called unipolar world, the euphemism that designates North-American imperial hegemony. Second, in 2001, the 9/11 attack against the World Trade Center's twin towers in Lower Manhattan, reinforced classic imperialist perspectives of conservative U.S. political and military elites.

Up to the end of the Cold War it was customary to explain the configuration of the world system by means of discourses often based on ideologies and utopias that referred to humankind's destiny. These discourses, postmodernists would say, were deeply rooted in metanarratives of the Enlightenment, promises of salvation through progress, accumulation, power, science, technology and, to a lesser or greater degree, social justice. With the end of the Soviet Union, though, triumphant capitalism had no major ideologies and utopias to confront. In the ten years between 1991 and 9/11, political ideologies and utopias gave way to culture, disguised as civilization and religion, as the new substance for a dual vision of the world. The clash of the socialist and capitalist worlds was substituted with the clash of civilizations. 9/11 would confirm that evil had to be understood on a culturalist note. Culturalism, a perspective often associated with symbolic analysis, ethnic, racial and identity issues, has clearly transcended materialism, a perspective highly associated with class relations and political economy. Now it is the time for the west and the rest, all kinds of orientalisms and occidentalisms, modernity, identity politics and multiculturalism. Interest in culture and power has almost brought about the fading away of interest in class and power (see Fonseca, 2005). It may be the case that social classes have been buried in the rubble of the Soviet Empire.

My arguments must be placed against a backdrop of crisis in ideologies and utopias that has characterized the past two decades. This crisis is reflected in the academic world in different ways. Neoliberal recipes, for instance, have started to restructure university life. There has also been a relative decline in the visibility of Marxist theories in the period. The world system theory may be the only exception perhaps because it has given a sense of a world totality, something useful in an era of heightened globalization. It does not follow, though, that critical stances have been totally outmoded. We have undoubtedly entered the era of the post prefix with strong

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<sup>1</sup> This is a different version of the chapter that gives the title to my last book, *Postimperialismo*, published in 2003, by Gedisa, Barcelona.

moments of post-modernist and post-structuralist critiques, also heavily inclined to dwell more on discourses and culture than on class or labor relations.

Globalization has increased the number of contacts and exchanges among people located in different countries. In the academic world, this has meant a growth in the international flow of knowledge and the possibility of increasing cooperation. Nevertheless, in many ways, such trends have mirrored unequal relations existing within larger structural globalization processes. Theory has flown from metropolitan centers to non-metropolitan centers while the flow of “raw data” has made the opposite move. The circulation of critical discursive matrices has occurred within a Western university system that has become globalized in the past five decades. Such matrices could be called ideascapes, the category Arjun Appadurai (1990) coined to interpret the dissemination of ideas and discourses within “global culture.” I’d rather call them cosmopolitics (see below). This global university system operates as a world system of intellectual production (see Kuwayama, 2004, and Gerholm, 1995) whereby hegemonic centers define canons and professional standards as well as accumulate global symbolic capital.<sup>2</sup> In exploring the existence of a world system of anthropology, Japanese anthropologist Takami Kuwayama states that:

‘Simply put, the world system of anthropology defines the politics involved in the production, dissemination, and consumption of knowledge about other peoples and cultures. Influential scholars in the core countries are in a position to decide what kinds of knowledge should be given authority and merit attention. The peer-review system at prestigious journals reinforces this structure. Thus, knowledge produced in the periphery, however significant and valuable, is destined to be buried locally unless it meets the standards and expectations of the core’ (2004: 9-10).

Kuwayama is aware of the problems arising from dualistic readings, he recognizes the complexity of center/periphery intra and inter-relations and the existence of elites in the periphery closely connected to those of the center (pp. 49-46).

