

WORK IN PROGRESS, DO NOT CITE WITHOUT THE AUTHOR'S PERMISSION

**Decolonizing Anthropology
A Self-Critical Appraisal of the Current State of Research and Teaching
Lecture Series by and for Social and Cultural Anthropological/Ethnological Institutes
in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and Italy**

Donnerstag 2. Mai, 2024

T h e r e i f i c a t i o n o f r a c e

(Decolonizing what was known as Mexican Anthropology)

**Ricardo F. Macip
Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla
rfmacip@gmail.com**

“Past solutions to given problems help to find solutions to similar problems today, thanks to the cultural critical practice of scholarly discipline. However, one cannot say that the solution of contemporary problems depends genetically on past solutions; the genesis of the solution resides in the current situation and not in anything else. This criterion is not absolute and must not be stretched to the point of absurdity, otherwise it would lapse into empiricism: extreme actualism, extreme empiricism. One must know how to go about defining the great historical periods that, in general, have brought forth certain issues and from their onset have pointed to the rudiments of the resolution of those same issues.” (Gramsci Q6: ¶¶85)

Introduction

What can pass as “decolonial” in Mexico? I am stressing passing as a performative gesture informed by anthropological debates in a state where anthropology (alongside with history) has been used as a tool for mythmaking, shaping national identity, and character. Mexico, home to the second-largest population of Catholics after Brazil, is a direct product of Counter-Reformation. In 1521, a year before Luther’s Bible was printed, the fall of Tenochtitlan brought

conquest and evangelization on a scale unknown even to well-seasoned Spanish fighters and monks. Even though the Church, Crown, conquerors, and their offspring had competing ideas about everything else, they all worked towards providing the Vatican with a reserve of souls (Womack 1999: 63- 709) right after it had lost half of Europe. The specific form of Christian transculturation has proved enduring. Another element to ponder about the possibilities for decolonization is the transmutation of Spanish from a lingua franca, which is what Castilian was in Spain, into a vehicle for something radically new. In trying to reach China across the Pacific to the West, and through the exploration of North and South within the Americas, the language became the project we still fight over in four continents among 500 million native speakers and against the overriding power of English. As the second most spoken native language, fourth largest, and most widely spoken romance tongue, Mexico is home to the biggest group of its native speakers. The great majority of Mexicans are monolingual Spanish speakers and, allegedly, among the worst at learning another language (either foreign or indigenous). Regardless of “saving linguistics”, for ethnic whites (Lebanese, Sephardic, regional Spaniards) or indigenous groups, Mexicans organized in their state formation have a hard time imagining themselves without Spanish.

Decolonizing surely makes critical sense in those places where there is a robust history and corroborated memory of what existed before the European expansion. If taken seriously, it ought to be the contemporary equivalent of denazification, destalinization, or desovietization that different European states underwent - albeit imperfectly. (Mamdani 2020). However, when practiced in the context of Mexico and the Americas by enlightened activists and public intellectuals, we are quite literally on a different terrain of possibilities. This is closer to Lacanian

“Jouissance” as the ideological enjoyment of excess, particularly on social fantasy (Žižek 1989: 121).

Beyond the painted six deer skin books known as the Codex Borgia Group, the four Maya codexes, and archaeological vestiges, interpreted always already through presentism, we had no way to know much outside Catholic or secular frames, mediations, and projections. Of course, oral tradition and educated guesses get invoked too often as artifices, but they will come through Romanized languages and Christian models. Mythmaking and knowledge become entangled with politics and there is no proof nor guarantee that we have been or will be able to untie it. The effort and political will to decolonize the New World will necessarily run into many contradictions too soon to remain meaningful in the long term.

The main relevance of discussing the variations between decoloniality (Quijano 1992) as a “forma mentis” and decolonization (Harrison 1991) as an institutional process for the hiring of “minorities”, are not restricted to anthropology, but has turned into a meta-discourse with traction among those under twenty-five years of age. This is most evident in classrooms but also on the conflation between activism and studies on race, racism, and discrimination. After the long standstill of policies aimed to contain the Covid-19 pandemic, one of the effects in discussions is the reification of race among Mexicans for the understanding of their differences and its importance. This demands a thorough critique and engagement, which is what I will try to point out here.

