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Different Anthropologies: The State and the People

It is fundamental to have knowledge of the past and the present in the context of the time scales of the different first communities, who have lived throughout history outside Western traditions and have suffered the domination and destruction of their centuries-old ways of life, outside of the idea of progress, labor, and capital. Invasions, conquests, and colonization led the first peoples' cultures to gradual destruction at the hands of the expansion of the mercantilist world and the imposition of new ways of life that brought slavery, servitude, and subservience.

In our country, history has not changed much since the sixteenth century. The different policies of the Spanish empire, during colonial times, Mexico after independence, and until today had their dose of progress for the original cultures, with the support of the Catholic Church. To a large extent, this justification of "progress" found one of its origins in the Council of Trent (1550), where those present carried on theological and philosophical discussions

to determine whether the Indians recently discovered in the Americas were men or not.¹ Later, the different discourses definitely were taken on board as just causes for war and the need to civilize or exterminate; all this in different religious and military orders.

The extension of the empire to the colonies also required military, religious, and colonial administrative services that could be seen and described, beyond the spiritual conquest, including the material domination of production through the brutality imposed by the colonial governments to favor their empires. From that moment on, the past acquires a dual link that the civilizing processes would inscribe in their writings: on the one hand, Western history, and on the other, those who have no history and must be civilized; in our particular case, the cultures from the overseas possessions were part of that process.

From that starting point, it is my opinion that the West went wild in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in the Americas, because to be able to register these cultures, it had to implement discourses that could situate these first peoples in history—in Africa and Asia, the processes were more or less similar with regard to the plunder

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of goods and territories from the European-dominated groups. Those Indians must have come from one of the lost tribes of Israel to be able to legitimately be considered under the category of men, even if they were still savages because they had lost their religious sense. The eighteenth century revealed the superiority and Caucasian decline in Europe. The sense of historicity is based on the construction of a theoretical, un-empirical apparatus that framed the supremacy of the white world; published works such as those by Jean-Sylvain Bailly, Georges Louis Leclerc Buffon, and Joseph Arthur de Gobineau show this. In that sense, the knowledge acquired slowly formed a reading based above all on philosophical discussion, which led to the emerging idea of the possibility that the races in the world had experienced, through migrations and sexual and symbolic exchanges, processes that would bring forth those cultures' moments of splendor and subsequent decline. That deterioration would lead to historic moments of hopelessness for the individuals who lived through them.

Aftertastes of those moments in ancient history are founded in the old Euro-Asian myths in the Northern Hemisphere. The empirical demonstrations are very unclear and charged with imaginaries, and they turn into readings and writings that form the basis above all for the idea of the privileged status of being Western. This surrounding movement intertwines in a dichotomy between race and mixed race that would undoubtedly spawn the decadence of cultures. By following this postulate, Western discourse leads down a path that brings colonialism to the fore as the place where domination and supremacy give meaning to exploitation; or, in other words, colonialism leaves its mark to show that civilization, in all its splendor, can only be found in the Western world. This opens up the vein of superiority with regard to first peoples and mixed races, given that the weak and not the Westerners are situated on an inferior level, therefore posing the Christian necessity of removing them from that

place to make it possible for them to one day be civilized. But, meanwhile, the hard work of that endeavor—above all a Christian endeavor—lies in attempting to save their souls, both in the spiritual and the material worlds, through the progress-seeking work that will dignify their lives.

In addition, romanticism about the origins of humanity goes hand in hand with religious beliefs and the birth of scientific rationalism, which clashed with creationist thought, limiting and narrowing and simultaneously creating the possibility of constructing pragmatic elements that unify the symbolic processes with practical ones. This mobility found its form in the descriptions of the other, which formalized the meaning of an understanding whose only real end is the knowledge of the differences that can be utilized in the construction of new forms of subjection. This network of actions created the ethnographic order as a principle, as the first-hand source that provided access to another culture; all this at the service of the imperial state and the systems of exploitation, work, and overseas trade.