The world system’s approach has been recently enriched by two other important perspectives: the ‘geopolitics of knowledge’ and the ‘provincializing Europe’ projects. Geopolitics of knowledge is a notion developed by Walter D. Mignolo (2000, 2001, 2002) who relates economic geopolitics to the geopolitics of knowledge in order to stress the idea that the locus of enunciation in academic subjects is geopolitically marked. Mignolo advocates in favor of *diversality* or the possibility of epistemic diversity as a universal project. Chakrabarty’s attempt at “provincializing Europe” is also central to the development of more complex forms of global cross-fertilization as well as more democratic modes of academic exchange worldwide. While transcending Eurocentric modernity is one of his goals, Chakrabarty asserts that

[The project of provincializing Europe] ‘does not call for a simplistic, out-of-hand rejection of modernity, liberal values, universals, science, reason, grand narratives, totalizing explanations, and so on. (...) It cannot originate from the stance that the reason/science/universals that help define Europe as the modern are simply ‘culture specific’ and therefore only belongs to the European cultures. For the point is not that Enlightenment rationalism is always unreasonable in itself, but rather a matter of documenting how ... its ‘reason,’ which was not

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<sup>2</sup> Arturo Escobar and I have edited a volume to explore the existing unequal relations among world anthropologies (Ribeiro and Escobar 2006).

always self-evident to everyone, has been made to look obvious far beyond the ground where it originated' (2000: 42, 43).

In his dialogical stance, Chakrabarty avoids a romantic dualistic position since he recognizes that without Enlightenment universals 'there would be no social science that addresses issues of modern social justice' (idem: 5). However, he also underscores the fact that in a world of globalized scholarship, translation of multiple forms of understanding life into universalist European categories is clearly a problematic process (idem: 17).

### **Cosmopolitics**

These debates immediately place us within global power fields, i.e. in social and political arenas shaped by unequal exchanges between hegemonic and non-hegemonic world centers. They also make mandatory consideration of the many tensions between universalism and particularism, tensions that, as Ernesto Laclau (2000) argues, cannot be considered as beyond the reach of power relations. Indeed, for Laclau the aspiration to universalism is the result of power effects. Relations between universalist and particularist claims are thus always traversed by specific hegemonies. In reality, there is a permanent struggle among different particularist positions to occupy the place and perform the role of a universal proposition. In the academic globalized world, under the hegemony of Anglo-American discourses, the issue is to foster different particular subject positions and enunciations and keep them in an articulated tension.

I find the notion of cosmopolitics useful in this regard. It seeks to provide a critical and plural perspective on the possibilities of supra- and transnational articulations. It is based, on the one hand, on positive evocations historically associated with the notion of cosmopolitanism and, on the other hand, on analysis in which power asymmetries are of fundamental importance (on cosmopolitics see Cheah and Robbins, 1998, and Ribeiro, 2003). Cosmopolitics comprises discourses and modes of doing politics that are concerned with their global reach and impact. As an anthropologist, I am particularly interested in those cosmopolitics that are embedded in conflicts regarding the role of difference and diversity in the construction of policies and supranational alliances.

Several cosmopolitics are counter-hegemonic discourses anchored in particular situations. This is the case with post-colonial critique, Zapatismo, subaltern studies and *interculturalidad*, a perspective that is being more clearly elaborated in the Andes, especially in Ecuador (see Walsh, Schiwy and Castro-Gómez, 2002; and also García Canclini, 2004). Since there are several progressive cosmopolitics, articulation becomes a key-word. Indeed, the effectiveness of cosmopolitical initiatives on the transnational level relies on networking. There is not a singular cosmopolitics capable of dealing with the entire complexity of the global counter-hegemonic struggle and with the existence and proliferation of critical subjects in fragmented global-spaces. Supporters of counter-hegemonic cosmopolitics need to identify their mutual equivalences to be able to articulate themselves in networks and political actions. Effective non-imperialist cosmopolitics that inform transnational political activists and progressive forms of global awareness also require a complex articulation of multilocalized and plural struggles and subjects.

### **Towards a Latin American Cosmopolitics**

The height of international visibility of Latin American theoretical contributions occurred in the 1970's with the consumption of dependency theory in Northern hegemonic centers and elsewhere. Since then, in spite of important works by Latin American scholars (see, for instance, Néstor García Canclini's work on hybridity; Anibal Quijano's on the coloniality of power and Enrique Dussel's on multiple modernities), the region has not produced theoretical discourses that have impacted upon global audiences like dependency has.