Let me start by contrasting the current conjuncture against a previous critical moment for debate and disagreement in the subcontinent. This is the school of Latin American Studies on Dependency. Launched as a “positioned” elaboration on Lenin’s understanding of the articulation of modes of production within one country and into relations of Imperialism

(Cardoso 1973: 91), it allowed generations of students to critically debate the European canon, reaching out into all the corners of the world. As such, it gave us the complex genealogy of anti-colonial politics from the French Antilles and Africa through the work of Césaire (1972) and Fanon (1963, 1967), providing us with a whole new vocabulary. The armed struggles in Central America and grassroots organizations against dictatorships in South America would affect how the Catholic Church appropriated, domesticated, and encoded *dependentismo* into “liberation theology (Dos Santos 2002: 47). Negating its Leninist origin, it became key to reimagining leftist politics and then encountering a novel sort of tricontinental discourse, intersecting with subaltern studies in South Asia, Postcolonial critiques in Africa (Mbembe 2001, 2019, Mamdani 1996, 2012, Chibber 2013), and above all, ecumenical trends from Protestant churches in the United States doing missionary work in Latin America.

I will oppose two generations and moments in anthropological discussions in Mexico from a Marxist understanding of culture and political economy informed by Raymond Williams (1977) and his proposal for the study of “structures of feeling”, Antonio Gramsci’s elaborations on common sense as the illiterate organization of ideas in public culture, and the potency of Lacanian interpellation (Althusser 2014: 191) as the keyword still bridging Freudo-Marxism globally. By privileging “reification” as an orthodox category, I am opposing any ambivalence or ambiguity as to the treatment of race. Conventionally, the main reason for anthropology to exist to this day is the unabashed confrontation and rejection of racist thought and politics. If we still use the term ‘culture’ it is because it remains the best to oppose race and its succedent metaphors in genetics and sociobiology. In that regard, reification is straightforward. It means giving substance to abstractions. In this case to race as a pernicious idea from racist imagination and politics. The material force of racism must be identified while also acknowledging how perverse

it is to concede to it by codifying meanings as racial. This contradiction implies no Faustian dilemma. Au contraire, it demands a certain sobriety of thought to reject it, no matter how potent it has proven to be in the United States to destroy all forms of solidarity among the working classes (Reed 2018). Thus, the decolonial stands as a moral critique more akin to Catholic guilt and often manifesting in rituals of public shaming rather than serving as a robust political or analytical category.

Two generations and structures of feeling are divided by the Zapatista Uprising of 1994. The first ranges from 1968 as a “cultural revolution” and it ends melodramatically in 1994. The second lasts from that year to the start of the pandemic as officially recognized by the World Health Organization and the Mexican government in March 2020.

1968 and ...*That what is known as Mexican Anthropology*

The events from Paris to Prague in 1968 had powerful reverberations in Western-styled universities worldwide and all the pieces, from Sao Paulo to Cape Town matter. Yet, Mexico City became infamous as among those which joined the party late by providing a tragic end to it. The massacre of students that overshadowed the Olympic Games (González de Alba 2016) again proved the contradictions that this state formation lives within the chorus of nations. On the one hand, there is hardly anything of relevance happening anywhere that is not registered and amplified as an echo in Mexico. By whom and how so is a contingency, albeit an important one. On the other hand, the specific way it is projected and used within the country has important local consequences. So, 1968 has often been characterized as a cultural revolution (Bartra 2008: 28) for the postwar generations, even for those countries that were hardly involved in it. There was a witnessing Mexican air squadron in the war, but it merits only a footnote in history. The

supply of oil to the Allies on the Atlantic theatre was more relevant but remains relatively ignored. In any case, like almost everywhere else in the North Atlantic, Transalpine and Central Europe, Mexicans engaged in a powerful critique of the war legacies after 1945, wrapping it up in 1968.

For our purposes, the most important element is the publication in 1969 of *That what is known as Mexican Anthropology (De eso que llaman antropología Mexicana)*. This is a rapid response by a young group of anthropology professors in the National School of Anthropology and History engaging what they considered a stale moment of the discipline after it was subordinated to the Mexicanizing of the modern state. The massacre of the previous year prompted the articulated response coming from one of the most privileged disciplines of the emergent nation and went beyond it. Attacking the subordination of the discipline to state projects, they were able to decry the feeble basis of authoritarian political arrangements and the cultural industries made around a national character (the Mestizo). Unlike those in charge of most institutions dealing with what were considered indigenous affairs, these were professional anthropologist by training. If lawyers, schoolteachers, physicians, and agitators were able in the past to replace the very few educated anthropologists through a spurious series of equivalencies, these knew what they were criticizing, and it ranged from the institutional and political to the common sense that made the collective unconscious of an imagined nation. By criticizing those controlling institutions and their purposed shaping of a national character, they opened a generous space for dissidence and creativity (See Binford et al 2017).