The situation did not change very much over time, above all with the expansion of the different Western empires that took on the task of the conquest and extermination of the local groups in different parts of the world, whether the Americas, Africa, Asia, or Oceania. Wherever they were, they enslaved and stole natural resources to the benefit of progress, of their civilization, and the maintenance of the oppressive forces that impeded any kind of change. These first thinkers were born under the principle of colonial administrators who described the others as objects that could be considered sub-human, as beasts of burden who, to be civilized and occupy a place in the spectrum of linear evolution—although on a lower level to that of Western Man—had to go through the harsh process of labor, subjection, and servility.

The Role of Anthropology

Anthropology has an important place in the context of colonialism that can be understood as ways of sketching political-expansionist policies and describing new lands and resources, as well as academic processes that scientifically legitimize comparative points demonstrating the existence of that difference. So, we can argue three forms of explanation:

1. Colonial anthropology administered the land of the other after the invasion, conquest, and colonization. It appropriated its place in the production of raw materials that would pass over to the empire, recognizing the role of the other as the knower of his/her territory. Anthropologists worked on an ethnography of the recognition of these groups based on their usages and customs, their mythology, their productive systems, and their kinship relations, accompanied by political relationships and possible conflicts. This ethnographic knowledge materialized in the control of different ethnic groups by the empire. This anthropology served colonial interests as a platform indicating the geopolitical movements that had to be made to be able to control the dominated territories.
2. The anthropology carried out in libraries and cubicles has as its main function the mythical, ancestral recognition of different human groups to be able to compare them, without establishing historic, temporal, or geographical scales. This kind of very erudite bibliographical work corresponds to legitimizing anthropological knowledge as a significant entity or fantasy that delimits the possible differences between one culture and others, to give a privileged place to the Western world and the empires. Based on this perspective, anthropologists describe a large number of ethnic groups throughout the world to be able to compare them outside their historical contexts. With this, writing in a book becomes part of realities that are outside any social continuity.

In addition, a wide range of theoretical works about the anthropological sciences is rooted in two levels: the first, the authors' field experiences, and, second, theories about the works of other authors.

3. Anthropology was carried out in different field expeditions, mainly in the colonial world, in societies without Western writing systems, with a low civilization profile, that were immersed in savagery, but whose lands held the raw materials that the empire needs. These field expeditions were carried out in places where information was needed to find territories to be exploited, but also in strategic locations that served to build artificial borders between the different entities. These international borders divided ethnic groups and in many cases turned them

into enemies. This arbitrary separation benefitted the imperial powers, which used their treaties to divide the world up until well into the twentieth century and even today. Colonialism continues to exist in more sophisticated forms through, for example, slave labor in post-capitalist societies.

The past and the present crisscross in the spectrum of capitalism. The nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries have to a certain extent shown us that human existence in its different ethnic and national contexts, as well as the genotype and phenotype, are proof that whoever possesses the means to disqualify the other and negate his/her diversity is also the owner of the means of production. This strong but simple argument situates the sectors that hold the means of production and that also have the authorization of the national states that support them in a rhetorical discourse close to barbarism. Some of the forms of discrimination that have occurred until recently on the long road of historical events can be clarified in this history; the histories of inequality, poverty, and destruction of the other are part of the work carried out by the empires of the past and the present, as we will see here.

Some of the ways in which colonial power materializes in subject peoples can be seen in concrete cases: the living museums in Europe, the United States, and Argentina, where different ethnic groups, above all African, were exhibited for European societies, and the ethnological museums where dried humans were displayed in "their natural habitat." All these collections were exhibited in the great Western capitals. A few concrete examples should be referred to: indigenous "prisoners of science" in Buenos Aires in the nineteenth century; Inayakal, the local strongman, displayed alive in the museum of natural sciences in La Plata, Argentina, in 1888; the human zoos in Europe and the United States from 1870 to 1930; the Paris Zoological Acclimation Garden between 1872 and 1912; and New York's Bronx Zoo in 1906, where racist amateur anthropologist Madison Grant put a pigmy on display together with an orangutan under a sign reading "The Missing Link."

