

# TOWARD A POSTCOLONIAL SOCIOLOGY: THE VIEW FROM LATIN AMERICA

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## ABSTRACT

*While sharing fundamental similarities with other colonial and post-colonial experiences, Latin America has a unique history of having been the proving ground for early Spanish and Portuguese imperial projects, of having experienced a relatively long duration of – but also historically early end to – these projects, and of negotiating a particular and complex trajectory of internal and external post-colonial relations. What can the study of this distinct colonial and post-colonial experience contribute to a broader program of postcolonial sociology? Conversely, what can a revitalized postcolonial sociology contribute to the study of Latin America? This article develops provisional answers to these questions by reviewing major currents in South and North American scholarship on the Latin American colonial and post-colonial experience. Some of this scholarship self-consciously identifies with broader movements in post-colonial studies; but much of it – both historical and contemporary – does not. By bringing together diverse strands of thought, this article sheds new light on what postcolonialism means in the Latin American context, while using the comparative leverage that this set of often overlooked cases provides to contribute to a new program of postcolonial sociology.*

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## INTRODUCTION

While a set of prominent Latin Americanist scholars have devoted their careers to tackling the problem of post-colonialism (e.g., Coronil, 1997, 2000; Dussel, 1995, 2000; Quijano, 1980, 2000), the Latin American colonial and post-colonial experience remains only partially integrated into the broader field of postcolonial studies.<sup>1</sup> With the widely accepted consecration of Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi Bhabha as the founders of the field, the most recent wave of postcolonial scholarship has tended to focus on contexts of more recent decolonization – especially those of British, French, and US colonialisms in Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia – leaving scholars of Latin America, at best, uneasy partners in the conversation.<sup>2</sup> This inadvertent marginalization of the Latin American experience has been codified through the region's conspicuous underrepresentation in general anthologies and popular introductions to postcolonial studies (e.g., Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2006; Gandhi, 1998; Young, 2003).<sup>3</sup> Such neglect is surprising, given the important contributions that Latin American critical scholarship has made to other 20th century discussions of imperialism, dependency, and Third-Worldism (e.g., Cardoso & Faletto, 1979 [1968]; Castells, 1973; Mariátegui, 1995 [1928]; Prebisch, 1950).

No doubt various intellectual and disciplinary dynamics have contributed to Latin America's relatively low profile in postcolonial studies – not least, the fact that many Latin American scholars rarely publish in English. But there is also a first-order reason for the partiality of intellectual integration: the specificities of Latin America's colonial history. In a number of respects, colonialism and post-colonialism unfolded differently and had different historical consequences in Latin America than in other world regions. This historical reality has hindered the integration of the Latin American colonial experience into the broader postcolonial dialogue, while posing serious challenges to the mechanical application of existing postcolonial critiques to the Latin American cases. This article highlights the distinctiveness of the Latin American experience in an effort to transform what has heretofore been an intellectual stumbling block into a productive source of creative friction.

Furthermore, this article provides a conceptual baseline for a productive conversation between postcolonial studies and the recent sociology of Latin America. It does this by outlining some key contributions of postcolonial studies and identifying generative resonances with the work of sociologists studying Latin America. In this way, it parallels efforts in the humanities to apply postcolonial frameworks to Latin American societies (see especially

Thurner & Guerrero, 2003). This article thus sheds light on what “postcolonialism” means in the Latin American context, while taking advantage of the comparative leverage provided by this set of often overlooked cases to contribute to a new program of postcolonial sociology.

This article does not aim to provide a comprehensive review of the sociology of Latin America or a new postcolonial paradigm for the study of the region. Neither does it endeavor to provide a systematic history of ideas or a sociology of intellectual fields. Rather, it is motivated by two basic questions. First, what can the study of Latin America’s colonial and postcolonial experience contribute to a broader program of postcolonial sociology? And second, what can this postcolonial sociology contribute to the study of Latin America? We develop provisional answers to these questions by reviewing major currents in South and North American scholarship on the Latin American colonial and post-colonial experience.

As much of the best of this literature does not explicitly engage with postcolonial studies per se, we must begin by attempting to identify the fundamental principles of a sociologically informed postcolonial *perspective* – that is, of a sociological perspective that is loosed from colonialist ways of thinking – regardless of how that perspective might be rhetorically signaled. Then, as some Latin Americanists *have* engaged directly with discussions of postcolonialism, our next step is to highlight the distinct contributions of this postcolonial Latin American scholarship. In the remainder of the article, we explore three other domains of social-scientific research on post-colonial Latin America – focused on economic development, politics, and collective identities – that we believe share important points of resonance with a broader program of postcolonial sociology.

## **THE LATIN AMERICAN COLONIAL EXPERIENCE**

Before engaging with the challenges of postcolonial scholarship, we must first consider the distinctiveness of Latin America’s colonial and post-colonial experience. Our purpose here is neither to reaffirm old theses about the exceptional character of Latin America, nor to align ourselves with Latin American intellectuals who deny the relevance of the postcolonial critique to the history of the continent (Klor de Alva, 1995). Rather, our intent is to highlight the enormous historical variation that is often swept under the rug by the overarching concepts of “colonialism” and “post-colonialism.” Although cross-regional similarities matter, it is important that a revived

postcolonial sociology avoid the tendency to run roughshod over distinct historical experiences – simply replacing old colonial visions of universal history with a new “postcolonial universalism” (Thurner, 2003, p. 24). Rather, a robust postcolonial sociology must be both critical of the global dimensions of imperialism and, at the same time, concerned with variation in the forms of colonialism and post-colonial development. Recognizing the particularities of Spanish and Portuguese colonialisms in the New World helps to explain the relative lack of attention that postcolonial theorists have paid to Latin America (see Thurner, 2003, pp. 18–25).