The main byproduct of the Mexican revolution (1910-1921) was the cultural politics around *mestizaje*. This is the myth that most Mexicans are the offspring of Spaniard males and indigenous females. Around this trope Vasconcelos (1948) would write his lyrical *Cosmic Race*.

Under this fictional character, artistic and scientific projects converged into the modern Mexican nation. Modernization theories were adopted and adapted, and anthropology got subsumed into it. Of course, there were many more populations from which inhabitants of the country came from and the indigenous was by no means an unambiguous or straightforward marker. The internal diversity was ignored in favor of the Aztecs as tragic fallen heroes, while the Spaniard was acknowledged only to be rejected as a sort of “false consciousness”. The Mestizo then went from descriptive to prescriptive, and therefore it became a forced national identity to perform in civic rituals and negotiate in face-to-face encounters that could go sour, reminding us of its feeble basis.

De eso que llaman antropología mexicana is important precisely because it articulates the many critiques and misgivings against the institutionalization period of the discipline. Even if there were attempts to launch it twice before and during the armed phase of the revolution (Vázquez León 2014), it would not be until the postwar period that this became a reality. Against the flattening efforts to project and promote a national character, different proposals would debate the main differences among Mexicans in ethnic and class terms. The rejection of racial categories was not solely a consequence of the fascist defeat. Franz Boas directed at least a couple of Mexican students (Manuel Gamio and Anita Brenner) in their doctorates and his teachings were the major premise in any discussion regarding differences among Mexicans. Ethnicity was adopted early on as a valid category to portray them, even if the indigenist policy was planned around integration towards *mestizaje*. Given the revolutionary fervor and the importance of anarchist ideologues among some factions, class has been consistently acknowledged as a salient feature. Not always or not usually the first and foremost consideration, but as an unavoidable category of analysis and substance. Marxist texts were scattered but

available, and after the Spanish Civil War, Mexico City rather than Madrid or Buenos Aires became the hub for their translation, printing and distribution. . Even though it was not until after 1968 that Marxism would become dominant in anthropology through Althusser's influence in French Structuralism and the work of his students in Africa, a healthy dose of class awareness usually relativized cultural essentialism. Finally, a veritable adherence to fieldwork orthodoxy was taken from Malinowski's final project in Oaxaca (Cook 2017A & B). Therefore, poetic, lyric and other reflexive exercises around the enjoyment of ethnic essentialism were largely taken with a grain of salt. It was certainly present and Vasconcelos was the most egregious case, methodological rigor prevented them from being taken seriously outside the realm of literary essays. Together, Boasian and Malinowskian approaches coupled with Althusserian Marxist tenets projected the critical efforts against the ideology of The Mexican Miracle of modernization and revolutionary nationalism. The turn after 1968 will be clear in the effects against modernization theories. This would incorporate class and ethnicity as main categories of analysis to the debates around The Agrarian Question, Internal Colonialism, Articulation of Modes of Production, and National Identities (as a dissimulated replacement of "character").

Some of these debates were reiterations of those already settled in Eastern Europe, like the opposition between Narodniki versus Leninists regarding the Agrarian Question (Kautsky 1899). Even if through actualization, the debate implied more than enough specificities (Warman 1976), that set it apart from its precedent. Its main feature was how it precluded the essentialization of peasantries. They were to be understood as specific subjects of the state. No ethnic or class dimension was strong enough to subordinate the other and all in all it was a pretty sophisticated debate. In a similar fashion, responding to dependency critiques that mostly originated in South America, Rodolfo Stavenhagen (1969) rejected dualist approaches to modern

urban industrial versus premodern rural societies by elaborating a model of internal colonialism. His analysis of underdevelopment as a byproduct of uneven development also seemed robust enough to fear any ethnic nationalism from taking place. They all reacted to the popularity of French Structural Marxism in the articulation of modes of production debates, relegating national identity to a residual status.