The grotesque example of several cases in the past established the reference point of Western supremacy and that anything non-white was condemned to become an inferior species of human comparable to the primates;

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thus, museums guided the way in framing the inferior subjects. In this sense, the object of study was presented in two ways: the first as a living museum, where a human zoo was presented as the registry of superiority showing non-Western persons in the artifice to manufacture the *habitus* in which they were found in the places of origin, emphasizing their primitivism. The second conceptual level they were presented on was as already dead: through their taxidermy, they were exhibited as a show in a museum, representing the habitat had they occupied when alive. The exotic was underlined here to ensure the act of white, Western supremacy in the empire and also in the colonies that presumed to be Caucasian outside the borders of the empire.

On the other hand, there was also an academic anthropology that discussed first in theory and then through fieldwork, the ethnographic description based on two points of view: 1) for academic ends, and 2) with political biases. Among the most important of the former are the works of Edward Burnett Tylor, Bronislaw Malinowski, and Claude Levi-Strauss. Those with the political bent focused more emphatically on the English-language anthropology of Reginald Radcliffe-Brown, Margaret Mead, and Ruth Benedict, among the most important, not to mention the new generations.

In Mexico, anthropology took its distance from the colonialist spectrum, except for a few foreign expeditions doing fieldwork, primarily in the areas of archaeology, ethnology, and linguistics, in the late nineteenth century and during the twentieth century until the expulsion of the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL). Anthropology had a fundamental reason for being after the 1910 Revolution to the extent that it aided in constructing a vision of Mexico that became a reason of state, forming a comprehensive perspective. That is to say, archaeology; physical, social, and linguistic anthropology; ethnology; and ethnohistory made up the anthropological sciences.

Until relatively recently, archaeology occupied a privileged place in the study of the areas of high impact (pre-Hispanic, monumental cities like Teotihuacán, Chichen Itzá, and Palenque, among others). This is because the glorious, monumental past of the great cultures was enshrined in the construction of the national identity. Meanwhile, the other important point would be the projects about *indigenismo*, and with that, the construction of institutions that backed research in the anthropological sciences in Mexico. Among the anthropologists with this state vision were Alfonso Caso, Ricardo Pozas, and Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, among others.

The construction of the country through the national identity represented the process of validation of the nation, to ensure continuity between the past and the present that would legitimize the state to obtain a place of privilege for the political party in control. This line made it possible to regulate the construction of the country by a social imaginary that indicated that everything in the past was better and profoundly glorious. Its descendants, the indigenous, had lost their way, but the state situated them in the terrain of what was Mexican—we are all Mexicans—to attempt to erase each group's ethnic identity. With that, nationalism took its place of privilege in the monumental past, but also in the present, by maintaining the idea that all of those born in Mexico are Mexican without any distinction among them at all.² This meant that the political discourse of identity and national culture recognized a single country, one language (Spanish), a single glorious past due to the ancestral cultures, and a modern country due to the post-Revolutionary present, with the same opportunities for all its citizens. This last part slipped up profoundly in the terrain of inequalities and the suppression of rights and guarantees for many of them. Thus, Mexico constructed its vision of a nation to a great extent amidst monumental archaeology, *indigenista* anthropology, and the sense of oneness under a state party.

We could say that this process came to an end in the administration of Salinas de Gortari, who in one term dismantled the firm aim of a national state to turn it into a corporation and give rise to never-ending policies of dismantling government obligations, leaving only its rights. This procedure led to the end of national heritage as it had been conceived in the past; the new forms led to its commercialization; plunder came on the scene and anthropology stopped being a reason of state; the great projects

lost their funding and came mainly under the custodianship of a declining National Institute for Anthropology and History (INAH) and the public universities.

