

Cancino, Hugo (Hrsg.): *Los intelectuales latinoamericanos entre la modernidad y la tradición, siglos XIX y XX*. Madrid: Vervuert Verlag 2004. ISBN: 8-4848-9127-5; 150 S.

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This is a collection of variegated essays analyzing the ideas of a wide range of Latin American intellectuals from the nineteenth century to the present. It takes up the perspective of the opposition between modernity and tradition. It is a very diverse group of authors, ranging from Lucas Alamán (Mexico) and Leôncio Basbaum (Brazil) to Mario Vargas Llosa (Peru), which comes under scrutiny in this volume. Nevertheless they have one thing in common and that is that they share the vocation to propel progress and encourage the modernization of local societies and cultures.

The first essay by Guillermo Zermeño looks for the origins of a scientific view on history in Mexico. Differing from what is usually stated, namely that these origins are linked to the positivist movement which accompanied the Porfirian regime, he considers an earlier period, right after the American occupation of Mexico, to be decisive. The key figures for that development were conservative leaders, particularly Lucas Alamán (1792-1853) and José Justo de la Cortina (1799-1860), who for the first time in that country systematically appealed to statistics and quantitative data as a tool for the reconstruction of the past. Yet, as Zermeño shows, the aim of founding their historical discourse on an objective basis did not exclude the goal of serving present national interests as they understood them.

The following chapter by Carmen L. Bohórquez deals with the Venezuelan writer Laureano Vallenilla Lanz (1870-1936). Bohórquez tries to understand how Vallenilla Lanz's attempt to elaborate a scientific method for the study of societies went along with his role as an official ideologue of the regime imposed in 1910 by Juan Vicente Gómez. What in her perspective represents the link in this apparent antagonism is a determinist view of history. This vision of history

is based on the idea that there existed a disintegrative spontaneous impulse present in local societies and rooted, as Vallenilla Lanz believed, in the colonial past. According to him, that trend was simultaneously countervailed by another current of integration. However, this latter, in order to be effective, demanded the figure of a caudillo around which it could cohere. To abstain from the clearly negative political consequences allows to consider Vallenilla Lanz's fundamental intellectual contribution: understanding history as a process and emphasizing the need to develop an American criterion to comprehend its specific local reality.

Cesia Hirschbein stresses, in turn, the contributions of three other Venezuelan intellectuals: Lisandro Alvarado (1858-1929), who intended to apply the methods of natural sciences to fields of the humanities; Manuel Díaz Rodríguez (1871-1935), who, at the same time as Alvarado, introduced new aesthetic patterns into a literary canon, which up to that moment had been dominated by romanticism; and Rufino Blanco-Fombona (1874-1944), who in his essayistic production provided key elements for the comprehension of modernism in Latin America. The common drive behind these three authors is the goal to institute in the region the „Empire of Reason“ The paradox lies in the fact that they would appeal to liberal values and put them to the service of Gómez's dictatorship. Yet, Hirschbein remarks, they helped to awake the consciousness of a Latin American identity, and, in this fashion, they would anticipate – and, in some ways, would prepare – the boom.

Hugo Cancino unravels the reactive attitude adopted by the Catholic Church in Chile regarding the spreading liberalism during the second half of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century. Questioning a widespread image, that was forged especially during the years of Pinochet's dictatorship and that presented the church as a defender of democracy and human rights, Cancino shows that in the period under consideration the local Church closely followed the reactionary orientations that came from Rome. The subsequent ideological turn of the Chilean episcopate was, in a great part, as

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well a result of external influences. This is particularly true for the reorientation of the Vatican towards a new social doctrine after WWII.

Lucia Maria Paschoal Guimarães discusses Licínio Cardoso's essay *À margem da história da República*, which forms part of a collective work containing contributions representative for Brazilian intellectuals in the 1920ies. This volume was published in 1924 by Cardoso himself under the same title as the mentioned essay. This essay was intended to make a balance of the republican experience in Brazil since its proclamation in 1889. In his review of the recent past Cardoso stresses the country's lack of national coherence. He considered this to be a consequence of the disintegration of the imperial order with the abolition of slavery, that the Republic persistently failed to solve. This problem was at the basis of his project for an organic idealism, which anticipated motifs taken up again later when the *Estado Novo* was founded.