At the same time, the current hegemony of the Anglo-American academic system has generated distortions in the production and dissemination of academic cosmopolitics and theories. I think, for instance, of the worldwide diffusion of multiculturalism. Postmodernism also well illustrates the centrality of the North-American university system in the reception and diffusion of theories. Originally formulated in France, post-modernism acquired great global visibility when, in the 1980's, it was increasingly absorbed and debated by North-American academic centers. More recently, post-colonial and subaltern studies, highly related to the work of Indian scholars, have undergone a similar process. It is the dissemination of post-colonialism that interests me. My arguments are a call for a critical dialogue between post-colonialism and another cosmopolitics I call post-imperialism.

### **A critical dialogue with postcolonialism**

In a session at the 1999 meeting of the American Anthropological Association, a young American anthropologist called contemporary Brazil a "postcolonial country." It was the first time I heard a researcher classifying Brazil that way. I wanted to understand her reason for using that category. For me, it sounded like an anachronism. I was surprised at the young professor's answer to my question as to why she was labeling Brazil a postcolonial country: "you are right, Brazil is not a postcolonial country, this category does not apply there."

This small, to many irrelevant incident, made me think how the dissemination of theories and concepts may follow paths that are similar to the diffusion (in its old sense) of other cultural constructions: swift and subtle mechanisms that are often imperceptible and random modes of generating familiarity and the mandatory use of a tool, a merchandise, words or ideas which, in many ways, are "misplaced ideas" (to borrow the title of the essay by Roberto Schwarz, 1992). Such mechanisms hide power relations, commonly embedded in the diffusion of anything. In the end, that was a session at a metropolitan academic meeting. We know that science and art are also means to fixate colonial images and discourses (Said, 1994: 12-13).

In relation to exchanges between Latin America and the "North," Nelly Richard considers that "the transit of cultural signs between the peripheral practice (Latin America) and metropolitan theory (Latinamericanism), as well as the system of scholarly exchanges that administer these signs are responsible not only for the circulation of analytic tools but also for the criteria that regulate their value and reception according to the predominant trends established by certain discursive hegemonies" (quoted by de la Campa, 1999: vii). The production of labels that designate cultural dominants is not an innocuous fact, most noticeably when it is intertwined with the act of interpreting. The relations between global and local actors within academic power fields replicate other kinds of power relations especially when the dissemination of cosmopolitics is at stake. In the domestication of the local by the global the direction of the vector of power accumulation favors global actors. When

global actors name trends or paradigms they guarantee their prominence and the affiliation of local actors to discursive universes that they, the global actors, have constructed. Spurr (1999: 4), in her work on the “rhetoric of empire”, considers that: “the process through which a culture subordinates another starts with the act of giving or not names.” The acritical acceptance of labels such as post-colonialism is problematic because it often implies categorizations that essentialize and homogenize the other from above.

If we need to consider the conditions of production, dissemination and reception of cosmopolitics in order to understand them, post-colonialism needs to be placed within such frameworks of analysis. It is a diversified theoretical and political stance marked by the presence of writers of the English language who are mostly from former British colony countries. This is my starting point. The post-colonial situation it refers to is intimately related to the decolonization of the British empire after Second World War, notably in Asia, Africa and the Caribbean. This was a very particular juncture of the world system for historical, cultural, economic and political reasons, especially if compared to nineteenth century post-colonial Latin America.

Post-colonialism started with “ethnic intellectuals’ (to use Ahmad’s [1994: 167] expression in his critique of Orientalism, Said’s archaeological landmark in post-colonial studies) who opened political and professional space to substitute the literature of the *Commonwealth* for a “new object” that came into focus. According to Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge

“As the British Empire broke up and attempted to sustain an illusion of unity under the euphemistic title of ‘*Commonwealth*’ a new object appeared on the margins of departments of English Literature: ‘Commonwealth literature.’ The ambiguous politics of the term was inscribed in the field that it called into being. ‘Commonwealth literature’ did not include the literature of the centre, which acted as the impossible absent standard by which it should be judged. The term also occluded the crucial differences between the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ Commonwealth, between White settler colonies and Black nations that typically had a very different and more difficult route into a different kind of independence. The struggling enterprise of ‘Commonwealth literature’ was jeopardized from the start by the heavily ideological overtones of its name. (...) Post-colonial(ism) has many advantages over the former term. It foregrounds a politics of opposition and struggle, and problematizes the key relationship between centre and periphery. It has helped to destabilize the barriers around ‘English literature’ that protected the primacy of the canon and the self-evidence of its standards” (Mishra and Hodge, 1994: 276).

