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Reseña de "Imperial Archipelago: Representation and Rule in the Insular Territories under U.S.
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y muy educativo, al igual que aquellos interesados en la Historia de la medicina y la de la salud pública.

Notas

- ¹ “The Destruction of Sennacharib”, versos 1-3 de Lord Byron.
- ² Tucídides comentó sobre la importancia de una epidemia en Atenas sobre la guerra del Peloponeso. La peste se ha visto como uno de los eventos precursores del capitalismo y afectó seriamente la relación entre siervos y señores. La viruela fue el mejor aliado de Hernán Cortés en Tenochtitlán y la fiebre amarilla ayudó a derrotar las fuerzas francesas en Haití.

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Imperial Archipelago studies what Thompson denominates as the “U.S. Imperial archipelago” or “the island territories under U.S. military and political dominion after 1898, namely Cuba, Guam, Hawai’i,

the Philippines and Puerto Rico” (p. 1). Thompson takes a deceptively simple question as the point of departure of his study: why were some territories annexed (Hawai’i) while others became independent (Cuba and the Philippines) or territories of the U.S. (Puerto Rico, Guam)? How can we explain the different political status obtained by each one of these islands in the context of the U.S. imperial archipelago? The main contention of this book is that through discourse and visual analysis of the available documentation it is possible to discern the particular political strategy followed by the United States to conceive their relationship with these countries.

This book continues Thompson’s interest in visual studies in the context of colonial historical studies that is illustrated so well in his previous book *Nuestra Isla y su gente: La construcción del “otro” puertorriqueño en Our Islands and Their People* (1995). *Imperial Archipelago* is a more developed project that is composed of one introduction, six chapters, a conclusion and a bibliography. The Introduction locates the project of the book in the context of the historical development of nations in Caribbean, Atlantic, South Asian, American and Latin American frameworks, as well as in historical and postcolonial studies. Thompson’s work converses with postcolonial studies, particularly with Edward Said’s foundational definition of “colonial discourse” as “those representations, comprised of symbols, meanings and propositions, that create subject peoples and justify imperial rule over them” (p. 3). Yet in this book the author proposes a necessary contextualization and historical grounding for colonial discourse analysis, as well as studies of the representation of imperial domination.

The first chapter argues that the different historical contexts, political debates, cultures and inhabitants found in each one of these dependencies elicited a different response from the U.S. Thompson then proposes two modalities of rule used by the U.S. to confront the situation of each one of these countries: “dichotomous representation of difference” vs. “hierarchical differentiation.” The first one constructed the natives of these islands as alien people, generally inferior to the imperial rulers, and thus appropriate for imperial domination. The second strategy elaborates distinctions among subject peoples, establishing which countries were superior to others and in terms of what. This chapter ends by identifying the corpus used to conduct the comparative study of the different archipelagic overseas possessions, which includes photographs from travelogue books, graphic and verbal representations of the peoples and landscapes found in the U.S. imperial archipelago, and finally legal debates about the political future of these islands in the context of the U.S. imperial expansion. Most of the primary materials consulted in this study were produced between 1899 and 1906, and the book ends with an

excellent bibliography of primary and secondary materials.

Chapter 2 analyzes the representation of women from Puerto Rico, Cuba, Hawai'i and the Philippines, using photographs as the main source of analysis. Thompson uses the masculinization of the U.S. and the feminization of the insular colonies as a point of departure for the visual analysis proposed in the rest of the chapter. He then compares the representation of Puerto Rican, Cuban, Hawaiian and Philippine women and men and links it to the political outcome of each one of these countries in their relationship with the U.S. For example, Puerto Rican women are depicted as mostly of mixed race and attractive, and willing to work, while Cuban women are represented as virtuous, beautiful and heroic. The Hawaiian women are depicted as "beautiful, passionate, uninhibited, happy, hospitable and kind" (p. 66) yet they often can have defiant poses and attitudes. Finally, Philippine women are represented differently depending on their social background; educated women are wonderfully beautiful while poor women are ugly and resentful. Interestingly enough, Philippine women are often described as aloof and unreadable, most probably relying on what Homi Bhabha has described as the stereotypical construction of the colonial other, and that Edward Said has linked to "Orientalists" stereotypes. Thompson uses the representation of each gender as a synecdoche of the imperial conceptualization of each one of these insular possessions, so Cuban and Philippine women are deemed capable of self-government and independence, Hawaiian women are conceived as assimilable to the United States, and Puerto Rican women and men seem to be in need of imperial supervision.

