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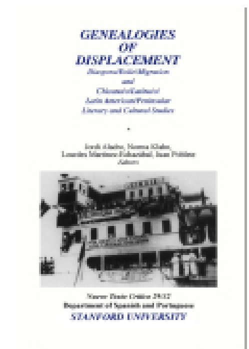

Nuevo Texto Crítico, Año XV-XVI, Número 29/32, 2002-2003, pp. 121-127 (Article)

Published by Nuevo Texto Crítico
DOI: https://doi.org/10.1353/ntc.2002.0009

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THE IMPACT OF BRITISH SOCIALISM ON LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES

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Towards the end of the Second World War, Churchill and the Conservative element in the Coalition Government that then ruled Britain came to contemplate the prospect of the defeat that they in fact sustained in the first post-war election, in 1945. In a vain populist effort to ward off this defeat, they passed the famous Education Act of 1944, which effectively was the first to give most people in Britain access to higher learning. As such, it was enthusiastically implemented by Atlee's Socialist government, after the Labour Party won that election (Britain then being economically punished by the US for their democratic choice). Over the next ten to fifteen years, despite Churchill's eventual victory in 1951, the ideals of this Act were carried through into the planning for and founding of the new Universities, which more than doubled the national total. Only with the emergence of New Toryism under Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s were radical attempts made to turn the clock back to pre-1944, Thatcher herself having ironically been perhaps the Act's most conspicuous beneficiary: she gained two doctorates entirely at public expense, only then to deny that possibility to any one else.

The 1944 Act and the New Universities of the 1960s brought with them new understandings of academic mission, discipline and subject area, and these proved especially relevant to readings of Latin America. This was thanks also to the setting up of the Parry centres, likewise in the 1960s, to encourage research and teaching in that area. Local twists were given to the general notion of area studies. As the main Parry Centre, the London Institute diverged from the traditional City alignments of Canning and Chatham House, and the Bank of London and South America (BOLSA). At Sussex, Latin America became the focus of 'development' theory, while at East Anglia Gunder Frank promoted his ideas of Dependency. In some cases these trends went so far as to raise a definite challenge to the implicit hegemonic model typical of the US and the metropolis. At Warwick, a hemispheric framework was set up, thanks to Alistair Hennessey, which presupposed as superfluous Lewis Hanke's question: "Do the Americas have a common history?", especially insofar as that common history could be understood to antedate the European invasion. In this arrangement, the United States itself was treated as an

"area" comparable to Latin America, as it was at the University of Essex. At Essex, Paul Thompson, Ernesto Laclau, Carlos Fortin, Dawn Ades and many others worked within Schools that dispensed with departments of history and lang./lit., in favour of Sociology, Government, Art Theory and Literature, an overwhelmingly productive arrangement. The interface between Art and Literature, for example, allowed for pedagogical analysis of the Mexican codices that simply was not practicable at that time at other institutions; while that between Sociology and Literature resulted in a series of internationally influential conferences, in which Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall (of Cultural Studies fame) were hallowed names. The proceedings (Barker et al. 1986) became a main reference for Latin Americanists, not least those who would later take up similar approaches in the US (Doris Sommer and José Rabasa, for instance). In all, the growth of Latin American area studies in Britain showed up the importance of academic structures as such and promoted strategies of occupying available space, in the sense discussed by Beatriz Sarlo in "Cultural Studies and Literary Criticism at the Crossroad of Values" (1999).

Further local specifics of the British situation are worth noting. Like most of the West, Britain belonged to NATO of course. But it had no Joe McCarthy, and by 1947, with the loss of India, knew itself at heart to be no longer imperial. Under Churchill especially, it bowed meekly to the US, turning Neruda back at Dover in 1952 (Neruda's exile having been prompted in the first place by the US's collusion with González Videla). Yet it certainly had nothing like the McCarren-Walter act of that year, which kept an impressive array of Latin Americans out of the US. Indeed, under Labour's Harold Wilson, the UK later welcomed Neruda, along with Carpentier and other prominent champions of the Cuban revolution. When it came to Vietnam, Britain contrived to stay out; and under Wilson it sustained a policy towards revolutionary Cuba, typified at the time by fleets of red London buses on the streets of Havana, which in practice diverged sharply from that of the US.