The fact that the archaeology of post-colonialism is marked by its roots in literary fields brings up other issues. It draws my attention to the acritical use of literature and fiction (most often based on the hermeneutical power of metaphors) as substitutes for social reality and for dense social science methodological and theoretical research. This raises the possibility of the existence of social sciences without social scientists, a complicated problematique that involves historical and epistemological factors and power disputes within academia. There is no doubt that we are facing here one of the most difficult issues in social theory, especially in a time when inter- and transdisciplinarity suppose ever more sophisticated dialogues. After the impact of the post-modernist wave new interpretations are needed to recast the relations between literature and the social sciences.

I am neither advocating a chauvinist position nor a defense of any canonic disciplinary perspective; both would be untenable by themselves. It is evident that science, knowledge and academic life are international practices in which cross-fertilization is welcome. But it is never too much to recall that this realm too is traversed by power inequalities. The high global visibility of post-colonialism became possible only after its reception in the Anglo-American academic world. If colonial discourse analysis and post-colonial theory are “critiques of the process of production of knowledge about the Other” (Williams and Chrisman, 1994: 8), it would be at least ironic that post-colonialism - with its trajectory marked by its growth and proliferation in English-speaking academia – colonizes – if you excuse the wordplay – the empty space left by the absence of Latin American cosmopolitics and becomes a discourse to produce knowledge about the Latin American Other. In Latin America post-colonialism would be equal to what it condemns, a foreign discourse on the Other that arrives through the hands of a metropolitan power. Post-colonialists would be, unwittingly, doing what they criticized.

Obviously, post-colonialism’s dissemination cannot be reduced to the force of the Anglo-American hegemony behind it. Similar to other critical cosmopolitics, post-colonialism has contributions to make in the analysis of social, cultural and political realities anywhere, especially when power asymmetries are at stake. The issue is not to deny post-colonialism but to assert the production of critical narratives in tune with Latin American subject positions, in a heteroglossic dialogue with cosmopolitics from other glocalities.

### **Post-imperialism**

The nineteenth century was the post-colonial century properly speaking in Latin America. It coincided with a period of nation-building both in Europe and in the Americas. But the nineteenth century was also the century of classic modern imperialism that transformed many Asian and African countries into colonies that covered almost the whole world.<sup>3</sup> Two apparently paradoxical movements existed side by side and flourished under the force of monopolist capitalism (Lenin, 1984): the consolidation of Nation-states within their own territories and the expansion of the most powerful states out of their territories incorporating other nations into their domains. In this period, post-colonialist ideologies in Latin America were highly marked by nation-building processes. Direct rule was almost absent on the continent, with the exception, in South America, of the French, Dutch and British Guyanas.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, in Asia and Africa colonialism would last until the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In these areas, anti-colonial struggles would reach their goals after World War Two when the United States would substitute the British Empire and others and a new global hegemony, mostly independent of direct-rule would be established.

The political and ideological post-colonialist struggles in African and Asian countries had to face the task, as did Latin Americans in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, of creating/consolidating independent nation-states. The wave of decolonization in the 1970’s meant at the same time the closure of the nation-state system within the world

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<sup>3</sup> Based on geographer A. Supan, Lenin (1984) shows the following variation of territories that were under American or European colonial rule between 1876 and 1900: Africa, from 10.8 to 90.4%; Polynesia from 56.8 to 98.9%; Asia, from 51.5 to 56.6%; Australia 100% in both years and Americas from 27.5 to 27.2%.