Recent work on comparative colonialisms has highlighted three fundamental axes along which colonial experiences may vary, and considering these is instructive for understanding the specificities of Latin American history. First, the Latin American colonial experience was shaped by the distinct nature of Spain and Portugal’s imperial projects. Scholars debate which characteristics of these projects were in the end most consequential; but along the way, they have identified a range of unique features. These include the importance of Catholicism, the distinctiveness of Iberian legal traditions and mercantilist policies, lower levels of racial and ethnic closure due to fetters upon representative government, and the coupling of higher levels of state control with low levels of bureaucratization on the ground (de Holanda, 2006 [1936]; Hiers, s.d.; Mahoney, 2010, pp. 22–24; Tannenbaum, 1946; Wimmer, 2002).<sup>4</sup> Considerations of geopolitical timing and competition are also crucial: Latin American colonialism began early, lasted for over 300 hundred years, and began to unwind as Spain and Portugal confronted the increasing imperial might and international projection of other European states – especially France and England.<sup>5</sup>

Second, Latin America’s colonial experience was conditioned by the characteristics of its subjugated societies and territories – and by colonial authorities’ perceptions of these. Latin America’s formidable terrain itself made transportation and communication incredibly difficult for Spanish and Portuguese colonial authorities – especially during the first two centuries of colonization – which only further contributed to the marginalization of colonial hinterlands (Weber, 2005). At the same time, some recent studies have drawn connections between the levels of social organization of pre-colonial societies and the types of imperial policies pursued (Lange, Mahoney, & vom Hau, 2006; Mahoney, 2010); and others have explored how colonial authorities’ distinct *perceptions* of indigenous and African slave populations provided elaborate justifications for labor exploitation and political exclusion that later impacted the assimilation of

marginalized populations into newly independent nation states (Loveman, 2009; Pratt, 1992; Wallerstein, 2006).<sup>6</sup>

Finally, the social, political, economic, and cultural *legacies* of colonial domination in Latin America have been distinctive. Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, the former colonies have negotiated particular and complex trajectories of internal and external post-colonial relations, especially given their entrenched dependency upon the exportation of primary products and the strong influence of Great Britain and the United States over their domestic and foreign policies (Furtado, 1977; Gootenberg, 1993). One area of particular interest is the relationship between colonialism, on the one hand, and post-colonial political institutions and racialized policies on the other (Fredrickson, 1988; Sanjinés, 2004; Thurner, 1997).<sup>7</sup>

Despite these differences, however, it is necessary to remember that Latin American colonialism still shared fundamental similarities with other colonialisms. First, it clearly conformed to what Steinmetz (2007, p. 28, 2008, p. 591) has referred to as the “sovereignty criterion” – that is, it involved an imperial power’s seizure of political authority in a foreign territory. Second, it operated in keeping with the “rule of difference criterion” (Steinmetz, 2007, p. 36, 2008, p. 593; see also Chatterjee, 1993), according to which an imperial state treats the indigenous populations of a conquered territory as fundamentally inferior (Quijano, 2000; Silverblatt, 2004). Third, the peripheral position occupied by Latin America at the onset of the colonial enterprise (in the 15th and 16th centuries, as the modern capitalist world system was being constituted) foreshadowed in important respects the position later occupied by other colonized regions, as European states sought new markets and sources of raw materials for the development of their growing industrial economies (Blackburn, 1998).

With these considerations of similarity and difference in mind, it becomes possible to consider the ways in which Latin America might figure into broader discussions of postcolonialism. But before engaging with substantive treatments of the Latin American experience, it is first necessary to distill the core principles of a sociologically informed postcolonial perspective.

## **TOWARD A SOCIOLOGICAL POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVE**

For better or worse, many scholars of colonial and post-colonial Latin America – especially social scientists – are put off by postcolonial studies

and would hesitate to have their work considered under the heading. The ongoing tendency of much of the interdisciplinary field of postcolonial studies to identify with a strong post-structuralist program (e.g., Mignolo, 2002; Young, 1990) has prompted many social scientists to criticize its lack of sociological depth – or simply to avoid it altogether. At the same time, many in postcolonial studies have remained suspicious of the social sciences, which they frequently accuse of “positivism” and complicity with other “colonialist” modes of knowledge production (e.g., Mignolo, 2002; Spivak, 1988). Yet despite such mutual distrust, we argue that there are resonances between many of the points advanced by postcolonial theorists (at least by those who have not embraced radical deconstructionism) and those suggested by sociologists devoted to the study of post-colonial societies. We propose that it is useful for sociologists to take seriously the critical questions raised by postcolonial studies; but also that postcolonial studies stands to benefit by considering recent social scientific scholarship on post-colonial societies.

Our effort to foster conversation between Latin America and other world regions – as well as, inevitably, between the social sciences and the humanities – is complicated by the lack of a common conceptual vocabulary. While not employing an explicit language of “postcolonialism,” many scholars of Latin America have developed analyses and perspectives that are in many ways compatible with those advanced by postcolonial theorists. Thus, in order to foster dialogue, it is necessary to look beyond use of the *term* “postcolonial” and to focus instead on the ideas and phenomena under consideration. This requires specifying what we mean by a *sociologically informed postcolonial perspective*.<sup>8</sup> We argue that such an intellectual project can be distilled into four main points of analytical emphasis.<sup>9</sup>

### 1. Questioning the conflation of modernity with the West

Perhaps most fundamentally, postcolonial theorists have questioned the automatic and thoroughgoing conflation of modernity with the West (Hall, 1992).<sup>10</sup> Traditionally, “the West” has signified a form of life composed of high development, industrialization, urbanization, capitalism, secularity, and modernity (Hall, 1992, p. 277). According to such a view, the “modernity/non-modernity” dyad thus corresponds to a “West/rest” opposition (Sayyid, 2003, pp. 101–102), collapsing space and time to produce an image of a so-called western experience that can then form a basis for further theoretical formulations – not the least of which is a

normative master narrative of modernization from which non-western societies represent discouraging deviations (Chakrabarty, 2000, p. 29). The consequence of such a theoretical starting point is, of course, that modernization becomes synonymous with westernization (Kaya, 2004, p. 50). Instead, postcolonial theorists have called attention to the fact that this Eurocentric imagination of modernity and westernization is an ideological project – or a *discursive formation* (Hall, 1992; Said, 1979) – that should be studied in its own right.<sup>11</sup> A postcolonial sociology should avoid such theoretical conflation and instead take the resulting ideological formation as an important object of critical social analysis.

## 2. Provincializing the European experience

An immediate consequence of questioning the West/modernity conflation is what Chakrabarty (2000) has referred to as the “provincialization of Europe.” When Eurocentric discourses identify modernity with the West, they in effect provincialize non-western social realities – making them out to be idiosyncratic deviations from an ideal (European) historical standard.<sup>12</sup> A postcolonial perspective endeavors to break with the spatiality and temporality of such discourses, simultaneously de-provincializing the histories of post-colonial (and other peripheral) societies while in turn provincializing the European historical experience. More concretely, this means questioning narratives that grant to a supposedly autonomous Europe sole credit for the historical elaboration of “modern” institutions and describing western colonial and post-colonial “modernization” projects as involving some form of – usually precarious – transference. The provincialization of Europe thus contributes to a denaturalization of Eurocentric modernization narratives and points instead to the need to understand the historical specificities *and* interconnectedness of contemporary societies – both central and peripheral.