For all his undoubted readiness to compromise, Wilson kept sameparty faith with the active socialists and communists of 1945. Prominent among these last was Aneurin Bevan, from the South Wales mines that had been militarily invaded before the war, on Churchill's orders. The architect of much of the Welfare State, Bevan was known for his relentless assault on Tory upper-class privilege, and British subservience to US foreign policy. In this he proclaimed himself, in a startling conjunction, to be the son of Marx and Rodó, the latter being none other than the Uruguayan author of *Ariel*, remembered by many for its critique of US society (Foot 1962; San Román 2001).

To Bevan's proletarianism, we may add that curious but decidedly effectual breed of upper-class communists, the Burgess and Macleans, whose great ambition was to bring down western imperialism and foster world socialism. The last of them to be officially unmasked, already under Thatcher, was Sir Anthony Blunt, whose involvement with Latin America, particularly Mexico was facilitated by his being, amongst many other things, the Queen's art adviser, and a guest lecturer with Swan Hellenic tours (an organization itself with a pedigree both high and leftist). Blunt's fall from grace was distastefully told in the up-front Thatcherite

movie *The Whistle-blower*, starring Michael Caine). Fed by Eton and Oxford, this upper-class leftism (Alexander Cockburn; Christopher Hitchens) has sustained its discourse openly on the pages of the *New Left Review*: the summer issue of 2000 carries an extensive analysis of US relations with Cuba, by Robin Blackburn, which is perhaps the best printed source available to date in English.

Institutionally, Blunt's cohort found a particular home on the Foreign Office, then still more or less their social preserve. Before Thatcher, the F.O. spent long hours in consultation with Latin Americanists like Alistair Hennessey. It also employed such sympathizers as Stephen Clissold, author of *Latin America: a Cultural Outline* (1967), and a friend more of the Maya guerrilleros in Guatemala than of the US which invaded Guatemala in 1954 causing half a century of bloody repression.[1] Clissold drew out the telling detail that in defending their land, the Maya appealed to their 'bible', that is the *Popol vuh*, casting the US military 'advisers' in the role of the murderous, totally unprincipled lords of Xibalba. In other words, already then he was respecting the antiquity and the coherence of Maya culture, at the same time as revealing its urgent message in the modern world, in the same spirit that later guided Asturias's son 'Gaspar Ilom' and, of course, Rigoberta Menchu.

There is also the question of the propaganda machine left over from the war, and the message of friendship with the Soviets that it so effectively got across, through broadcasting and publishing more generally. There is certainly something to be said here with respect to the BBC — the inimitable World Service that became the willing host to wave after wave of left-wing refugees from Latin America; and initiatives like Penguin Books, which in the 1960s issued key volumes on the 'New Cuba' (several put together by J. M. Cohen),[2] as well as the first ever bi-lingual anthology of Latin American verse, part edited by a Cuban (Pablo Armando Fernández). These moves became an important element in encouraging other London publishers along the same lines: for example, Cape, who in the tumultuous year 1968 produced *Palabra de Guerrillero* — works by the guerrillas themselves translated by the US poet Ed Dorn— and commissioned editions of Che Guevara's *El hombre y el socialismo en Cuba*, and Regis Debray's *Révolution dans la Révolution.*

In the universities and polytechnics, these developments were strongly infused by a sense of common enterprise, and of political community or network. Since the 1960s this has been articulated formally through such bodies and publishing ventures as the Society for Latin American Studies, the Pergamon Oxford Latin American Series (which enlisted the support of a young and revolutionary Vargas Llosa), the Latin American Bureau, the publishing house Verso (set up by Jean Franco, James Dunkerley and John King), and *Travesia/Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies,* founded by Will Rowe and others in the early 1990s and generally acknowledged to be a world forum. Similarly, the World University Service coordinated the efforts of Latin Americanists from all over Britain in finding academics places and futures for the exiles fleeing Pinochet's Chile.