<sup>4</sup> We should not forget Cuba, the U.S. expansion over Mexican territory and the interventions that, in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, led to the construction of the Panama canal.

system and the last cry of modern imperialism. But the closure of a system triggers the opening of another. In this new juncture of a world basically organized under the model of the European, republican nation-state, nationalism started to feel the presence of ever stronger transnational trends. Especially in the period 1980-2000, transnational corporations, flexible capitalism and neoliberal recipes generated new forms of surpassing national control. This is a kind of transnationalism marked by an intense time-space compression (Harvey, 1989), i.e. by a technological command of space and time that distances itself more and more from the political and administrative forms of exerting power associated with modern imperialism and from the colony in its strict sense of occupation of a foreign land. The relative climax of the nation-state goes hand-in-hand with the relative decadence of its controlling power set in motion by transnational capitalism.

In order to exert their power, transnational corporations do not require direct territorial control by a metropolitan State. Post-imperialism is how I call this juncture in which nation-states have to deal with transnationalism, a superior level of integration. Already in the 1970's, Samir Amin (1976: 191) called post-imperialism the most advanced phase of capitalism, characterized by the concentration of power in transnational corporations and by their control of the "technological revolution" (p.189).

But post-imperialism does not exhaust all possible forms of organizing economic and political life and constructing cosmopolitics. It exists together with other forms. Those new nation-states that since World War Two have had to cope with the post-colonial situation may find in post-colonialism a useful cosmopolitics to situate their struggles in the present moment of the world system. Furthermore, after 9/11, imperialism has resurged in Afghanistan and Iraq, a fact that shows, once again, that history does not move in a straight line and that the conservative military-industrial complex has known very well how to maintain its power and take advantage of certain political opportunities in the United States. However, in Latin American nation-states, post-imperialism predominates over other dynamics. It informs the contents of political, economic and cultural contemporaneity as well as imposes certain interpretative and research needs.

The prefix "post" is surely emblematic of the anxieties of our time. There is, as Anne McClintock (1994: 292) suggests in her texts on the traps of the term post-colonialism, an "almost ritualistic ubiquity" of post words. Indeed "post" has many slippery qualities not the least of them being the confusion between continuity and discontinuity, change and permanence. Yet, it may be exactly because of its tricky qualities that – in a time full of uncertainties and ambiguities – "post" is such a popular prefix. Its use avoids the risk of making peremptory statements, a stance that has characterized triumphalist trends in the social sciences (including Marxism).

If the prefix "post" may be problematic, why use an expression such as post-imperialism? For the following reasons: a) currently the world system is characterized by unipolarity, the euphemism for the climax of American supremacy; b) military interventions are made by a globalized war machine with an unprecedented power; c) I want to make use of the political reverberations of the term "imperialism" in a time when anodyne terms such as "globalization" are diffuse; d) characteristics of imperialism, such as the control of the world system by powerful economic conglomerates are still with us; e) I also want to make use of the critical reverberations already associated with the expression "post-colonialism;" e) finally, the ambiguity of



the prefix “post” is not entirely negative and it is possible to make it work in the direction of other subject positions.

I want to advance the idea that post-imperialism is the Latin American side of the coin on which post-colonialism is found. It should be clear that I use the term ironically. Furthermore, as a cosmopolitics, post-imperialism mixes utopian horizons (a moment beyond imperialism in which, nonetheless, imperialism remains an issue) and descriptions of specific characteristics of our times. It thus combines programmatic and sociological visions.

Like the term colonialism, imperialism has many meanings and definitions. It is well-known that colonialism and imperialism are different sides of the same coin. Williams and Chrisman start their anthology on post-colonialism by pointing out the equivalence of both terms. For them, colonialism is “a particular phase in the history of imperialism, which is now best understood as the globalization of the capitalist mode of production” (1994: 2). Said relates imperialism to colonialism: imperialism is “the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory; ‘colonialism’, which is almost always a consequence of imperialism, is the implanting of settlements on distant territory” (1994: 9). This definition shows that “classic imperialism” is not common anymore in today’s world since, with a few exceptions, it is no longer necessary to rule distant territories but to keep the means to exert hegemony at a distance – often flexible and mobile means (such as transnational political and economic networks; military vigilance and rapid military capacity of intervention).<sup>5</sup>