## 3. Advancing a macro-relational approach to social dynamics

The analytical consequence of breaking down the West/modernity dyad and provincializing Europe is that a macro-relational approach to social dynamics – one that shifts the focus from self-contained “national” units to relations between and among peripheral and metropolitan societies – becomes essential. Hall (1996, pp. 249–251) and Dussel (1995) have argued convincingly that, after the first colonial contact between Europeans and the American peoples, *any* treatment of the European experience that attends only to the historical unfolding of events within Europe (in its supposed isolation) will inevitably produce incomplete explanations of the economic,

political, and cultural processes under study (see Bhabha, 1994, p. 355, on Foucault's critique of Nazi racism, which ignores the interconnectedness of metropolis and colonies in the development of modern apparatuses of domination). Postcolonial studies has emphasized instead the need to focus on the relationships between societies of the metropolitan core and the colonial periphery – *as well as among these* – in the context of modern capitalist and colonial systems (Go, forthcoming; Hall, 1992; Steinmetz, 2003). Such relational thinking not only poses a challenge to the conceptualization of modernity as a European project, but also to different forms of “methodological nationalism” (Wimmer & Glick-Schiller, 2002) that, among other things, commonly treat colonizer and colonized as discrete entities. In this way, a sociologically informed postcolonial perspective redefines the units of analysis of modernity, from the nation-state to the domain of international and transnational macro-social relations among states and various sub-state actors (Go, forthcoming; Hall, 1996, pp. 249–251).

#### 4. Writing history from the colonial margins

An even stronger postcolonial position suggests that not only is it important to focus on macro-social relations, but it is necessary to attempt to write history *from the periphery in* – that is, from the perspectives of those marginalized by the colonial experience. By foregrounding the inequalities of power and diverse forms of violence that have constituted colonial and post-colonial histories, some postcolonial scholars have tried to elaborate a new critique of modernity from the margins of colonial world relations. These scholars have endeavored to restructure general theories of modernity by attending to the historical experiences of social groups who had been written out of traditional Eurocentric histories. Such a project is clearly evident in the late work of Edward Said (especially Said, 1994), in which he asserts the need to recover the voices of colonial writers; in the early works of many “subaltern” historians (see Chakrabarty, 2000, 2002; Chatterjee, 1993; Guha, 1983; Prakash, 2000); and in the work of those identified with British cultural studies (e.g., Gilroy, 1993). While too narrow a focus on “writing from the margins” runs the risk of neglecting the broader macro-relational context – and of reifying the “colonial archive” (Chakrabarty, 2000; Spivak, 1988) through attempts to rewrite a purified history of subaltern actors (Domingues, 2009) – this critical project clearly resonates with the other three elements of a sociologically informed postcolonial perspective already identified.



## LATIN AMERICANIST POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES

How, then, have scholars of Latin America addressed the postcolonial challenge? Some – often from humanities positions in US universities – have engaged *explicitly* with postcolonial theory, attempting both to reread Latin American history through the critical lens of postcolonial studies and to extend the postcolonial intellectual program through a consideration of the region’s distinctive history. In analyzing the colonial roots of Latin American post-colonial society and culture, in dialogue with postcolonial theories, these scholars have attempted to unpack – and to criticize – what they consider to be the Eurocentric aspects of western social science.

The four postcolonial principles discussed above were in many ways already present in Latin American social scientific thought *before* the birth of postcolonial studies. Thinkers such as José Martí, José Carlos Mariátegui, Gino Germani, Florestan Fernandes, Leopoldo Zea, and Edmundo O’Gorman, for example, dedicated most of their careers to the development of comprehensive interpretations of the histories of Latin American societies that took very seriously the problem of “colonial difference” and that, at the same time, served to critique the popular and sociological discourses of modernity that had been developed with reference to Europe.<sup>13</sup> In the 1960s and 1970s, these intellectual traditions were reinvigorated by new Latin American intellectual, artistic, and political movements – and by the era of decolonization around the world – and crystallized in a series of important theoretical innovations.<sup>14</sup> Such theories, which had enormous influence in Latin America and abroad (Domingues, 2009; Lander, 2000, p. 519), represented major attempts to break with Eurocentric discourses of modernity well before the more recent emergence of postcolonial studies.

In this sense, the new postcolonial theorists of Latin America (or theorists of “modernity/coloniality,” as many of them understand themselves [Lander, 2000; Maldonado-Torres, 2004; Mignolo, 2007; Quijano, 2000]) have been as much a part of a long and continuous history of critical theory on the continent as they were influenced by recent developments in (non-Latin Americanist) postcolonial studies.<sup>15</sup> While wrestling with the new theoretical challenges of the late 20th century – especially a desire to bridge post-structuralist and Marxist approaches – this recent scholarship has used Latin America as a platform for advancing a critique of the discursive bases of Eurocentrism and for situating these discourses in the history of modern capitalism. And by developing a postcolonial critique grounded in Latin American history, these writers have highlighted the limits of a postcolonial

theory centered exclusively on the African, Middle Eastern, and South Asian colonial experiences.

Despite the breadth and the theoretical diversity of this recent Latin American postcolonial scholarship, we believe that it is possible to identify five potentially important contributions to the broader enterprise of postcolonial sociology. First, Latin American postcolonial scholars have demonstrated that neither the Eurocentric imaginary nor the material relations of colonial power were exclusive products of the 18th century. Rather, these had their roots much earlier, in Spain and Portugal's 16th century establishment of colonial control over the indigenous populations of the New World and peoples who had been forcibly imported from Africa (Dussel, 2000, p. 47). The neglect of this "first modernity" (Coronil, 2000; Dussel, 1995; Mignolo, 2000b) by postcolonial scholars was, to Latin Americanists, a critical oversight; and in taking this first modernity into account, postcolonial scholars of Latin America have underscored the region's central role in the development of a new system of colonial power relations (Quijano, 2000).

