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## Utopias and dystopias of our History: Historiographical approximation to “the Latin American” in the Mexican social thought of the 20th century (Edmundo O’Gorman, Guillermo Bonfil Batalla and Leopoldo Zea)

Utopías y distopías de nuestra historia: aproximación historiográfica a lo latinoamericano en el pensamiento social mexicano del siglo XX (Edmundo O’Gorman, Guillermo Bonfil Batalla y Leopoldo Zea)

Julimar del Carmen Mora Silva

### ABSTRACT

The present work sought to analyze the ideas on “the Latin-American” —as historical ontologism— in the historiographical production of Edmundo O’Gorman, Guillermo Bonfil Batalla and Leopoldo Zea. In order to do so, I observed the meaning of utopia and dystopia that has been associated with the interpretation of the processes that have shaped Latin America into its present expression. The analysis of the works focused on the categories proposed by Hayden White (emplotment, argument and ideology), allowing the demonstration of ruptures and continuities in the formal attributes and intrinsic meanings of the historical discourses of the authors. The convergence of these elements consolidated an iconic conceptualization of “the Latin American” in Latin American social thought which has been valid in broad sectors of humanistic and social thinking in the present.

### KEYWORDS

Utopia; Dystopia; Latin America;

### RESUMEN

El presente trabajo buscó analizar las ideas sobre “lo latinoamericano” —como ontologismo histórico— en la producción historiográfica de Edmundo O’Gorman, Guillermo Bonfil Batalla y Leopoldo Zea. Para hacerlo, presté atención al sentido de utopía y distopía asociado a la interpretación de los procesos que han hecho de Latinoamérica su expresión en el presente. El análisis de las obras se centró en las categorías propuestas por Hayden White (trama, argumentación e ideología), las cuales permitieron establecer rupturas y continuidades en los atributos formales y sentidos intrínsecos de los discursos históricos de los autores. La convergencia de esos elementos consolidó una icónica conceptualización de “lo latinoamericano” en el pensamiento social latinoamericano que, con el pasar de los años, no ha dejado de tener vigencia en amplios sectores del pensamiento humanístico y social hasta el presente.

### PALABRAS CLAVE

Utopía; Distopía; América Latina;

In the world of utopia, the differences of character that arise from the climate, the language, the traditions should not disappear... all these differences, instead of meaning division [...] should be combined as different nuances of human unity. Never the uniformity, ideal of sterile imperialism, but unity as a harmony of the many voices of the people (HENRÍQUEZ UREÑA 1985, p. 8).

“The Latin American” and the multiplicity of meanings through which the term can be understood, as any identity construct, is composed of an extensive network of meanings that is plotted in consciousness through experience and the influence of discourses promoted from multiple axes of power. The judgments on this issue brought about ambivalences that placed the term in a duel of ideologies where history, as an interpretation of the past, acted as a legitimating /challenging voice to the ideological projects to be built, since they demanded a distinction between what needed reformation or what should remain in relation to its ontologism. This type of discussion was intensified in political contexts, as was the case of the Latin American independences at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and of the Mexican Revolution of 1910, as will be seen later. The focus of this work was the utopian and dystopian character assigned to the Latin American issue in the theoretical and historiographical production of three Mexican thinkers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: Edmundo O’Gorman, Guillermo Bonfil Batalla and Leopoldo Zea. This choice was due to the role they played in the post-revolutionary Mexican intellectuality, as well as to the repertoire of ideas and subjectivities (philosophical, artistic, literary, etc.) that were framed in the criticism and complexity of their thoughts. Their concern was the consequence of the political and social movements that took place in the continent at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These authors became, subsequently, a reference for the conceptualization of “the Latin American” in multiple spheres of humanistic and social knowledge, starting with history, moving up through philosophy and, finally, the Latin Americanist sociology and anthropology. Nowadays, we can assert that these authors and their historiographical production forged the bases of a singular critique to coloniality that, far from losing validity, has changed in time, gaining force in an important sector of the contemporary social thought.

## Where the waters run, "the Latin American" on the verge of the 20<sup>th</sup> century

If something defines Man, as it has been said, it is history. The history that gives meaning to what has been done, what is done and what can continue to be done. This is past, present, and future. Man is what he has been, what he is and what he can become (ZEA 1976, p. 17).