Two books from 1987 speak of national identity and character as a romantic leftover. The first is *Mexico profundo* by Bónfil Batalla in which the author took a contrasting if not radically new approach from his early work in *De eso que llaman antropología mexicana* by asserting the existence of a dual society in Mexico. One modern and spurious, superficial, and phony, the product of colonialist comprador classes; another deep and earthy, resistant, and enduring. The resilience of the second is a lament that would become dominant less than ten years after it was published. The second book is *The Cage of Melancholy* by Roger Bartra in which the author took a pretty sophisticated approach to nationalist myths and the senselessness of national identity as a control artifice. Using a salamander that is unable to mature but reproduces as a juvenile, he indulged into one too many jabs at the feeble Mestizo's psychic structure. If Wolf (1959) was overly dramatic in his portrayal of "the power seekers" as he understood them, Bartra was mercilessly hilarious with his *axolotes*. Yet, the mascot he used, and all his jokes would, soon enough, get turned around against him and his cerebral model.

1994 The Zapatista Uprising (and its aftermath)

1994 was expected by the ruling Mexican elites as a triumphal milestone. The long-cherished integration to the United States finally got a legal framework through NAFTA. Focusing on the

economic rather than the political, or cynically as Perestroika without Glasnost (Centeno 1994) the agreement proved the victory of the cosmopolitan elites over its critics as they thought (and think) that there was/is only one way forward. Yet, together with NAFTA, an anachronical uprising made itself known before New Year's sunrise disrupting everything. A small guerrilla attacked some police and military garrisons, took four municipal seats and was eager to share what they were about. Militarily, they failed from the beginning. In political and communicative terms, however, their success still reverberates to this day.

The events in Chiapas for the first twelve days of the uprising went from contention in military terms to a long and publicized series of negotiations that had proved themselves endless. It must be stressed that the Zapatistas, as they presented themselves, gained enough sympathy among the Mexican population and international commentators that they were able to administer this support instead of a military threat. This is most eloquently in the changes of their declarations that went from orthodox National Liberation models into one dealing with indigenous rights. If read carefully, the Lacandon jungle declarations, from first to sixth, changed the political subject to accommodate the terms of the debate (Womack 1999: 44). The uprising had many effects, paramount among them was the shifting of the debate in Mexico regarding how to understand internal differences. A cottage industry of books about them would slowly build a canon while the production of documentaries and arts overflowed as propaganda. If the Zapatistas failed in overthrowing the "neoliberal government" as they claimed as their objective in the first declaration, they provided a soapbox and bullhorn for most Mexicans to express their misgivings, critiques, and rejection against the political arrangements in Mexico and its governments. This would have a lasting effect in anthropology and public discourse.

It must be stressed that neither the Zapatistas, nor those debating them at the time of the uprising with sympathetic or critical views, used race as a valid category. They referred to racism and racist discrimination combining colonial legacies with modern processes of class and gendered forms of exclusionary practices. Unacceptable as it is, they have not lent validity to the category of race as the key for understanding differences among Mexicans. Most committed canonical authors to the cause (Montemayor 1996, Harvey 1998, Stephen 2002), were very careful when separating the analysis of ethnic relations and exploitation in a pretty well-known area of the country from the aesthetics around the movement, and what different audiences took them to mean. Critical authors such as Bartra (2002) and Womack (1999), pointed out the perils of lyrical excess while trying to maintain a sober analysis. Even apologists who were eager to pose as spokespersons of the sympathizers of the movement refrained as well. It is quite difficult to find an author raised and educated before 1994 who would concede to race and racism alone. This would change for those who were still at school then and took Zapatismo as their mantle and flag, fighting to reduce the university system to activism from the mid-nineties onward.

Ethnic strategic essentialism of one too many sympathizers opened the door to a new crop of activists and students to replace Hispanic American comparative history with ironed and starched models to understand race relations in the United States. Ironically, NAFTA was not reduced to the movement of commodities and the renewed super-exploitation of captive labor in favor of transnational corporations. Ideas, too, were cheapened and traded, and new anti-intellectual “sweatshops” (in the form of graduate programs) opened for business, setting the boundaries for what progressive politics may mean. Given the events in central and eastern Europe in between 1989-1991, the War in Yugoslavia, and the amplified versions coming from the United States and NATO (while ignoring the African milestones on 1994—the collapse of

Apartheid in South Africa and the horrors of genocidal political violence in Rwanda), it was no surprise that empty signifiers (Laclau 2005) like “transition towards democracy”, “globalization”, “multiculturalism”, or “ethnic violence” subordinated to neoliberal policies of free market, became canonical. As mentioned, the technocrats in power were too eager to repeat that there was no other way to rule but the one demanded by transnational corporations. What was not expected was that the new crop of public intellectuals would be so eager to replace Latin American critical traditions with the canon of the liberal and postmodern anti-Marxist left of the United States. Soon, an anti-historical, anti-structural and anti-materialist series of positions got braided into a ready-made explanation for one and all discontents.