Post-imperialism supposes the hegemony of transnational, post-fordist, flexible capitalism, with its impact on the redefinition of relations of dependency and the establishment of new interdependencies within the world capitalist system made possible by the existence of “global fragmented productive spaces” and satellite integration of financial capital. After the end of the Cold War, it also supposes the military, economic and politic hegemony of the United States as well as the control and concentration of scientific production and technological knowledge, especially in cutting-edge sectors such as information technology, electronics and biotechnology. We should not overlook the control of space and of the production of “mediascapes.” Hollywood, Silicon Valley, Wall Street, NASA and the Pentagon are icons of a political economy based on production, dissemination and reproduction of images, high technology, financial capital and military power. This triumphant capitalism, in a one-system world, does not need to divide the planet in “spheres of influence” the way the classic modern European imperialist powers did (Lenin, 1984: 9), in a programmed division of the globe.

Modern imperialism was organically linked to fordist capitalism. It relied on major socio-political-economic actors; economic verticalization; the creation of a periphery through the unequal exchange of raw materials and manufactured or industrial goods; metallurgy’s hegemony, especially by means of the expansion of railroads which gave access to natural resources, important for the central economies. For Lenin (1984: 10), “coal, iron and steel” were the “basic capitalist industries.” Rosa Luxemburg (1976: 366) also underscores the importance of railroads for imperialist expansion. Time space-compression caused by trains and telegraphs implied a much less intense shrinking of

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<sup>5</sup> “Few exceptions” here refer to Afghanistan and Iraq which were invaded by multinational forces. Interestingly enough, these are allegedly temporary invasions to restore “order” and implant “democracy.”

the world than what we witness today in the era of jets, the internet, on-line time, and CNN.

It is not a coincidence that when Said (1994: xii) addresses the issue of “cultural forms”, “immensely important in the formation of imperial attitudes, references and experiences” to the “modern Western empires of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries,” he chooses the novel as his object. It is no surprise either that the study of the “rhetoric of empire” (Spurr, 1999) follows the same path. Both are studies marked by the post-colonialist debate that focus on the kind of media that existed in the time of modern empires. For the post-imperial critique the main object would be the cosmopolitics embedded in “mediascapes” (Appadurai, 1990), especially those “cultural forms” shown on television or in movies that fixate exoticizing and essentializing narratives about hegemonic and non-hegemonic practices. The contemporary “structures of feelings” (as Raymond Williams called them) currently are much more based on the mass media, which prepare and reinforce the “practice of the empire,” more than through any other media. Observe, for instance, what happens with the diffusion of English in Latin American and elsewhere. International pop culture (Ortiz, 1994), hegemonized by U.S. production, plays a key role in the transformation of English into the *créole* of the world system and into a status symbol.

Under the conditions of transnational flexible capitalism, corporations may operate free from strong links with nation-states, through the planetary integration of financial markets and the fragmentation of productive processes on a global scale. Hence the neoliberal program for state downsizing and the consolidation of multilateral agencies’ power (the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization, etc.). Multilateralism ends up in multinational military alliances. Today many members of the national elites are transnationalized, a situation that has diminished hopes over the role that “national bourgeoisies” could play in national development – a typical 1950-1970’s mindset. The practices of segments of elites in several Latin American countries have not been studied nor theorized. From drug dealers to entrepreneurs, these social agents have already been operating in post-imperial ways, laundering their money in fiscal heavens in the Caribbean or in conspicuous consumption in cities such as Miami.