The reflections on "the Americas" as a political project arose from the first experiences of inter-ethnic contact in the continent, at which moment otherness shocked the foundations of everything known by the West. The first representations of "the Americas" were far from having a univocal character because the "encounter" resulted in ruptures of western knowledge which, after the contact, challenged a time and a space that did not have a category to define this new reality (AMODIO 1993). This fact was expressed in the denominations given to what we know today as "the Americas", a historically polysemic notion. The multiplicity of interests and subjectivities that served as a prelude to the attempts to define its reality explains the reason why the authors demanded the right to intervene on their object. In this framework, the historiographical discussion constituted a duel of ideas capable of explaining the present and channeling the future. Hence, the importance of the utopian and dystopian meaning assigned to the past and the events that could have arisen from the exercises of historical interpretation.

The periodization of the ideas on "the Americas" proposed by Ardao (1980) illustrates well the links that attached "American" denominations to the thought which,<sup>1</sup> regarding its concept was built in different historical moments. *The Indies*, as an inaccurate idea of what had been discovered, expressed the impossibility of defining "the American" without resorting to signifiers of the doctrines that led to the search of lands to be conquered at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The first concepts of "the American" were marked by the most immediate referent of otherness known to Europe: orientalism and, equally important, by the

*1 - "America" / "American" / "the American" is understood as synonymous with "the Americas" in the period prior to contemporaneity, where "the American" (North America / USA) differs from "the Latin American".*

previous conceptions of what was then expected to be found in the transatlantic voyage undertaken by Columbus in 1492. Continuously, the idea of a *New World* evidenced the originality of this context. Nevertheless, it would be a sort of transition to the emergence of *America* as a definitive enunciation of a novelty without a name, which was concealed in the two previous precepts. With "*the Americas*", the foundations of the colonial enterprise on the continent were laid, determining the beginning of its domination once the feeling of bewilderment caused by the "encounter" was overcome.

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there were many movements that tried to define "the Latin American" through prose, novel, essay, history, sociology, anthropology and philosophy. Such a situation demonstrated the great concern that the Latin American issue originated in the intellectual work of this period. Although the fact was not new, the political course of the century demanded a reconfiguration of the criteria that explained the intrinsic properties of "the Latin American" conceptualization. Regional events such as the Spanish-American War of 1898, the Mexican Revolution of 1910, the Brazilian Modernist Revolution of the 20s, the student insurrections of Venezuela in 1928, the Salvadoran peasant movement of the 1930s, the workers' fronts that emerged in the first half of the century, the Cuban revolution of 1959, the formation of guerrilla organizations in Colombia, the Sandinista revolution of 1979 and other events of this nature redirected attention to the role of Latin America in the world history and geopolitics. After these events, and in addition to the internal unrest after a century plagued by wars and conflicts, an anti-imperialist sentiment began to be expressed, in different levels and different nuances, in the works of connoted Latin American artists and intellectuals.

These events were related to the consolidation of an oligarchic project, as Carmagnani (1984) named it, which was generalized in the emerging Latin American nations and lasted until the 1930s, when actual demonstrations of its inexorable decadence intensified. This project highlights two aspects that,

on the one hand, justified the emergence of revolutionary outbreaks on almost the entire continent and, on the other hand, constituted the axis of gravitation of the enchantment and disenchantment of the Latin American intellectuality of the 20<sup>th</sup> century which were: the dispossession of the land owned by peasants and indigenous people and the submission of a continent serving the interests of great foreign powers.