The third chapter addresses the process of racialization of colonial difference by analyzing descriptions of Cubans, Puerto Ricans, Hawaiians and Filipinos in terms of race. In each one of the cases, race is used to express the particular anxieties and plans that the U.S. had with each insular possession. Cuba, for example had a white upper class that deemed capable of governing the country and its low class darker sectors. Puerto Rico, on the other hand, had an educated white class closely controlled by the Spanish, and as a result the local population was poor, uneducated and unfamiliar with the principles of self-government. In the case of Hawai'i, Thompson mentions the photographic campaigns produced by Hawaiian monarchs to justify their capability to become independent. Finally, the Philippines are represented not as a homogeneous nation, but as an incomprehensible, volatile and unpredictable set of tribes, races and religious communities.

Chapter 4 then analyzes the different projects of Americanization that were designed to deal with each one of these insular possessions. Given that the U.S. had to civilize and educate the "infantilized" populations of each one of these countries without settling in any of these

insular territories, the process of Americanization was achieved using three basic strategies: capital investment in Cuba, public education and assimilation in Puerto Rico, and political tutelage in the Philippines. Thompson develops and supports each one of these arguments by close-reading several images of Cubans, Puerto Ricans and Filipinos included in *Our Islands and Their People* (1899), *Our New Possessions* (1898) and *National Geographic* (1900).

The fifth chapter examines how legal scholars, colonial administrators, the U.S. Congress and the Supreme Court conceived the context of the insular possessions, and how they answered to the question about how to rule the U.S. Imperial Archipelago. By close-reading the argumentations in favor or against the annexation of Hawai'i, or the discussion about the legal and political context of the insular cases, Thompson deconstructs the complex legal discourse devised by the United States to justify its control and rule over its insular possessions. The complexity of the legal definition of the "unincorporated territories," as well as the systematic exclusion of the Philippines from the U.S. government, legal system and even its citizenship, are all crucial clues to understand the differences in the political outcome of each country. This is the strongest chapter of this book, because it includes direct quotes from the legal documents and the actual debates in Congress about the anomalous situation of these insular possessions in the context of the imperial expansion of the United States.

Chapter 6 focuses particularly on the case of Guam, and it studies how this region, defined primarily as a naval station, is eventually conceived as a community using the metaphor of the ship, which is less than an established country yet it possesses some kind of organization. This case is included in the book to document the anomalous condition of an "unorganized territory" that serves as a counterpoint to the case of Cuba, Hawai'i, Puerto Rico and the Philippines. The book closes with a brief conclusion that compares the 5 cases studied and that offers a narrative for each one of the political statuses attained by each country.

Very recently, some historians have become interested in proposing a series of questions that articulate what they denominate as the "imperial archipelago" (Morillo Alicea 2005, and Thompson himself) or the "inter-Atlantic paradigm of colonization" (Stevens Arroyo 1992). The main contribution of this book is that it engages in what I have denominated as a *Archipelago studies*, since their scholarship engages in comparative studies of the political and historical trajectory of archipelagoes within the imperial and global world-systems. Thompson focuses on the study of the U.S. insular possessions, but his project could easily be expanded to include other imperial systems. The second contribution of the book is that it is clearly an interdisciplinary project, in which

postcolonial studies converse with cultural and historical studies. Of particular interest is Thompson's focus on visual analysis, a key contribution of his previous work to the field of Colonial Caribbean studies. Finally, the book includes several reproductions of images from a diverse range of sources, making this an engaging and compelling reading of the colonial archipelagic archive.

Imperial Archipelago is an important contribution to the study of the late nineteenth century colonial period in Cuba, Puerto Rico, Hawai'i, Guam and the Philippines. It is also a challenging disciplinary proposal that explores the productive intersections of Caribbean and American studies using discursive analysis from cultural studies with solid archival work. Most importantly, Thompson teaches us how to "see" colonialism in the insular possessions, and how to actively engage with historical documents and images to discuss the complex process of colonization and imperial expansion in the Atlantic and Pacific archipelagoes as a particular case that merits a closer analysis within Latin American, American and Caribbean postcolonial studies.

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