### **Post-imperialist research**

A post-imperialist research program calls for understanding (a) the nature of connections that Latin American capitalists keep with advanced capitalism, with diverse transnational elites and with formulators of multilateral agencies’ development policies; (b) the insertion of national elites in globalization processes, in neoliberal adjustment programs; (c) relations of the consolidated and “emergent” middle classes with globalization processes; (d) different flows of information, capital and people from and to the region; (e) the use that different segments of the Latin American lower classes are making of globalization processes through the sizable expansion of sales of global gadgets in popular markets globalized by “smuggling” or by the “piracy” of cultural industry products (all forms related to computer and electronic capitalism); (f) resistance to the nation-state via internet, a fact well epitomized by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation; (g) the new migratory waves of indigenous peoples, peasants and lower urban middle class that colonize vast urban and rural areas and economic spaces in the United States. In the same vein, it would be important to redefine, in specific national contexts, the place and identities assigned to ethnic segments and other minority groups. At the same time, the issue of mestizaje cannot be overlooked and

needs to be re-examined given the impact of Anglo-Saxon interethnic ideologies such as multiculturalism.

At the symbolic, cultural and political levels the post-imperialist critique has many tasks ahead. First, the struggle against hegemonic mediascapes and ideascapes circulating within the world system is a priority for two reasons: it is a basic task of any social scientific effort and it has a strategic meaning given the sensibility of global financial capital to information. It is not the case of once again taking on the struggle against cultural imperialism since the latter may make too strong a call for stressing particularities which, in turn, may help to create unviable chauvinisms in a world of globalized markets as well as undesired political consequences that may reach the form of exacerbated and politically active racisms. What we need is to increase both pluralism and the circulation of heteroglossic narratives and discursive matrices through the apparatuses that dominate the global communication networks and the international circuits of academic production. The absence, for instance, of horizontal relations among Latin American researchers is a central problem even today (Cardoso de Oliveira, 1999/2000). The fact that several Latin American anthropologists, for instance, are leading figures in initiatives such as the World Anthropologies Network ([www.ramwan.org](http://www.ramwan.org)) and the World Council of Anthropological Associations ([www.wcaanet.org](http://www.wcaanet.org)) shows that there are Latin American scholars already working towards a more heteroglossic and plural transnational academic community.

Comparative research on Latin American migrants may show their relevance for the economy, politics and culture of our countries as well as their importance in the (re)production of new forms of hybridism. The existence of a “Latin American press in the United States” is another fundamental research topic. It creates, through linguistic means, a collectivity of participants belonging to the same symbolic universe. The growing relevance of the ethnic press in the United States shows that this terrain is not only politically and culturally significant but also of economic importance. A 1997 survey of New York’s ethnic press indicated the existence of 143 newspapers and magazines, 22 TV and 12 radio stations, in more than 30 languages (Dugger, 1997). The growth of a “latino” middle class, a market that, in the mid 1990’s was calculated in US\$ 250 million, caught the attention of popular magazines such as *People* that started a Spanish edition and led to a noticeable increase in the “Hispanic” press (Arana-Ward, 1996). Only in New York City, it was estimated that the media in Spanish, one of the largest ones, is made up of at least 56 publications, two local TVs (members of networks) and five radio stations (Ojito, 1997). Arlene Dávila (2001) shows how the Spanish speaking TV networks are dominated by “Hispanics” and have financial and production ties with Latin America (mainly with Mexico and Venezuela). These networks create a “latina” transnation within the United States, unifying segments of immigrants of several nationalities. The “Hispanic” press is also important for Brazilians, since many of them watch Spanish speaking channels, some of which include Brazilian news and other materials in their programming. But Brazilian TV is available on cable TV in many American cities, a recognition of the growing relevance of Brazilian migrants in that country (see Ribeiro, 1999). As is well-known, technologies of communication create imagined communities (Anderson, 1991) that often become political actors. Language is also an important factor in the unification and creation of consumer and labor markets in a globalized world.

Awareness of the growing importance of the “Latina” community in the United States has prompted conservative reactions in the academic world. Samuel Huntington (2004) considers that “Hispanics” represent a threat to the unity and territorial existence

of the American nation-state. In a certain sense, Huntington's was a recognition that the United States cannot exist without the "Hispanics." What can the study of the Latin American imagined communities inserted in American interethnic systems teach us about ourselves and about processes of globalization and transnationalism? Who but the "indocumented" migrants win the daily wars, in a sort of microphysics of power from below, against the most powerful nation-state in the world?