Different kinds of literary productions revealed the need to redefine the national and regional character of their contexts, starting from the denial of a western heritage as represented in Europe and the United States. The denial of this pristine western ideal was based on resentments, longings and nostalgia for the past, present and future of the colonial period, an issue that was generally appreciated in modernist literature, essays, *indigenista anthropology* and Americanist philosophy of the period. Everyone, absolutely everyone, thought of Latin America as a distant West. For example, in *Páginas libres* (1894) and *Horas de lucha* (1908) by Manuel González Prada, it is possible to observe a Latin American modernism loaded with a particular disenchantment of reality and the style of a Peruvian writer, with an anarchism bent, quite critical of the indigenous situation in Peru (SÁNCHEZ 1976). In *Cantos de vida y esperanza* (1905) by Rubén Darío, the poems "A Roosevelt" and "Los Cisnes" condense a critique of the imperial policies of the United States and an ode to the Latin American resistance against the American advance (DARÍO 2005). Similarly, *La guerra gaucha* (1905) by Leopoldo Lugones is an example of modernist literature that at the beginning of the century addressed a critique of the Hispanic colonization, an issue that had been the domain of the 19<sup>th</sup> century romantic literature (CELLA 2009). Finally, *Los ríos profundos* (1958) by José María Arguedas became one of the most renowned modernist works of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with indigenous themes (ARGUEDAS 2006). In fact, together with the *7 ensayos de interpretación de la realidad peruana* by José Carlos Mariátegui, it is considered one of the most notable references of the Peruvian intellectuality for the consolidation of Latin American "indigenismo". They

represented instances of a critical positioning to coloniality, but, above all, a need to reflect on the causes that until then had hindered the course of Latin American liberation.

Essays had similar characteristics. Works such as *Nuestra América* (1891) and *El presidio político de Cuba* (1871) by José Martí were, perhaps, the most concrete manifestations of militant essays at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they were a call to the Latin American civic union to respond to the emerging North American imperialism (MARTÍ 2002). Additionally, *Ariel* (1900) by José Enrique Rodó represented the beginning of Arielismo, a Latin American ideological chain that exacerbated the manichean representation of an Anglo-American culture, symbolized in the USA as a bastion of inert utilitarianism that lacked the nobility and moral embodied in cultural expressions developed in Latin America (NAVARRETE ORTA 1992). There are other works with a similar profile to be mentioned such as *Radiografía de la Pampa* (1933) by Ezequiel Martínez Estrada, *Casa Grande e Senzala* (1933) by Gilberto Freyre, *Insularismo* (1936) by Antonio Pedreira, *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar* (1940) by Fernando Ortiz and *Raíces do Brasil* (1955) by Sergio Buarque de Holanda. This sort of ontological distance, which is an inheritance of a differential historical development, found expression in the intellectual production forged in the tragic course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Latin America was conceived as the painful echo of a process that, as Martí (2002, p. 16) points out, was generated from the manifestation “[...] of Indians to the sound of the conflicts between the book and the cirial [and] on the bloody arms of a hundred apostles”. There was no doubt, this distant West was seen as a dystopia that threatened to perpetuate itself in time to what intellectuals gave different responses. The positivists and the rest of the intellectuals, who later called themselves Americanists, defended the thesis of *Latin America as an unrealized historical entity*, a situation that gave way to two antagonistic interpretations of the paths that should lead to the future destiny of the continent. The positivist interpretation bets on the acceleration of the civilization as a strategy of assimilation of the original western

canon,<sup>2</sup> while the Americanist bets on the consolidation of an independent project that still had promises to be fulfilled. The conceptualization of "the Latin American" as an unusual West overflowed the intellectual production and their abstractions soon found correspondence in reality.

The disenchantment with the Latin American reality served as background to the most diverse discourses and ideologies in the continent and the links that tied the ideas of political order to those of academic order were not an exception. It is important to point out the influence of intellectuals such as *Bartolomé Mitre*, who exalted chaos as a conceptualization of Latin America (HALPERIN DONGHI 1996, p. 57-69). In the Argentinean case, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, whose work *Facundo o civilización y barbarie en las pampas argentinas* exalts the dilemmas of the fight against barbarism in Latin America, influencing educational policies during his presidential office in Argentina (JITRIK 1977). In Mexico, José Vasconcelos raises, with his thesis "the cosmic race", "the positive" aspect of miscegenation, influencing policies regarding the massification of education in indigenous and peasant populations (OCAMPO LÓPEZ 2005, p. 137-157). In Peru, José Carlos Mariátegui claimed the importance of the indigenous in the projects of the left-wing movements in that country. Finally, in Venezuela, there is Laureano Vallenilla Lanz, whose thesis justified the feasibility of the authoritarian governments that characterized the political reality of Venezuela and some Latin American countries at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> (BRACHO 2003; STRAKA 2010, p. 88-93; RODRÍGUEZ VELÁSQUEZ 2016, p. 11-31). Also, it is important to point out *Miguel Acosta Saignes*, whose works were a counterpart to the approaches outlined by positivism in Venezuela, helping organize many guilds, academies and national unions (STRAUSS 2008). Finally, Romulo Gallegos who through novels such as *Canaima* and *Doña Bárbara* forged an ambivalent ideal with respect to Venezuelan identity in a transition towards modernity and rooted in the tradition of barbarism (CONSALVI 2006). These intellectuals and others participated in the constitution