From the start, a further characteristic of this post-War British socialism has been not just pedagogy and dissemination, but active participation and engagement in the historical process in Latin America itself — a mode which finds antecedents in 19th-century anthropology and abolitionism. Whole platoons went to Latin America thanks not to global agencies like the Peace Corps but to individual commitment, to Castro's Cuba, Allende's Chile and Ortega's Nicaragua. They went not just to observe academically but to be involved as best they could, many of them leaving Britain altogether. The multiple links between Managua and Essex in the early 1980s, for example, impinged directly on the struggle to survive Reagan's criminal deployment of the Contras.

To this migration, Margaret Thatcher gave an ironic boost. After a decade of devastating rule, crushing the enemy without (Malvinas) and within (the Unions, especially the National Union of Mineworkers, after no less than a year of valiant resistance on their part), Thatcher had still not reduced the universities and what she saw as their obnoxious politics (she abolished tenure, reduced pay, steeply raised student fees, and stands as the only Prime Minister to date to have been denied three times the Oxford honorary doctorate customarily offered to those in that office). Her last, partly successful shot was a war of attrition and simultaneous offers of seductive early retirement deals. This tactic resulted in 1989-90 in the single largest exodus ever of full professors (more than 400) from the British system, swelling the ranks of those who work in Latin America and who carry a specific ideological message to the US and the wider world.

Mention of some particular cases may serve to round all this off, among many others who will have to be passed over summarily or unnamed: those who have worked on and in Cuba, Chile and Nicaragua (Jackie Kaye, Mike Channon, Catherine Davies, Nissa Torrents, Jackie Reiter, Maxine Molyneux, Peter Utting, Robert Pring-Mill, Catherine Davies), and who have published work that shares much in the terms proposed here (Peter Hulme, David Treece, Mike Gonzalez, Jean Stubbs, Valerie Fraser, Jon Beasley Murray). Two in particular who have migrated to the US may help to flesh out the account sketched out so far, Jean Franco and Gerald Martin. Both have consistently grounded their scholarship and teaching in a particular understanding of the social and political process, having been immensely influential in this, as their many disciples testify. They have published work which is indispensable in the longer view of the field and radically critical of earlier paradigms, then typical of history and language-literature departments, with respect to class, culture, gender, and above all the larger story of imperial oppression. They have long been at the heart of political and cultural initiatives throughout Latin America and well represent the new English-language reading of that area that announced itself in the 1960s in Britain and only later in the US.

Jean Franco is a legendary matrix. She completed her dissertation in London in the early 1960s, on a straight Hispanist topic: Angel Ganivet. But, being thoroughly in touch with Raymond Williams's thinking and with developments that would issue into Stuart Hall's pioneering Cultural Studies, she simultaneously

found ways of articulating into her work her rich and wide experience of political life in Britain, Latin America (especially Mexico and Guatemala) and Communist Italy. Her *Modern Culture of Latin America* (1967) remains a landmark and revealed scholarly possibilities scarcely suspected hitherto. Having taught in London, and at Essex (all too briefly, though long enough to invite Carlos Monsivais for a year), she went to Stanford and then Columbia, with results we all know about, and can now better consider thanks to the recent collection of her essays *Critical Passions* prepared by Mary Louise Pratt and Kathleen Newman. In their Introduction, these editors note as a core passion "an implacable critique of the depredations of capitalism, of sexual and racial hierarchy and the forms of violence that sustain them...", and go on to summarize her immense impact: "Because Franco's work does analyze, contextualize, and theorize art and politics with a rigorous attention to history, she is one of the few European and U.S. scholars whose work on Latin America is considered essential reading in Latin America" (Franco 1999:4-5)