The impetus to study Latin American populations living in the United States should be complemented with other endeavors. If a post-colonialist working agenda is to "provincialize Europe" (Chakrabarty, 2000), for the post-imperialist critique the goal is to provincialize the United States. There is, thus, an urgent need to conduct research on American society from a Latin American standpoint, an inversion of a quasi-colonialist flow that prevails in academic and scientific life. Where are the systematic studies of American political, social, economic and cultural life from a Latin American perspective? Post-imperialism has as one of its central goals to decolonize the images that are held on the United States in Latin America. It should also make a profound critique of nationalist canons, the efficacy of which can be noticed in the exercise of hegemony against the region's subaltern segments.

### **Final comments: heteroglossia, Transversal Politics and Political *Bricolage***

Post-imperialism does not conceive of time in a unilinear fashion, in the sense of positing a new and more advanced time in history. The prefix "post" indicates the possibility of drawing other cognitive maps (Jameson, 1984) that allow for the (re)construction of visions external to dominant orthodoxies. Post-imperialism's main concern is with the power private and public corporations exert in shaping the present and futures of collective and individual social actors under the hegemony of flexible capital in a globalized and transnationalized world. But it is also concerned with the responses of these social actors to new power configurations, responses that foster the maintenance and growth of heterogeneity in a world full of homogenizing forces.

One of the aims of the post-imperialist critique is the struggle against all kinds of chauvinisms and the amplifying of voices present in the dialogues internal and external to the nation-state. Within a post-imperialist perspective, nativism and nationalism, in their excluding formulations, have no space. In reality, new activists of different types (environmental or indigenous causes, human rights, for instance) prove with their affiliation to transnational networks of activism (Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Mato, 1999) that political practice in a globalized world requires broader horizons and alliances. A point to pay attention to refers to the limits and dangers of "strategic essentialism" that often goes together with the politics of identity. Fragmentation without articulation results in vulnerability. A possible working solution for these dilemmas may lie in the acceptance of hybridism as the political force underlying all possible coalitions of different actors. Nonetheless, hybridism is also fraught with difficulties. It supposes subjects aware that their places in the world are much more the result of many fusions and con-fusions over time than of any foundational ideology, clearly and coherently defined, based on history, ethnicity and nation. The size of this kind of political subject is still small as a consequence of the ways that institutional politics, the media and the educational system operate.

Perhaps all this leads to the conclusion that intellectuals and activists need to keep a critical attitude towards essentialism and to promote plural, decentered and democratic coalitions that keep negotiated universalist programs in common. However, one should never forget a central tension that animates the particular/universal

relationship: if the distorted limit of universalism is the arrogance of empire colonizing all other perspectives, the distorted limit of particularism is the arrogance of a unique perspective that believes to be above all others. In their distorted limits, each pole of the universal/particular tension considered exclusively in itself and canonized is equivalent to other present and insurmountable difficulties that mark an underlying resistance to democratic heteroglossic dialogues.

“Cyborg politics” (an expression associated with Donna Haraway’s work) or “transversal politics” seem to formulate relations between difference and democracy in a manner appropriate for considering a transnational and post-imperialist democracy. I reproduce what Werbner (1997: 8) wrote about this:

“Cyborg politics – or ‘transversal’ politics, as Nira Yuval-Davis calls them – are about opening up and sustaining dialogues across differences of ideologies, culture, identity and social positioning. The recognition of the right to be different animates and sustains such exchanges, despite conflictual perceptions and partial agreements. What *is* accepted, in other words, is the enormous potentiality of *imperfect* communication. Transversal politics thus organise and give shape to heteroglossia, without denying or eliminating it.”

Transversal politics also calls for spotlighting Alcida Rita Ramos’ insight on political *bricolage* (1998: 192), a way of bringing together different actors in the struggle for political representation. In order to contribute to the construction of political communities where heteroglossia and uniformity can coexist as a paradox and not as a contradiction, we need to think and act more like *bricoleurs* would in the face of the multiple forms of reproducing politics and culture in the contemporary world.

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