2 - The "critique of inherited reality" was a central element of positivist thought throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. His intellectuals defended the idea that the root of Latin American problems and its national states were a result of "characters" acquired in the conquest, highlighting aspects such as race and cultural inferiority.

of the political sphere in their respective national states and, equally important, in the formation of consciousness through their texts, expression of the thoughts of various powers and counter-power axes (MANSILLA 2003, p. 9-30).<sup>3</sup>

The painful situation of a continent which was economically dependent on deficient states, with an unequal distribution of resources, with many cases of political instability and repeated international attacks (ÁLVAREZ GARCÍA 2007) forced politicians and intellectuals to pay attention to history and rethink the course of the Latin American past. History was the source of the answers to the present, since a significant part of the aforementioned productions —inscribed in literature, sociology, anthropology or philosophy— resorted to the historical interpretation that, in addition to explaining, guided what should be done or avoided in “the political”. History represented the voice of old auspices and prohibitions that rested in a forgotten consciousness.

In the case of Mexico, the situation was not different, literary production also showed the bitterness left by the social costs of emancipation, the French intervention in 1862, the political imbalance at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the “latifundio”, the expropriation of the territory for the United States, the failure of the “Porfiriato” and the Mexican Revolution of 1910. Works like *Los de abajo* (1915) by Mariano Azuela evoked the meaning of the revolution from “the invisible” in the heroic epic represented by the official Mexican discourse (AZUELA 1996). In the same way, *Cartucho* (1931) by Nellie Campobello is about the disappointment of the exacerbated violence that hit Mexico at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (CAMPOBELLO 2000). Later, *Apuntes de un lugareño* (1932) by José Rubén Romero shows the heterodoxy intrinsic to the Mexican revolution, that is, the diversity of desires and interests that drove the violence in the Mexican history of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (ROMERO 1972). Other works such as *Llano en llamas* (1953) and *Pedro Páramo* (1955) by Juan Rulfo and, of course, *Balún-Canán* (1957) by Rosario Castellanos also were influenced by the Mexican Revolution in the Mexican social imaginary of the last century

3 - The article by Rodríguez (2018, p. 91-117) reflects on how the International Congresses of the History of America held in Buenos Aires between 1937 and 1966 contributed to the design of a cultural diplomacy. This investigation constitutes an example of the ties that linked the intellectuality with the management of official actions.

(MARTÍNEZ 1999, p. 9-27). In parallel, essays such as *Visión de Anáhuac* (1917) and *Última Tule* (1942) by Alfonso Reyes conceived democracy and integration as the right course of the Latin American future (REYES 1997); while *El laberinto de la soledad* (1950) by Octavio Paz showed a critique to the dictatorial regimes that aggravated the Latin American issue during all these years (PAZ 1994). All these works showed the encouragement and discouragement that housed the memory of a Mexico shaped by conflicts and inequalities.

This sentiment was manifested simultaneously in the Latin American intellectuality since their works were characterized by the disenchantments inherent in the formation processes of their respective States. However, it should be pointed out the influence of Mexican social thought on regional intellectual production, which coincided with the expansion of post-revolutionary institutions throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, among which: Fondo de Cultura Económica (FCE), Colegio of Mexico (CM),<sup>4</sup> Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH), the contemporary reforms carried out in the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), etc. Part of this spirit forged its features in the doctrine of ateneism which, years later, nurtured the conceptualization of Latin American Social thought. Within this framework of conceptual redefinition and institutional renewal, Latin America continued to concern Mexican and Latin American thinkers. Therefore, it is not surprising that "the Latin American" has been a meeting point in the academic production of figures such as O'Gorman, Bonfil Batalla and Zea.