Second, following Foucault and influenced by the work of Said and other postcolonial theorists, Latin American scholars have highlighted the role of representational and discursive practices in reproducing post-colonial domination. Quijano (2000), for example, has advanced the notion of a "coloniality of power" to describe the cultural and racial classification systems – and the institutions and spaces responsible for enacting and enforcing these – that were established in the colonial era. Associated particularly with slavery and other forms of compulsory labor, these classificatory systems constituted a cultural dimension of early capitalism (see also Domingues, 2009, p. 117). According to Quijano (2000, p. 54), this "coloniality of power" was first developed in the Americas. Although in principle the concept shares much in common with Said's (1979) notion of "Orientalism," Latin Americanists have argued that Said's formulation inadvertently excludes the Latin American experience by focusing attention on the *categorized* (the "Orient," as a geographical entity and discursive construction). Coronil suggests that it is more appropriate to shift attention from the objectified to the objectifying colonizer, coining the complementary term "Occidentalism" (Coronil, 2000, pp. 89–90; see also Rodríguez, 2001, pp. 8–9). By elaborating the concepts of "coloniality of power" and "Occidentalism," scholars of Latin America have highlighted the fact that modernity is inseparable from various forms of colonial violence – both material and ideational (e.g. Mignolo, 2007, p. 477).

Third, and related to the previous, Latin American postcolonial scholars have recovered the idea that the colonization of the Americas played a crucial role in the constitution of modern capitalism *beyond* just the so-called primitive accumulation of capital. They have noted that much more than capital was “accumulated” in the colonization process, identifying in particular various techniques of control derived from new modalities of Eurocentric knowledge. Colonial exploitation at the origins of modern capitalism contributed to the development of specific forms of knowledge, concepts of identity, modes of social categorization, and systems of hierarchy – particularly the racialized systems developed for the exploitation of Native Americans and Africans in the colonies – that would ultimately have effects well beyond the localized exchanges between colonizer and colonized (Mignolo, 2000a, 2000b; Quijano, 2000; Thurner, 2003). Indeed, modern techniques of control that were first developed in the Latin American colonies – such as those implemented on sugar cane plantations in Brazil and the Antilles (Mintz, 1985; Mitchell, 2000, p. 8) – would become central elements of political and economic practice in modern societies worldwide.

Fourth, in dialogue with psychoanalysis (but also with the work of Frantz Fanon, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Martin Heidegger), Latin American postcolonial thinkers have highlighted the importance of the colonial experience for shaping the early modern European self, as well as the subjectivities of colonized peoples. The idea of “America” – and especially conceptions of the indigenous and African populations of the Latin American colonies – represented a fundamental “other” for the constitution of European civilization from the 15th through the 18th century (Dussel, 2000; Mignolo, 2000b). On the one hand, the recognition of this fact represented a critique of European thinkers from Hegel to Habermas, who narrated the history of modernity as a consequence of internal European events and processes detached from the relations between European states and peripheral societies (Dussel, 2000). On the other, it highlighted the problem of “colonial difference” that, according to Mignolo (2000a, 2000b), characterized the historical relations between Latin American subjects and the European or “modern” cultural projects that they encountered. Mignolo (*ibid.*) has elaborated on such critiques, while drawing on the work of Du Bois and Indian subaltern scholars, to advance a theory of the “double consciousness” of colonized subjects, in which such a consciousness is the subjective manifestation of the condition of the colony as simultaneously modernity and difference.

Finally, in an effort to push beyond the Eurocentric colonial imaginaries of Occidentalism, postcolonial scholars of Latin America have attempted to elaborate their own form of “decolonial thinking” (Maldonado-Torres, 2002; Mignolo, 2002, 2005, pp. 189–190). These scholars have argued that a “decolonization of knowledge” – the development of a political “counter-epistemology” of modernity derived from the social experience of coloniality (Lander, 2000; Mignolo, 2007) – is a necessary first step in trying to recreate a non-Eurocentric social science. Mignolo’s (2000b, 2004) concept of “border thinking” simultaneously affirms the irreducibility of the colonial experience, while also allowing for the incorporation of different traditions of western critical theory – especially Marxism and post-structuralism (see Domingues, 2009). The development of such a critical-syncretic theoretical framework is in keeping with the colonial experience of “double consciousness,” insofar as the colonized is both part of the modern world and simultaneously its other. It is thus no surprise to find evidence of such a framework in several strains of indigenous thought – including Mariátegui’s (1995 [1928]) blending of Marxism with an indigenous cosmology, the radical political epistemology of Mexico’s Zapatista movement (see Mignolo, 2000b), and the political rhetoric and practice of indigenous leaders like Guatemala’s Rigoberta Menchú (Zimmerman, 2001).

In summary, postcolonial scholars of Latin America have endeavored not only to extend or upgrade grand European theories by incorporating Latin American cases (cf. Centeno, 2002; Centeno & López-Alves, 2001), but more profoundly, to deconstruct the Eurocentric character of many of these traditional theories. They have sought to provincialize the experience of the so-called modern societies by foregrounding how Latin American experiences of domination and violence were central to the development of European modernity – and to sociological understandings of that modernity. At the same time, they have advanced a relational perspective, while often advocating theorization from the margins.

This response to the postcolonial challenge by scholars of Latin America is profoundly significant in itself. But we would like to take the analysis a step further. If we broaden our understanding of postcolonial scholarship beyond just those scholars self-identifying as postcolonial theorists, an even richer body of work opens up. The next section explores what some of these other literatures stand to contribute to a more general program of postcolonial sociology – and to a postcolonial sociology of Latin America.

## **SOCIOLOGY OF LATIN AMERICA AND THE POSTCOLONIAL CHALLENGE**

The scholarship discussed above represents just a fraction of the work that has been done to make sense of Latin America's colonial and post-colonial history. While *not* engaging explicitly with debates in postcolonial theory, a good portion of this other work also stands to make strong contributions to a sociologically informed postcolonial perspective. Here, we would like to highlight contributions across three intellectual domains: economic development, political institutions and practices, and collective identities (specifically race, ethnicity, and nationalism).<sup>16</sup> While not all of the works reviewed here embrace all four elements of the postcolonial perspective outlined above, they do exemplify at least some of the points – and all take what we think of as a sociologically informed approach to their subject matter.