Nanci Leonzo uses the catalogue of Eduardo Prado's (1860-1901) personal library as a historical source for the reconstruction to rebuild an intellectual world, the elegant world in which that member of a prominent family from São Paulo was educated. Besides the predictable predominance of books with a clearly catholic bias Leonzo discovers the rather heterogeneous and, in many senses, eclectic universe of readings that oriented the author of *A Ilusão Americana*. This all-embracing cultural world had, finally, to find its expression in a moderate tone, with plenty of nuances articulating his critical perspective on the culture of his time. Nevertheless, in the way, he scorned this culture, one can still discover a typically aristocratic disdain for the values of modernity.

Lená Medeiros de Menezes follows the political trajectory of a thinker and militant, Leôncio Basbaum. He rose to the position of General Secretary of the Brazilian Communist Youth in 1927. Later he became engaged in a bitter dispute with the national leadership of the party headed by Luís Carlos Prestes. The central point of his criticism was linked to the obreirista orientation of the leadership. Furthermore he despised the military style of leadership. Ultimately, states Menezes, at

the heart of this debate was a question never solved, and that is the question of the place and the role of intellectuals in militant political organizations.

Pablo Rolando R. Cristoffanini investigates the process leading to Mario Vargas Llosa's recent ideological turn. C. considers as its basis Vargas Llosa's perspective on the Latin American reality that already had been present in the years of the writer's leftist affiliation. It combined political optimism with economic pessimism. His political twist, however, is expressed by the fact that he would now identify internal causes as the ultimate reason of the region's problems, nourishing his economic pessimism, while he had stressed the external ones in an earlier period. The anti-imperialist perspectives would now appear to him as merely revealing a typical local complex of being victims with its roots lying in the time of the Conquista. Yet, his discourse still has more in common with the leftist views he currently combats: a totalizing perspective which a priori rejects the legitimacy of any other option than his own.

Finally, Rogelio de la Mora V. analyzes the changes which occurred in the way Mexican intellectuals interpreted and criticized their society during the decades since 1968. His starting point, of course, is the massacre or Tlatelolco, and, particularly, Octavio Paz's role as a symbol of the critical intellectual in those years. Paz's career reveals the importance of the world of literary journals for the articulation of a critical discourse about the regime. Eventually he found a wide audience, conferring, moreover, undisputed moral authority to the intellectual figures around whom that world gravitated. The emergence of the EZLN brought about, in turn, a new kind of intellectual, which changes the scenery of Mexico city for that of Chiapas. It displaced the world of letters of the urban elite and located it instead in the peasant masses. Its massive use of the Internet, however, allows that movement to address a global audience, thus connecting it with a mass of followers spread all over the world and immediately communicating its messages to the centers of cultural production. In turn, the investigation process of the 1968 events, which, for the first time in that

country forced a former president to appear before a court, shows another distinguishing feature of the Mexican intellectual elite in the last decade and a half. This would now severely cut its formerly close ties with the State and would start pursuing its political action preferably from the bosom of a new kind of organizations that since then have emerged: the NGOs. In fact, these organizations were the ones which headed the demand for justice regarding the violation of human rights by the PRI regime.

In the introduction Hugo Cancino tries to define what we should understand, in this context, by Modernity. As he says, the term refers to „the ideological, cultural and civilizational movement that reached its peak in the discourse of the philosophy of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. It“, he clarifies, „plunges its remote roots in the Renaissance and the Reform.“ But the immense variety of perspectives taken by these essays clearly challenges any attempt for conceptually fixing the sense of „Modernity“. There are no essential, permanent features which could provide a definite meaning for that term. Nevertheless the fact remains that the dichotomy of „tradition“ and „modernity“ is a central point in almost every discourse about Latin American reality. This seems to force us to turn our sight towards that very analytical framework and to convert the antinomy between tradition and modernity, from a premise, into an object of historical analysis itself.

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