*4 - As Alfonso García Morales points out, "the Ateneo de México was one of the most important intellectual media in its context", bastion of anti-positivism, an expression of the modernist movement which was present in the rest of the continent and, a sign of maturity / renewal of the historical, literary and philosophical Mexican and Americanist production in the world (GARCÍA MORALES 1992, p. 3).*

## Latin America and the birth of History, the new that has not just been born and the old that has not just died...

At each instant of time, moments of the more or less distant past, of the present and even of the future coexist ... the meaning of each text cannot be established, except in relation to its context (TODOROV 1990, p. 9-13).

The strengthening of Mexican social thought through figures such as O’Gorman, Bonfil Batalla and Zea happened along with important changes in the social function attributed to intellectuality during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As Mansilla points out, before 1960, intellectuals “had a commitment to the truth [...] with which they were not contented] promulgating values of partial validity and limited relevance” (MANSILLA 2003, p. 13), in fact, in correspondence with power, intellectuals legitimized the right to intervene (in a theoretical and practical way) on its object: Latin America. Even though the production of these authors did not maintain ties with the power of the State, as those that characterized the intellectuality of earlier times,<sup>5</sup> part of that spirit continued to be present in the contents expressed in its most famous works. The emergence of texts such as *En torno a una filosofía americana* (1942), *América como conciencia* (1953), *América en la historia* (1957), *El pensamiento latinoamericano* (1965), *La filosofía americana como filosofía sin más* ([1969] 2005), *Colonización y descolonización de la cultura latinoamericana* (1970), *La esencia de lo americano* (1971), *Latinoamérica: emancipación y neocolonialismo* (1971), *Latinoamérica en la encrucijada de la historia* (1971) and many others written by Zea; *Fundamentos de la historia de América* (1951) and *La invención de América* (1958) by O’Gorman. Similarly, *México Profundo, una civilización negada* (1987) and *Utopía y revolución* (1981) by Bonfil Batalla maintained the idea of Latin America as a fertile soil eroded by the traces of its history and, further on, as the cosmos of a reachable project to which the intellectuality, in its exercise of thinking and dreaming, had much to contribute. History was more concerned with the future than with the events of the past (ZEA 1976).

In this sense, Zea’s perspectives on the “Latin American phenomenon” are similar to those that he exposes for the “Mexican phenomenon” in texts such as *El positivismo en México. Nacimiento, apogeo y decadencia* (1943), *Conciencia y posibilidad del mexicano* (1952) and *El occidente y la conciencia de México* (1953). Similarly, O’Gorman’s analysis of the Latin

5 - The publication context of these three authors coincided with the “deacralization of the intellectual and the disenchantment [in the traditional political sphere] of their functions” (MANSILLA 2003, p. 13).

American matter corresponds to many of his ideas proposed in works such as *Historia de las divisiones territoriales de México* (1937) or, more recently, *México el trauma de su historia* (1977). In the case of Bonfil Batalla, the issue is more evident because the ideas about Latin America had to be traced in the works on Mexico. The common denominator lies in the furtiveness of historical interpretation, that is, in its most intimate meaning; dystopia was the result of a tragic past, while utopia was presented as a promising possibility, always in the future.

The decomposition of the historical narrative in the works of these authors shows how the Latin American past, drawn as a negative causality of a devastated present, was engendered in the idea of the "contact" between indigenous originality and western tradition. That is why O'Gorman's history begins in 1492, questioning whether the arrival of Columbus was an act of discovery toward "the Americas" (1995). His research was based on texts written by visitors, expeditionaries and European chroniclers such as Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, Francisco López de Gomara, Fernando Colón, Bartolomé de las Casas, Antonio de Herrera y Tordesillas, Beaumont, William Robertson, Martín Fernández de Navarrete, Washington Irving, Alexander von Humboldt, Samuel Eliot Morison and others, considering the recent doctrines proposed by Latin American historians and philosophers. The development of his thesis was based on demystification of the "idea of discovery", reinforcing the disenchantment of common paradigms. O'Gorman affirmed that the "irrationality" intrinsic to Latin American history was due to the substantialism that conceived it as a "thing" in itself, an issue that fueled discussions about the existence of a Latin American ontologism.