### *Economic Development*

A first domain of research in which scholars of Latin America who were not explicitly engaged with postcolonial theory have made significant contributions to a postcolonial sociology is the field of development studies. The problem of development – and the burdens of occupying a dependent position in the international economy – has been of central concern to Latin America intellectuals over the course of the 20th century. Perhaps the most important strain of scholarship on this problem is captured under the heading of “dependency theory.” Dependency theory represents a profoundly important line of scholarship in Latin American social science; and its emphasis on the global inequalities imposed by colonialism and economic dependence resonates strongly with the work of many contemporary postcolonial theorists. Thus, most of the present section will be devoted to dependency theory (and particularly to the work of Latin American scholars), although we will also briefly review more recent contributions to the study of economic informality. These bodies of scholarship, despite being separated by a few decades and relying on different modes of economic analysis, have raised new problems and proposed new theoretical bases for the provincialization of traditional models of economic development.

The dialogue between postcolonial studies and political economy is not an easy one. Although many postcolonial theorists of Latin America have

acknowledged the contributions made by dependency theory to the overall project of “decolonizing thought,” there are still rigid epistemological barriers impeding a more thorough theoretical exchange. Dependency theory (and other theories of political economy) usually rely either on a structuralist epistemology (Furtado, 1977) or on a dialectical reading of Marxist theories of accumulation and exploitation (Cardoso, 1972 [1964]), whereas postcolonial theories tend to favor several strains of post-structuralism – stressing the connections between imperialism, on the one hand, and discursive resistance and the politics of representation, on the other (Ahmad, 1997; Bartolovich & Lazarus, 2002; Kapoor, 2002).

This divide, however, is one that a postcolonial sociology must make efforts to bridge. Sociological theories of underdevelopment and dependency are among the most important contributions that Latin American scholars have made to the international field of sociology (see especially Cardoso, 1972 [1964]; Cardoso & Faletto, 1979 [1968]; Furtado, 1977; Prebisch, 1950; Quijano, 1980). A significant proportion of this literature – most of it produced *before* the emergence of postcolonial studies – questioned the premises of Eurocentric theories of modernization and promoted new paradigms for understanding the causes and forms of underdevelopment on the continent. It simultaneously highlighted the unequal relationships between Latin American countries and central economies, and questioned the theoretical and political adequacy of the models of development in vogue in the 1950s and 1960s.

The origins of dependency theory can be traced to three important sources. The first tributary comprised the new economic theories elaborated in the 1950s by the economists of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America (“Cepal” in Spanish).<sup>17</sup> The second was the set of sociological studies undertaken by the so-called “São Paulo school of sociology,” under the leadership of Florestan Fernandes.<sup>18</sup> Finally, the *dependentistas* were particularly influenced by local readings of Marxism.<sup>19</sup> These three strains converged in the most important book of the tradition, *Dependency and Development in Latin America*, co-authored by Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Enzo Faletto (1979 [1968]).

Dependency theory tried to reframe the sociological and economic interpretations of underdevelopment by situating underdeveloped countries in the totality of world capitalist relations, constituted during the colonial era and reinforced through unequal post-colonial relationships. In so doing, dependency theorists also attempted to move beyond classic Marxist theories of imperialism (Hilferding, 1981 [1910]; Lenin, 1937 [1917]; Luxemburg, 1951) that looked almost exclusively at the social

classes of the imperialist nations, without regard to social dynamics in the colonies (see, e.g., Cardoso, 1977, p. 13). For example, Cardoso advanced a style of macro-sociology in which the primary focus was on explaining the constitution and operation of the articulations between internal and external social actors.<sup>20</sup> In this form of analysis, the notions of “backwardness” and “under-development” only acquire a meaning when seen in a *relational* international perspective (Cardoso, 1975, p. 73, 1979) – leading to an understanding of underdevelopment as a *form of development* and not a *stage* (Cardoso, 1975; Ianni, 2004 [1965]). Thus, Cardoso and Faletto’s classic text shows that dependency is the result not of the “abstract ‘logic of capital accumulation’ but...of particular relationships and struggles between social classes and groups at the international as well as at the local level” (Cardoso & Faletto, 1979 [1968], p. xvii; see also Kapoor, 2002).

Dependency theory represents a critical touchstone, but one other area of development scholarship warrants attention: recent work on the informal economy. Latin Americanists have provided a critical contribution to the study of economic informality, in an attempt to analyze the economy from its social and institutional margins. A growing literature examines the nonregulated practices of social actors in their navigation of economic, political, and urban spaces (Holston, 1999, 2009; Perlman, 2003; Portes, Castells, & Benton, 1989). Portes et al. (1989), for example, have argued that informality exists within the scope of the state rather than outside of it, since the state has the capacity to determine what is and is not formally recognized as legitimate economic activity. And Holston (2009) has argued that informality and the illegal (or unknown) ownership of land was a crucial mechanism for the settlement of urban populations in Brazil throughout the 20th century (see also Caldeira, 2000; de Oliveira, 1972). This question of informality, which many Latin Americanists have addressed, has been of central interest to postcolonial theorists more generally – many of whom have looked into how poor people develop solutions for advancing political claims or settle in and explore new and hostile environments, against restrictions imposed through official political and legal channels (Chatterjee, 2006; Roy, 2009).

Together, this work on economic development provides important insights for a new postcolonial sociology. It resonates with the principles of a sociologically informed postcolonial perspective, broadly conceived, and represents an important effort to take material economic conditions seriously in the study of post-colonial realities.

*Political Institutions and Practices*

A second domain in which scholars of Latin America have made significant contributions exemplifying a sociologically informed postcolonial perspective revolves around the study of political institutions and practices. With some exceptions (e.g., Coronil, 1997), postcolonial studies has rarely attended to politics at the macro-institutional level – tending instead to focus on the political dimensions of civil society and discursive formations. But from research on democracy and authoritarianism, to more recent scholarship on the state and social movements, Latin Americanists have countered Eurocentric narratives of political development, asserted the distinctiveness of Latin American political institutions and practices vis-à-vis those of Europe, explored the value of a relational approach to political analysis, and attended to social experience at the political margins – all contributions that share an affinity with the core assumptions of a postcolonial sociology.

Building in many ways on the contributions of dependency theory, an earlier generation of Latin American scholars (again, preceding the invention of postcolonial studies *per se*) confronted the supposed underdevelopment of Latin America political institutions – arguing for the importance of understanding the region’s politics on their own terms, in light of Latin American countries’ colonial and post-colonial histories. The rise of populist regimes in the mid-20th century in Argentina, Brazil, and elsewhere – which were difficult to explain with the dominant European theories – led, for example, to new theoretical work by sociologists like Gino Germani (1963), Torcuato Di Tella (1965), and others on the social underpinnings of such regimes. These populism scholars argued that the formation of populist social coalitions, embodied in populist parties, resulted from a “revolution of rising expectations” and “status incongruence” in Latin America’s specific context of peripheral dependent development (*ibid.*). This work initiated a long debate in Latin Americanist circles about the specificity and determinants of this uniquely Latin American political form (for a recent review, see Jansen, 2011).