Gerald Martin also had formative experience in Mexico and Central America, as well as the Andes (whose mining history has long been the scholarly focus of his wife Gail). He showed exemplary dedication in building up Latin American studies at Portsmouth Polytechnic, before it became a university. From there he went to Pittsburg, though thereby losing nothing in his lifelong socialist loyalties. He is unrivalled in the scope and focus of the analyses he has made of Latin American narrative (*Journeys through the Labyrinth*; Verso 1989). He has a notable capacity to deal with international modernism as such, and perhaps yet more significant, with the decisive presence of indigenous roots. It was he who for the first time in English alerted us to the parallels between Mário de Andrade's *Macunaima* (1928) and Asturias's *Leyendas de Guatemala* (1930), each indispensably indebted to native texts (the former, to Pemon narratives gathered by Koch-Grünberg; the latter, to the *Popol vuh*). Fundamental, Martin's work on Asturias has done as much as anyone's to ransom that author from the 'baroque' reading of the kind promoted by Vargas Llosa and others. He is brilliant at contextualizing the bedrock of *Hombres de maiz*, the story named after the hero 'Gaspar Ilóm' that would inspire Asturias's guerrillero son. In this and other projects, he has been the mainstay of the Unesco-supported ALLCA series. He is also a major contributor to Leslie Bethell's *A Cultural History of Latin America*, published by Cambridge University Press (1995-8), even as the Syndics were being seduced by New York and an ideology promoted by González Echevarría. Martin's achievement has been acknowledged and publicly honoured throughout Latin America, notably in Guatemala after the signing of peace accords in 1996.

Not just people but critical discourses "root and displace themselves", and physical migration is matched by that of ideas. The endeavour exemplified by Franco and Martin finds an interesting corollary in the work of many Latin Americans, a signal case being Beatriz Sarlo. Along with that of several Argentinian contemporaries, this critic has reiterated her special link with British socialism, emphasizing the concern with ethics and value (1999) expressed by Richard Hog-

gart and Raymond Williams, and before them, F. R. Leavis.[3] Her deep familiarity with the British experience might not too fancifully be read as yet another episode in that most intimate Anglo-Argentine story, which began with Rosas and Darwin and famously includes the Ocampo sisters (hence Borges) and Virginia Woolf's Bloomsbury. Yet it is of an order which exemplarily reverses the priorities of the Jockey Club. In any case, there can be no doubt about the effect that Sarlo's new readings have had locally in the River Plate arena, and within what has become the Latin American Cultural Studies debate. This much Sarlo makes clear in an interview with John Kraniauskas in the *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* (1997), as she carefully distinguishes her own approach from those of Nestor García Canclini, Jesús Martin Barbero and Aníbal Ford: "I came into the field of... let's call it cultural analysis, by the British route —through Hoggart and Williams, in the early 1970s" (1997: 86).

The wider consequences of this difference are still making themselves evident. Within cultural studies, the concern with text is clearly no more that of the mainstream, generally sociological discourse than is the conviction, shared by those she names and above all Orwell, that political responsibility cannot ultimately be divorced from the very language and syntax of speakers and writers.

It is clear that in the broader canvas of 20th century, the exile and displacement of certain British academics and ideas can hardly be billed as a major event. This story had nothing whatsoever of the pain inseparable from those driven from Spain by the Fascists, or from Central American and Southern Cone dictatorships habitually supported by the US. What is offered is more like a record that is most often made invisible in the hygienic, a-politics of US academia or positively drowned out by forces of the right that have gained the highground under Thatcher and Reagan and those responsible for the neo-liberal disaster of today.

NOTES

1. This event also led to the downfall of a British Latin Americanist working in the US. When in charge of Bolivar House and the Latin American Center at Stanford in the early 1960s, the Ronald Hilton encouraged students to learn about and from the press in Latin America and to compile a regular digest of main news items. It was this policy that is reported to have led to his abrupt dismissal when a item appeared on how Cuban exiles were being trained by US military in Guatemala. A nonagenarian, he is today a fellow of the Hoover Institute.
2. In its concern with current international politics, Penguin had issued volumes on major topics in the 1930s, the time when Gollancz's Left Book Club also flourished.
3. As some of his successors acknowledge, George Orwell pioneered this kind of sociology of literature, in essays on the popular press in the 1930s, "Boys Weeklies," for example.

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