The historical account in the texts of Bonfil Batalla began with considerations on the Mesoamerican pre-Hispanic past. However, the "disenchanted past" also began in 1492. His analysis questioned the conceptualization of "the Latin American" as a tropicalization of western identity, divorcing the sequence of its history from traditional historical narratives.

Bonfil Batalla proposed an anthropological reading of history because the past maintained a dialogue with the present and highlighted the struggles of *indianidad*, an issue less evident in the works of O’Gorman and Zea.

Unlike O’Gorman, in whose works an ethereal reading predominated; Bonfil Batalla denounces inequality, discrimination, dispossession and imposition explicitly as permanent social processes in the history of Latin America (BONFIL BATALLA 1988, p. 13-53). O’Gorman’s concern about the existence of the object called “the Americas” was also expressed in the texts of Bonfil Batalla, however, the first focused on the conceptual, whereas Batalla focused on “the identity”. “Mexico profundo..” was, in fact, an analogy of the deep Latin America, where discomfort could be explained through “the surreptitiousness” of constantly denied worldviews.<sup>6</sup> Coloniality in Latin America expressed “its inconsistency, its partiality and its incapacity [...]” (ZEA 1972, p. 105) maintaining in latency the variety of cultural contents that today fight for their right to exist. The idea of a “the denied civilization” by Bonfil Batalla is congruent with the proposal developed by Zea. For this author, Latin America was understood as a historically unrealized entity, which denied itself in its history, a thesis that was attributed to the influence of the historical circumstantialism of Ortega and Gasset, who he assiduously read under the tutelage of Gaos during his training in Mexico (REZENDE DE CARVALHO 2010, p. 267-282).

6 - “Profundo” refers to the surreptitious nature of indigenous codes, habits, cosmologies and subjectivities, although it also applies to other identity expressions concealed by westernism (BONFIL BATALLA 1989).

These ideas introduced the need to question the exclusivist universalism of the western philosophical matrix, especially applied to the understanding of Latin American historical processes. In this way, the historiographical tone in the works of Zea tried to avoid “infertile descriptivism and the sterile historical positivism”, which was strongly criticized by the circumstantialism, resorting to a broad understanding of the Latin American historical reality (HERNANDEZ FLORES 2004, p. 261). In order to do this, it started with the identification of the categorical nucleus of its history, that is, the historical constants that gave shape and meaning to its reality, concluding that the non-realization of its identity

gave way to disappointments that tattooed a dystopian seal whose continuity was put at risk with the imagination of better futures guided by utopia.

Zea's need to understand the historical Latin American constants in depth, transcending the mere compilation and organization of the data, but, without coming to a divorce with reality, guided him to approach the history of ideas with a proposal that allowed to "historicize" Latin American thought —previously dispersed in academic, artistic and literary productions— and thus, generate the basis of a Latin Americanist philosophy based on the historical circumstances of its formation (REZENDE DE CARVALHO 2010, p. 267-282). And, although, the productions of Bonfil Batalla did not display clear pretensions of penetrating in the philosophy of the history, they were participants of their enrichment, generating new debates, concepts and perspectives in the field of history of ideas. It is not surprising that, in theory and historiography, both fields of knowledge facilitated the dialogue of these three authors.

Gaos also influenced O'Gorman who, in his transit through the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters of the UNAM, received training in philosophy of history nurtured by the circumstantialism, very popular in Mexico, and the ideas of authors such as Descartes and Heidegger, appropriating some premises of existentialism and its questioning of the idea of "being". Either Zea or O'Gorman's interpretations had a dialectical logic where history was the result of ideas, while ideas were the result of history (MEYER 2006, p. 3-7). The "non-realization" of America, as a definitive historical product, was deciphered by these authors as a result of the coloniality of their thought at the same time that their cultural dependence was understood as the result of real and concrete actions of western domination.