Similarly, scholars of Latin American democracy have more recently made notable contributions that provincialize Eurocentric models of political development and democratization. Although the general consensus has been that democracy – by European standards – emerged quite late given the region’s long post-colonial republican history (see Stephens, 1989), some scholars have probed the Latin American post-colonial past for evidence of *earlier* democratic practice. Some – most notably the sociologist



Carlos Forment (2003) – have suggested that preliminary evidence of democratic practice can be found amidst the oligarchical and exclusionary politics of 19th century Latin America. In an intriguing theoretical twist, Forment considers what Alexis De Tocqueville would have discovered had he found himself immersed in the political culture of 19th century Mexico or Peru, rather than that of the United States (which had informed his classic study, *Democracy in America*, 2000 [1835]). From the perspective of the United States (and of Tocqueville's actual study), 19th century Latin America appears to be devoid of civil society and democratic practice. But a more subtle reading of historical experience – provided by Forment, and to which Tocqueville would have presumably had access if he had subjected Latin America to the close scrutiny that he gave to the United States – discovers embryonic forms of democratic practice in Latin American civic life that were quite different from those of the North American context, but that nonetheless represented a form of democratic civil society (Forment, 2003). This suggests that scholars of post-colonial contexts must question western narratives of political progress if they are to identify and understand the lived historical realities of such settings.

Finally, recent events in Latin America have fueled scholarship on how neoliberalism, globalization, and a post-Cold War geopolitical reality have led to new repertoires of resistance that combine local and global vocabularies, traditions, and practices. For example, the neoliberal reforms of post-colonial corporatist social and political arrangements spurred waves of austerity protest in some countries (Walton, 2001), while playing an important role in prompting a revival of indigenous movements in others (Yashar, 2005). At the same time, such indigenous movements often built on transnational relationships and articulated with broader antiglobalization and environmental movements (Brysk, 2000; Conklin & Graham, 1995; Johnston, 2000). Finally, as Cold War rationales for the United States' overt and covert support for anti-leftist authoritarian regimes gave way to a more politically hands off foreign policy in the 1990s and 2000s, a new wave of leftist and indigenous parties have gained a foothold in the region (Cameron & Hershberg, 2010; Lee Van Cott, 2005). In emphasizing the counter-hegemonic agency of such subaltern groups and movements, such social scientific scholarship strongly resonates with the critical interventions of postcolonial theorists.

While serving as a critique of Eurocentric models of political development, this research highlights the constraints and opportunities provided by the region's unique, early experience of Iberian colonialism and post-colonial domination by Great Britain and the United States. Continuing

dependent economic development and hierarchical social relationships – and increasing cross-national communication between (elite and marginalized) social actors in these post-colonial states – have shaped the region’s politics to this day; but they have also opened up possibilities for combinations of alternative political practices that deeply challenge the western repertoire of contentious politics.

### *Collective Identities*

A third domain of recent Latin Americanist scholarship that might serve as a jumping off point for a sociologically informed postcolonial perspective has centered on studies of the social and political construction of collective identities – especially race, ethnicity, and nationalism. Historically in Latin America – both in terms of social relations and political practice – the categories of race, ethnicity, and nation have been so inextricably intertwined that it is methodologically impossible (not to mention empirically misguided) to treat any one in isolation from the others. We thus consider the three categories jointly (cf. [Brubaker, 2009](#); [Wimmer, 2008](#)). A growing number of social scientists have engaged with the issues of colonial and post-colonial collective identities in ways that are attuned to colonial legacies and are critical of European narratives of identity formation – while taking a relational perspective and maintaining a sensitivity to the experiences of marginalized groups.

This central area of investigation for postcolonial scholars and social scientists is part of a longer intellectual and political history in Latin America, where political thinkers and state-makers have long been preoccupied with questions of collective identity. The social and political construction of coherent national communities in these states was rendered particularly problematic by the fact that most would have to subsume a unique triadic relationship between Iberian “whites,” African slaves and former slaves, and formerly subjugated native peoples – a relationship that was in many cases further complicated by immigration from southern Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, and East Asia ([Cook Martín, 2008](#); [Lesser, 1999](#); [Moya, 1998](#)). This political-demographic fact prompted ongoing debates – among academics, but also in the civic and political spheres – about *mestizaje* (or racial-ethnic “mixing”), in the countries of Spanish Latin America ([de la Cadena, 2000](#); [Gould, 1998](#); [Sanjinés, 2004](#)), and about “racial democracy” in Brazil ([Bailey, 2004](#); [Degler, 1971](#); [Fry, 2000](#); [Guimarães, 2002](#); [Telles, 2004](#)), that have served different political

purposes at different historical moments over the past two centuries. Some positions in these debates about the constitution of a national “people” involved explicit rejections of Eurocentric models, imposed by the colonizing powers and perpetuated by European and North American intellectuals in the post-colonial period; but other positions maintained – or even expanded upon – dominant European frameworks.

The comparative contrast provided by Latin America’s particular configuration of racial, ethnic, and national categories has played an important role in denaturalizing (i.e., provincializing) North American and European racial ideologies – a contribution that should be of particular note to postcolonial scholars. A central point of criticism has been the use of “imported” ethno-racial categories – in particular, the common tendency to universalize a biracial model premised on the US experience. For example, [Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant \(1999\)](#) have criticized what they considered to be the imposition of a foreign binary race model in studies of Brazilian society by North American scholars (and Latin American scholars trained in the United States), with the support of US foundations; and their argument prompted a number of responses by American and Brazilian social scientists.<sup>21</sup> This debate attests to the difficulties (both analytical and political) involved in attempting to conduct a comparative analysis of racial domination that adequately grasps the changing character and multiple political and cultural uses of racialized discourses and practices.