Decolonization has two antecedents that are worth mentioning. One was “epidermically” articulated in the Faye Harrison (1991) edited *Decolonizing Anthropology*. Even though it was centered on the black experience in the United States, it took and “subsumed” Asad’s (1973) classic edited *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter* and projected itself over it. Vermeulen (2015: 24) has warned us against the totalizing images Asad’s argument conveys over anthropology in the past and present regarding the colonial enterprise. While discussing the history of ideas we cannot concede to political presentism but ought to confront different ethnographic presents and possible futures against historical analyses. Therefore, this also applies to the short-term use and popularity of the decolonial in the United States as a resource for negotiating (and blackmailing) in hiring practices. In Mexico and Latin America, a generation educated in dependency critiques moved away from it by the 1990s, trading political economy and structural analysis in favor of a cultural politics of recognition, heavily influenced by US debates on racism and identity politics.

The other relevant antecedent is Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui's (1993) work on the cultural discontents of indigenist integration in Bolivia and how it folded into anti-racist politics. However, it would be Quijano (1992) and Mignolo (2007) who would be identified as the main proponents conflating cultural politics with the decolonial. The most important change was the moralizing dimension of what used to be structural and historical approaches to culture and political economy. Harrison and Cusicanqui were not only open to critique and able to engage with, but they have also remained relevant, discerning between academic and activist production without conflation. This is an important difference regarding what would come after. By espousing a progressive agenda, understood against reactionaries, there is no need for public intellectuals to debate but simply to assert their only point: racism is the most fundamental element and criteria splitting Mexicans apart. If we accept this, then that colonial legacy ought to be expunged through decolonial activism.

This is most evident in the work of two Mexican scholars. Emiko Saldivar Tanaka (2022) and Federico Navarrete (2023) are leading the charge that Mexico is a racist country. While specifying that, in the absence of a majority that can pass as white, it has been the job of privileged Mestizos to exercise cruelty over those who can be racialized as different and inferior. They can hardly be merited with discovering or denouncing racism first. The overwhelming majority of ethnographies of the last quarter of the twentieth century and almost during all of this have acknowledged it. It is simply too prevalent to be denied, and serves no group's political interest to do so. Moreover, after the Civil Rights movement in the US, it was a virtue signal of a cosmopolitan academia. What is new among the crop of scholars born in the sixties and later is the colonizer's substitution from a white settler with his Mestizo proxy. In fact, if their work was aimed at dismantling the Mestizo myth, they would simply be part of a larger chorus. Confronted

with colonial and modern history, it simply is not possible to reduce *mestizaje* to two populations. Apart from Spaniards and natives, enslaved Africans, indentured Philippine, and other Asians, plus immigrants from all over Europe and the Middle East, but *mestizaje* ought to get thicker and impossible to track down outside DNA analysis.

However, instead of a Mexicanized “multiculturalism” adjusting *mestizaje* to the new times and discoveries they copy and paste tribalistic popular labels on the incendiary press in English (Cfr. Finkelstein 2023) and are therefore able to talk about Mestizo “fragility”, “privilege”, and “innocence” among other epithets. Rather than gaining complexity, the Mestizo is reified as a strawman to be rejected on moral and political grounds. Unintentionally, perhaps, but this resembles too much the Hutu propaganda against the Tutsi (Mamdani 2001) and is consequently too scary to ignore. The Mestizo is reduced to the proxy of colonialist power, while the phallus belongs to masculine European/White/Settlers. Charged with carrying out the demeaning job of sorting out Mexicans by phenotypical markers and subordinating them in a new Apartheid, when none was successful before, the Mestizo is also a sad joke. This cannot be dismissed out of hand as “pure nonsense”, precisely because by perverting the notion of *mestizaje* they are also reifying racial categories. Therefore, as they declare, their aim is to “make visible” (and celebrate) the indigenous and afro descendants to be recognized not by any linguistic or cultural traits but rather through racial markers.