O'Gorman and Zea were involved in disputes between Hispanics and "Indigenistas" during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a context in which the ideas of Bonfil Batalla played a radical role. The inspiration of this last author was the result of the assiduous reading of intellectuals such as Eric Wolf, Manuel

Gamio, Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, Ricardo Pozas Arciniega and others, being more influenced by the North and Latin American anthropological tradition than by philosophy. His “theory of cultural control” and his critique of the concept of Indian as a colonial category highlighted interesting distinctions in relation to the boundaries between class domination and those that, transcending capitalism, originated from discriminations based on “race” and ethnicity.

The common features of his works focused on the denouncement of the domination over Latin America. However, O’Gorman and Zea did not stress *indianidad* as “the non-West”, which they alluded to in their texts and was different when compared with the political meaning foreseen in the works of Bonfil Batalla and the importance given to “the ethnic” in his interpretation of the social conflicts in Latin America. O’Gorman and Zea chose moderate criticism, with less sociological and anthropological precision than that observed in the works of Bonfil Batalla. The criticism was aligned with the field of philosophy of history and history of ideas. O’Gorman focused his attention on the thinkers who, from the independences onward, questioned “the Latin American character” such as Bello, Bolívar, Rosas, Sarmiento, Alberdi, Sierra, Lastarria and other icons of social thought associated with emancipation, positivism and anti-positivism in their respective contexts.<sup>7</sup> And, although Zea, faithful to philosophy, had no problems with the category of identity; O’Gorman, militant of a radical historicism, considered that identity was an equivocal category that presupposed an essence, an Aristotelian concept, which he denied when he affirmed that “Man has no nature, but history”, confirming Ortega’s ideas. (O’GORMAN [1986], *apud* SORELA N.D).

*7 - The synthesis of these characters can be seen in the first and second part of Leopoldo Zea’s text “El latinoamericano” (1976).*

Despite these differences, there are also consistencies in their historical productions. The first is expressed in the conceptualization of the “encounter” as the cause of the impossibility of the self-realization of Latin America. The second is expressed in the inconclusiveness of the historical narrative and its expectation for the future. In all these authors, “the

Latin American" is presented as a continuous and tireless challenge that demands the overcoming of the colonial forces that, until then, had hindered its realization.

However, future prospects showed substantial differences. By understanding the indigenous identity and past as key to the interpretation of the present, Bonfil Batalla defended the denial of the colonial past (BONFIL BATALLA 1991, p. 71-88). In his writings, he defends "ethnic pluralism" as a political project, which was more than the right to suffrage, criticizing the simplistic interpretations that materialized it. Bonfil Batalla supported the thesis that the indigenous people of Mexico and Latin America were political entities recognized as active agents of the processes of change intrinsic to national states, an inevitable vindication for any democratic project within Mexico's borders. For Bonfil Batalla, the vindication of "the indigenous" did not mean the extermination of the institutions coming from the western modernity. However, he suggested creating conditions that would make their authentic participation possible and this participation should not turn its back to their own culture.... It aspired to "eliminate inequality, while defending the right to difference" (BONFIL BATALLA 2001, N.P).

For his part, O'Gorman highlights the challenges of understanding oneself as responsible for the present and future of Latin America (O'GORMAN 1995), subtracting protagonism from identity, and affirming that "the only way to assume [the past] was to overcome it, that is to say, proposing, within the current circumstances, a program of dignified life for the future" (O'GORMAN 2015 N.P). As he pointed out in his discourse "La marcha de las ideas liberales en México», O'Gorman chose the realization of the liberal project, which he defined as "one of the most delicate conquests of western culture, one of the most difficult flowers to cultivate and maintain, a conquest [still] precarious" (O'GORMAN 2001, p. 94). By distancing himself from the identity question —not as historicism, but as ontology— in O'Gorman's critique of the future, the colonial conservatism, and not the "West", was the main enemy of Latin American historical realization.