While many race scholars have highlighted the critical role that political institutions have played in the configuration of racial, ethnic, and national categories in Latin America (see [Centeno, 2002](#); [de la Fuente, 2001](#); [Loveman, 2009](#); [Marx, 1998](#)), some recent scholars have also addressed the formation of identities from the margins of these post-colonial societies. A growing number of social scientists have focused on the central role of black and indigenous movements in reshaping the social relations of the continent and inserting new themes into the democratic agendas of these societies. A rapidly expanding literature, for example, has described the growing participation of the black movements in the Brazilian ([Costa, 2006](#); [Guimarães, 2002](#); [Hanchard, 1998](#)) and Colombian ([Paschel, 2010](#)) public spheres and their influence in reshaping race relations in these countries. The roles played by subaltern actors and their movements in the construction of race, ethnicity, and nation in Latin America has likewise been emphasized by Latin American postcolonial theorists, as the emergence of such movements contests linear histories of political development and traditional views on the practices, languages, and symbols in which “modern” public spheres are embedded.

Some recent work on such black and indigenous cultures and movements has emphasized their transnational nature, challenging the choice of the nation-state as the primary unit of analysis – in clear affinity with a postcolonial sociological program. Sansone (2003), for example, building on the work of Paul Gilroy (1993), has elaborated a sophisticated analysis of the transnational cultural circuits of the black diaspora. He has shown that, despite the fact that many symbolic and cultural artifacts circulate among the black youth of different “Atlantic” societies (particularly Brazil, United States, and the Netherlands), the local mobilization of such resources is contingent upon the history of race relations in each locality. Other researchers have recently looked at how the circulation of people in different national racial contexts informs their understandings of race. Wendy Roth has studied the constitution and transformation of pan-ethnic identities as a consequence of migration among Dominicans and Puerto Ricans (Roth, 2009; for the Brazilian case, see Joseph, 2011). Such work on transnationalism has placed studies of Latin American collective identities at the forefront of critiques of “methodological nationalism” (Wimmer & Glick-Schiller, 2002).

All told, these lines of research stand to contribute to a broader program of postcolonial sociology. Many question the universalization (whether for analytical or political reasons) of any model of race relations – a critique that can be read as a conscious act of provincialization of models premised on race relations elsewhere (especially the United States). They also stress the role of the transnational connections and circuits involved in the dissemination of racial identities and political demands. Finally, they pay due attention to the politicized identity claims of subaltern actors.

The sociological scholarship on economic development, politics, and collective identities discussed here attests to both the need and the potential for a more conscious integration of Latin Americanist social science and postcolonial studies. To be clear, this does not mean that we are claiming that the sociology of Latin America is already postcolonial. Indeed, some of the works in this field still occasionally slip into linear models of political and economic development, methodological nationalism, and the unproblematic transference of Eurocentric concepts and theoretical models. Also, many sociologists have not yet devoted enough attention to the power dynamics involved in the production of knowledge about post-colonial societies and to the colonial nature of the historical records – particularly as materialized in the archives, but also commonly present in the ethnographic encounter. Furthermore, the contributions of sociologists to the understanding of Latin America have rarely been accompanied by a systematic

rethinking of the key canonical categories used to make sense of post-colonial realities – a crucial exercise for the project of a postcolonial sociology. Nevertheless, these strains of sociological scholarship attend to the often neglected historical specificities of the Latin American colonial and post-colonial experience vis-à-vis those of other world regions; and they usefully reflect on the asymmetric nature of international power relations and their consequences for understanding the historical experience of post-colonial societies. These works resonate, at least to a certain extent, with the arguments promoted by other Latin Americanist scholars who have been more explicitly engaged with debates in postcolonial studies.

## CONCLUSION

This article proposes a tentative frame for a creative integration between the social sciences and postcolonial studies, with a particular focus on Latin American societies. Building on earlier strains of Latin American critical thought, the postcolonial scholarship on Latin America has attended to the specificities of the colonial and post-colonial histories of Latin American societies in its engagement with postcolonial theory. It has argued that the analysis and critique of a colonial, Eurocentric imagination should be pushed further back in time, from the 18th to the 16th century – to when Iberian colonial officials first came into contact with the indigenous peoples of Latin America and introduced modern forms of slavery. It has also argued that Latin America is an important site for examining the representational and discursive practices that were developed *for* and *through* the operation of early European colonialism. Following this observation, it has shown that – much more than simply fueling the primitive accumulation of capital for European industrialization – Iberian colonialism acted as a proving ground for the development of the modern techniques of control that accompanied capitalist development. Further, Latin American postcolonial scholarship has illustrated how the distinct Latin American colonial experience shaped particular identities on the parts of both Iberian colonizers and colonial subjects in the region. And finally, it has been at the forefront of new attempts to “decolonize thinking,” through the consideration of the distinct historical trajectories of Latin American states and societies. These contributions are themselves incredibly significant and deserve to be taken seriously by postcolonial studies, as well as by other scholars interested in developing a new sociology of colonialism and post-colonialism.

But in addition to these advances made by overtly postcolonial strands of Latin Americanist thought, the sociology of Latin America has provided examples of how comparative critical insights might be better incorporated into the social sciences. For more than 60 years, there have been important traditions in sociology (albeit often at the margins of the discipline) that have critiqued modernization theory, worked through the challenges of regional comparison, transnationalism, and historicization, and taken culture quite seriously. These traditions have informed much of the sociological work on Latin America, by Southern and Northern scholars alike. Such work stands to contribute a great deal to a new program of postcolonial sociology – a program that we have made preliminary efforts to sketch here.

Finally, this article also suggests a few ways in which a postcolonial sociology might inform new scholarship on Latin America. Substantively, it encourages scholars of cultural politics at the micro-level to attend to the broader social relations and institutions in which these are embedded – both at the national and international levels. Historically, it echoes recent suggestions by Latin Americanist historians and historical sociologists that understanding 19th century structures and events is critical if we want to comprehend adequately the region's post-colonial historical trajectories. And methodologically, it highlights the usefulness of adopting a comparative perspective. This means continuing to compare Latin American countries with those of Europe and North America; but equally important is to compare Latin American with other post-colonial cases, and to pursue innovative comparisons *within* the region. Overall, the strongest Latin Americanist scholarship has been moving in these directions for some time now. But a reinvigoration and broadening of this effort would go a long way toward the eventual development of a mature program of postcolonial sociology.

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## NOTES

1. In this article, we use the hyphenated “post-colonial” (and its variants) when referring to historical periods after independence, and the unhyphenated term “postcolonial” when referring to domains of thought – especially the field of postcolonial studies.

2. See especially Appiah (1993), Bhabha (1994), Chakrabarty (2000), Chatterjee (1993), Said (1979, 1994), and Spivak (1988, 1999). It is worth noting that postcolonial studies have also neglected the experiences of the British settler colonies (most notably the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand), relative to other colonies (Denoon, 1983).