This most infelicitous development has successfully crystalized as an extravagant structure of feeling among those students impacted by the educational policies around the Covid pandemic. Forced to stay at home for over two years, without the proper infrastructure to do so, all students were affected by the undeniable degradation of their school programs. Paramount was the irrelevance of grades or homework, but mostly the fact that complex teaching materials

were out of the question. Reading was subordinated to electronic media and therefore the criteria regarding sources of authority has been obliterated. Within this context, the reification of race while debating racism has been the major undesirable effect, cost, and thorough defeat for anthropology as part of the social and political sciences. Even though it is possible to try to slow and painfully reverse the process aiming to recover some of the lost ground, the fact remains that an emergent common sense has congealed. This has hardly any Mexican elements, it is the identity politics spectacle of the United States grossly translated by Google without any possibility of nuance. Therefore, against this interpellation, the caveats developed by classic Caribbean anti-racist and anti-imperialist scholars ought to be actualized.

What is to Be Done?

On the Black Jacobins C. L. R. James (1963: 283) writes, “The race question is subsidiary to the class question in politics, and to think imperialism in terms of race is disastrous. But to neglect the racial factor as merely incidental as an error only less grave than to make it fundamental.” Among many other places, racism and racial discrimination are thorny problems in Mexico, yet they have their own histories that cannot be subsumed into a single narrative. This is no simple correction but a clear acknowledgement that we must strive for more complex understandings rather than the simple reiteration of party politics developed elsewhere. By adopting the propaganda of the Democratic party, codified as Decolonization, we learn less and less without realizing that in the processes we are being drafted as conscripts of postmodern delusions (Cfr. Scott 2004).

In a chapter written as a coda for a Marxist anthropology on class, Jonathan Friedman (2015) tries to account and explain the events from the great fall of 2008 and its effects for the future. Among the points he makes, I find relevant how he opposes as complementary the processes of Cosmopolitanization and Indigenization as specific class politics, for elites and rabble correspondingly, with regard to the displacement from the position in the productive process to one of the reproductive system (Friedman 2015: 194). Confronted at the last stertors of the neoliberal period but without any logical or coherent substitute outside populist politics, we find ourselves at Gramsci's (Q 3, ¶¶ 34 1996: 32-3) dictum in which "The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born: in this interregnum, morbid phenomena of the most varied kind come to pass." We are certainly overwhelmed and have been by the endless sense of crises that has multiple dates of beginning but has no end either. The conflation of time and space and the crucible of a "New Center" (*Neue Mitte*) in politics are according to Friedman (2015: 198) both symptomatic and ironical. Beyond his sense of humor when dealing with a cohort of Marxists scholars asserting themselves as relevant to the discipline and education, the fact remains that more and more cosmopolitan intellectuals sound indistinguishable from their US models when dealing with Mexican realities.

Precisely because racism is a relevant problem in Mexican society, we cannot allow any reification of race to pass and take hold, no matter how many indigenous intellectuals and their allies concede. If it has been useful to challenge historical situations in the United States and produce constant legal debates that does not mean it is a reasonable formula to emulate. Its cruel normalcy shall be enough to reject it, but we ought to deal with it also on academic terms. One author that I have found productive to disagree with is Paula López Caballero (2021). Problematizing indigenous identities, she avoids any strategic essentialism and historicizes them,

opening the door to contextualize the “immediate struggles” (Narotzky and Smith 2006) that they are byproducts of, and the possibilities to become political projects. Even though some of the theoretical reflections she proposes as a model were masterfully advanced by Homi Bhabha on *The Location of Culture* (1994), it is suitable to try to fulfill ethnographically the elusiveness, ambivalence, volatility, ambiguity, and instability of racist desire and discrimination practices in Mexico. Gavin Smith (2018) has offered a clear path to ethnographically work “Elusive Relations” pointing out precisely how they constantly mutate, and demanding serious analytical work informed by a political urgency that elucidates both the reasons for engaging realities and the manner in which they are approached. . Rather than stable categories devoid of consistent materiality, confronting ethnic essentialism historically, structurally, and spatially (Roseberry 2002) is an urgent political and academic project. For this, we shall “un-cancel” from the canon authors such as V. S. Naipaul and his devastating critique of *The Mimic Men* (1967) and colonial racist desire in all its frustrating creativity. If Fanon and Césaire opened the anti-colonialist debate, we shall explain how it has been twisted and distorted through perversion and misrecognition. Together with the history of ideas, it demands ethnographic work on the eagerness to indulge in the exotism of decolonial intersectionality.