The neoliberal model in the context of the imaginings of capitalist progress replaced the previous ideology, redefining the concept of nationalism as reactionary because it was no longer correct to defend international or regional borders: the territories inside the borders of the nation could be sold to the highest bidder, no matter where in the world they were; the law of supply and demand also went to the highest bidder, and, with that, the state rid itself of its fundamental obligations by auctioning them off. In this context, cultural diversity emerged without a defined project, as did the new need to reconstruct the nation; and anthropology had to take on a new connotation: that is, an anthropology from the roots of society, from below.

We must “give the floor to the peoples themselves . . . , listen to them through their intellectuals (decolonizing our interpretative perspective with regard to them,” says Heriberto Ruiz Ponce.³ This situates us in an anthropology

of shared meanings, from which the differences take on meaning through the interlocution between the anthropologist and the person he/she is dialoguing with. Democracy is established between the different forms of accessing the power of knowledge. For the first time in the history of anthropology, we can say that the decolonization of discourses happens in practice, and this will lead us to determine knowledge shared through a common life. ■■

Notes

- 1 Mercedes Serna, ed., “Introducción: políticas de la conquista,” *La conquista del Nuevo Mundo. Textos y documentos de la aventura americana*, Clásicos Castalia. Documentos siglo XVI (Madrid: Castalia, 2012), p. 37.
- 2 José Antonio Fernández de Rota, *Nacionalismo, cultura y tradición* (Barcelona: Anthropos, 2005), p. 58.
- 3 Heriberto Ruiz Ponce, *Resistencia epistémica. Intelligentsia e identidad política en el proyecto descolonial ñuu savi* (Mexico City: Universidad Autónoma Benito Juárez de Oaxaca / IIA, PUC, UNAM / Juan Pablos Editor, 2017), p. 133.



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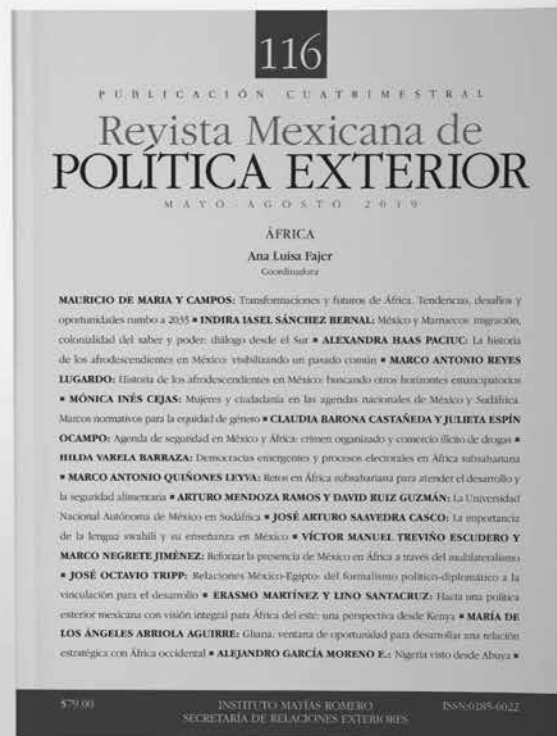
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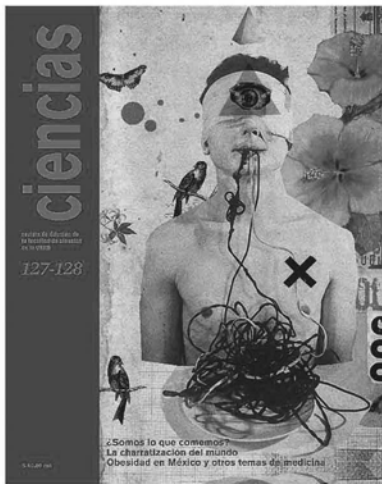
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