3. Notable exceptions include Loomba, Kaul, Bunzl, and Burton (2005), Moraña, Dussel, and Jauregui (2008), and Prakash (1995).

4. Focusing on the question of slavery, for example, Tannenbaum (1946, p. 69) argued that Iberian traditions were “biased in favor of freedom” and fostered a greater incorporation of the slave populations in Latin American colonial and post-colonial societies. (Although it is worth noting that Tannenbaum has since been roundly criticized by comparative sociologists and historians of race in the Americas [Degler, 1971; Fernades, 1965; for a review of this debate, see de la Fuente, 2010]).

5. In this respect, World Systems Theory’s attempt to situate specific colonial endeavors in broader waves of colonization and decolonization is instructive (see Bergesen & Schoenberg, 1980; Wallerstein, 2004).

6. This is consonant with Steinmetz’s (2007, 2008) analysis of German colonial native policies.

7. Although it is important to note that many scholars have also emphasized that attention to the *colonial* roots of Latin American patterns of development should not preclude the detailed analysis of the domestic arrangements and international relations of Latin American countries *after* independence (Cardoso, 1977; Centeno, 2002; Coronil, 1997).

8. This task is daunting. “Postcolonial studies” does not constitute a well-defined school, but is rather an internally diverse research agenda concerned with critiquing the relationship between colonialism and multiple dimensions of power and knowledge. As Sapiro, Steinmetz, and Ducournau (2010) have noted, it includes post-Foucaultian analyses of the relationship between colonialism and a Eurocentric imagination (in the work of Edward Said), Derridian deconstruction of colonial and post-colonial texts (such as that of Gayatri Spivak), psychoanalytic assessments of colonial subjectivities (by Homi Bhabha, but also in the earlier work of Frantz Fanon and Albert Memmi), and Heideggerian critiques of western modernity (see, e.g., the work of Timothy Mitchell and Dipesh Chakrabarty). One might add to this list Gramscian anti-colonial historiography (represented well by the work of Indian Subaltern historians, such as Ranajit Guha and Partha Chatterjee) and creative combinations of Gramscian Marxism and French post-structuralism in the tradition of British cultural studies (especially by Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy).

9. This is certainly not the only possible frame for a productive integration of sociology and postcolonial theory. [Bhabra \(2011\)](#), [Costa and Boatcă \(2010\)](#), and [Go \(forthcoming\)](#) also provide very valuable contributions to the elaboration of a postcolonial sociology.

10. This is both an ontological critique (pointing to the inadequacy of the conflation for the comprehension of both “modern” institutions and values and of non-western realities) and a normative critique (aiming to deconstruct the Eurocentric assumptions of many humanistic, political, and social scientific depictions of “modernity” and “development”). In this sense, for postcolonial studies, the “post” is not simply a temporal marker, but a critical device (see [Hall, 1996](#), p. 253).

11. See for example [Dussel’s \(1993, p. 74\)](#) critique of Habermas – a common target of postcolonial theorists.

12. In the words of [Dipesh Chakrabarty \(2000, p. 29\)](#), according to Eurocentric discourses of modernity, “...only ‘Europe’... is *theoretically* (that is, at the level of the fundamental categories that shape historical thinking) knowable; all other histories are matters of empirical research that fleshes out a theoretical skeleton that is substantially ‘Europe.’”

13. See for example [Mariátegui \(1995 \[1928\]\)](#), [Martí \(2010 \[1891\]\)](#), and [Zea \(1976\)](#).

14. The sociological theories of dependent development and internal colonialism, for example, provided new vocabularies for challenging the hegemony of “modernization theory” by highlighting the unequal and exploitative relations existing between developed countries, on the one hand, and the local Latin American bourgeoisie and popular groups, on the other ([Cardoso & Faletto, 1979 \[1968\]](#); [Casanova, 1967](#)). At the same time, [Paulo Freire’s \(1970\)](#) elaboration of a new “pedagogy of the oppressed” and the development of participatory action research ([Fals-Borda, 1981](#)) advanced non-hierarchical paradigms for education and social research, while highlighting the importance of local knowledge and the agency of subaltern social groups.

15. For further discussions of the influence of this historical legacy, see [Grosfoguel \(2000\)](#), [Lander \(2000, p. 519\)](#), [Mato \(2000\)](#), and [Mignolo \(2002, p. 62\)](#).

16. We could have focused on other fields or highlighted different works within these fields. Our aim, however, is not to provide an exhaustive review, but simply to note some points of resonance with a broader project of postcolonial sociology.

17. For more on Cepal, see [Furtado \(1959, 1977\)](#), [Gootenberg \(2001\)](#), [Prebisch \(1982 \[1950\]\)](#), and [Love \(1996\)](#).

18. This group of intellectuals was also associated with an important reading group on Marx’s *Capital* during the 1950s and early 1960s, constituted by intellectuals like the sociologists [Fernando Henrique Cardoso](#) and [Octavio Ianni](#), anthropologist [Ruth Cardoso](#), economist [Paul Singer](#), literary critic [Roberto Schwarz](#), historian [Fernando Novais](#), and philosopher [José Arthur Giannotti \(Bastos, 1999, p. 219\)](#).

19. In addition to the *Capital* reading group of the São Paulo school, also of note were the several attempts by influential intellectuals, such as the Chilean sociologist [Marta Harnecker](#), to disseminate [Althusser’s](#) structural reading of *Capital* in the region.



20. This aspect is probably the main difference between his and “North American” dependency theory – particularly the work of Andre Gunder Frank (1967), to whom Cardoso (1977) has addressed a severe critique.

21. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1999, p. 44) attacked the work of the American political scientist Michael Hanchard on the Brazilian black movement (Hanchard, 1998), arguing that he tried to make the “...US Civil Rights Movement into the universal standard for the struggle of all groups oppressed on grounds of colour (or caste).” (For a more nuanced critique of the inadequate transference of the binary model of race relations, see Sansone, 2003.) Hanchard (2003) replied that their critique was essentially flawed and, more than that, was an intricate exercise of imperialist reason – since it failed to recognize that the Black Movement in Brazil has voluntarily adopted many of the categories mobilized by the American Civil Rights Movement and other African and diasporic movements in order to frame their demands. The sociologist Edward Telles also responded to the critique, demonstrating that there is a long tradition of the study of race relations in Brazil that has no direct connection with US categories or institutions (Telles, 2003; see also de Pinho and Figueiredo, 2002).

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