Backpedaling a bit, the problem with the decolonial discussion in Mexico is how easily it lends itself to be degraded into a hypocritical moral critique akin to soul-searching for the purpose of virtue signalling and public shaming rather than a productive debate to inform emancipatory politics. Given the fact that social relations are material and have consequences we cannot be content with the transmutation of the Jouissance of racism into “Mestizo guilt” while reifying race. One ought to be confronted, the other discarded yet again, “for local political reasons.” (Roseberry nd).

References

- Althusser, Louis 2014 *On the Reproduction of Capitalism*. Verso, London.
- Assad, Talal (ED) 1973 *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter*. Ithaca Press.
- Bartra, Roger [1987] 1992 *The Cage of Melancholy. Identity and Metamorphosis in the Mexican Character*. Rutgers, New Brunswick.
- Bartra, Roger 2002 *Blood, Ink, and Culture. Miseries and Splendors of the Post-Mexican Condition*. Duke University Press, Durham.
- Bhabha, Homi 1994 *The Location of Culture* Routledge, New York.
- Binford, Leigh 2017 Dialectical Anthropology Forum: De eso que llaman antropología mexicana. *Dialectical Anthropology* 41 (4): 295- 335.
- Bónfil Batalla, Guillermo 1987 *México Profundo. Una civilización negada*. CNCA, México.
- Cardoso, Fernando H. 1973 Nota sobre el estado actual de los estudios de la dependencia. En Sergio Bagú et al *Problemas del subdesarrollo latinoamericano*. Editorial Nuestro Tiempo, México. Pp. 90- 125.
- Centeno, Miguel Ángel 1994 *Democracy Within Reason. Technocratic Revolution in Mexico*. The Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Césaire, Aimé 1972 *Discourse on Colonialism*. Monthly Review Press, New York.
- Chibber, Vivek 2013 *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital*. Verso, London.
- Cook, Scott 2017A Malinowski in Oaxaca: Implications of an Unfinished Project in Economic Anthropology, Part I *Critique of Anthropology* 37(2): 132-159.
- Cook, Scott 2017B Malinowski in Oaxaca: Implications of an Unfinished Project in Economic Anthropology, Part II *Critique of Anthropology* 37(3): 228-243
- Dos Santos, Theotônio 2002 *La teoría de la dependencia. Balance y perspectivas*. Plaza y Janés, Ciudad de México.
- Fanon, Frantz 1963 *The Wretched of the Earth*. Grove Press, New York.
- Fanon, Frantz 1967 *Black Skin, White Masks*. Grove Press, New York.
- Finkelstein, Norman X. 2023 *I'll Burn that Bridge When I Get to It! Heretical Thoughts on Identity Politics, Cancel Culture and Academic Freedom*. Sublation Press
- Friedman, Jonathan 2015 Global systemic crisis, class, and its representations IN *Anthropologies of Class: Power, Practice, and Inequality*. Edited by James G. Carrier y Don Kalb, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. Pp: 183- 199.
- Gramsci, Antonio [1975] 1996 *Prison Notebooks*. Columbia University Press, New York.
- González de Alba, Luis 2016 *Tlatelolco: aquella tarde*. Cal y Arena, México.

- Harrison, Faye (ED) 1991 *Decolonizing Anthropology- Moving Further toward an Anthropology for Liberation*. Association of Black Anthropologists (AAA).
- Harvey, Neil 1998 *The Chiapas Rebellion. The Struggle for Land and Democracy*. Duke University Press, Durham.
- James C. L. R. 1963 *The Black Jacobins. Toussaint L'Overture and the San Domingo Revolution*. Vintage, New York.
- Kautsky, Karl [1899] 1988 *The Agrarian Question*. Zwan Publications, Worcester.
- Laclau, Ernesto 2005 *La razón populista*. FCE, Mexico.
- López Caballero, Paula 2021 Inhabiting Identities: On the Elusive Quality of Indigenous Identity in Mexico. *The Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology* 26(1): 124- 146.
- Mamdani, Mahmood 2020 *Neither Settler nor Native. The Making and Unmaking of Permanent Minorities*. Harvard University Press. Cambridge.
- Mamdani, Mahmood 2012 *Define and Rule. Native as a Political Identity*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge.
- Mamdani, Mahmood 2001 *When Victims Became Killers. Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda*. Princeton University Press, Princeton.
- Mamdani, Mahmood 1996 *Citizen and Subject. Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Colonialism*. Princeton University Press, Princeton.
- Mignolo, Walter 2007 *La idea de América Latina: La herida colonial y la opción decolonial*. Gedisa, Barcelona.
- Montemayor, Carlos 1996 *Chiapas: la rebelión indígena de México*. Joaquín Mortiz, México.
- Mbembe, Achile 2001 *On the Postcolony*. University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Mbembe, Achile 2019 *Necro-Politics*. Duke University Press, Durham.
- Naipaul, V. S. [1967] 2001 *The Mimic Men*. Vintage, New York.
- Narotzky, Susana and Gavin Smith 2006 *Immediate Struggles. People, Power, and Place in Rural Spain*. University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Navarrete, Federico 2023 *México racista: una denuncia*. Penguin, México.
- Quijano, Anibal 1992 Colonialidad y modernidad/racionalidad. *Perú Indígena* 13 (29): 11-20.
- Reed, Adolph 2018 Anti racism: a neoliberal alternative to a left. *Dialectical Anthropology* 42: 105- 115.
- Roseberry, William 2002 Understanding Capitalism—Historically, Structurally, Spatially IN David Nugent (Editor) *Locating Capitalism in Time and Space. Global Restructurings, Politics, and Identity*. Stanford University Press, Stanford. Pp: 61- 79.
- Roseberry, William nd For Local Political Reasons: An Ethnographic Sensibility and the Study of Politics in Mexico. Unpublished Manuscript, New School for Social Research. Personal copy handled in class in 1998.

- Saldivar Tanaka, Emiko 2022 La inocencia mestiza en tiempos de la 4T *Estudios Sociológicos* XL: 11-28.
- Scott, David 2004 *Conscripts of Modernity. The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment*. Duke University Press, Durham.
- Smith, Gavin 2018 Elusive Relations. Distant, Intimate, and Hostile. *Current Anthropology* 59 (3):
- Stavenhagen, Rodolfo 1969. Siglo XXI, México.
- Stephen, Lynn 2002 *¡Zapata Lives! Histories and Cultural Politics in Southern Mexico*. University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Vasconcelos, José 1948 *La raza cósmica. Misión de la raza iberoamericana*. Espasa, México.
- Vázquez León, Luis 2014 *Historia de la etnología. La antropología sociocultural en México*. Primer Círculo, México.
- Vermeulen, Han F. 2015 *Before Boas. The Genesis of Ethnography and Ethnology in the German Enlightenment*. University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln.
- Warman et al 1969 *De eso que llaman antropología mexicana*. Comité de Publicaciones de los Alumnos de la ENAH, Ciudad de México.
- Warman, Arturo 1976 *...y venimos a contradecir. Los campesinos de Morelos y el Estado nacional*. SEP, México.
- Williams, Raymond 1977 *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford University Press.
- Wolf, Eric 1959 *Sons of the Shaking Earth*. The University of Chicago Press.
- Womack, John 1999 *Rebellion in Chiapas: A Historical Reader*. The Free Press, New York.
- Žižek, Slavoj 1989 *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. Verso, London.

Acknowledgements

I want to thank Dorothy Louise Zinn and Martin Zillinger for the invitation to participate in the series, stimulating the organization of ideas. Also, to my fellows in the Power, Class, and Culture (“intensification”) proseminar in Puebla. Arlene Sánchez García, Carolina Vázquez Moreno, Monserrat Hernández Sánchez, Christian Pacheco Gómez, and Ulises Villafuerte Guillen read a preliminary version providing valuable comments for its improvement. This by no means divides the responsibility and mistakes that are solely mine to atone for.

Endnote

Reification

Reify <Transitive verb> [reified, -reifying, reifies]: To regard or treat (an abstraction) as if it had concrete or material existence. Reification (noun) reifier (noun). *The American Heritage Dictionary* (Second College Edition) 1982 Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston Pp: 1042.

Substantiality (3) Verbs (5): embody, incarnate, materialize, body, forth, lend, substance to, reify, entify, hypostatize, solidify, concretize. Entry 3.5, *Roget's International Thesaurus* 1911 Four Edition Revised by Robert L. Chapman Harper Row, New York, Pp: 2.