This paper will be concluded with a description of the ideas of these authors in relation to Latin America, with a brief dissection of their historical discourses, using the categories proposed by Hayden White in his *Metahistory*. These categories are: "emplotment", a subjective meaning promoted by the disposition of discourse; "argument", formality adopted by its interpretations and; "ideology", ethical position of the context they describe (WHITE 2010). These elements allowed the dialogue of the meaning of their narratives, giving way to the identification of common characteristics that transcend the convergence or divergence in the use of certain concepts.

For all cases, the "plot" [emplotment] of the historical narrative was governed by the principles of *tragic narrative*, a statement that arises from the following conclusions. The first is related to the disenchanted vision of the historical processes that shaped the Latin American reality of the present. The second is linked to the open character of the "end" of historical narratives, which, as stated above, was evident in future political possibilities... every tragedy suggests "the possibility of a liberation, at least partial, of the condition of falling and an escape, even provisional, from the divided state in which men find themselves in this world" (WHITE 2010, p. 20). This possibility was brought to life in the transcendence of the colonial condition that besieged the continent until contemporaneity. Finally, the third is connected with the meaning of discovery given to "colonial reason" as a revelation of the forces that opposed the realization of Latin American people.

The tragedy in the discourses of these authors resided in the phenomenon of coloniality. Therefore, it is not surprising that everyone stressed the importance of issues that had been discussed since the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the political discourses of emancipation and at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the ideas of positivism. The most important of these issues was related to the endowment of conscience and the aspiration to a "mental revolution" that, beyond ideology, had its emphasis on the coloniality intrinsic to the Latin American social order.

The zeal for the cultural aspect was related to the sources used for the elaboration of the historical discourses —diaries, proclamations and academic productions mostly— but above all, it was related to a tendency of the postwar period to conceive culture as a primary focus of domination.<sup>8</sup>

Another point of the analysis corresponds to the mode of argumentation [argument], that is, to the way in which the authors explained the emergence of their hypothesis. O'Gorman, Bonfil Batalla and Zea edified the argumentation of their stories according to certain criteria of *mechanicism* because, in all cases, "the acts of the agents that inhabit the historical field [presented themselves] as manifestations of extra-historical agencies that had their origin in the scenario where the action described by the narration was developed" (WHITE 2010, p. 27). This phenomenon is possible to appreciate in the relation of the object —the ideas, in the case of O'Gorman; the identity, in the case of Bonfil Batalla and the philosophy of history, in the case of Zea— with the criticisms directed towards the present. In most texts, these "forces" were the same that gave the historical narrative a tragic meaning: coloniality.

This logic is also expressed in the "laws of history". In the case of Zea, there was no place for deduction; the author asserted that his thesis was based on the elementary principles of the Hegelian dialectic...

The movement of history, its dialectic, was oriented towards the preservation of the past, towards expectant hope in the present or permanent change in the future. "The Americas" have not been able to avoid so much concern at this stage of their culture, a stage that has been defined by their ontological preoccupation [...] in this way, the following questions arise]. Where does Latin American place the "accent" in the triple dimension of history? Is it a conservative, an expectant or a permanent revolutionary? [...] to which he replies that] "the way of being" of Iberian America [it is] detained in an expectant present in which it had to face the past, its past, forcing itself to destroy it (ZEA 1976, p. 18-10).

Zea found in dialectics the answers to what he himself defined as a constant of Latin American thought: the "non-conformity of

8 - In Latin America, it is expressed in the theory of coloniality and in Europe in lines of thought such as that of the Frankfurt School, for example (MIGNOLO 2007).

the self” or, as O’Gorman would say, the desire to be like others (*apud* ZEA 1976). Although the productions of O’Gorman and Bonfil Batalla were not directly oriented to the field of philosophy, as in the case of Zea, they were not exempt from the use of “laws” that explained history. In both cases, the importance of material reality was promoted, expressed in colonization and understood as a structural determinant of ideas and culture.

In his analysis of America, O’Gorman uses a revision of the ideas about the world in the times of Columbus (the *orbis terrarum*, the *orbis alterius*, the *ecumene*, etc.) and, thus, is able to explain, through specific events such as —scientific advance, the power, the institutional reforms, the economic expansion of modernity, etc.— how the myth of discovery found a place in the social imaginary of the West, both in Europe and in America. Bonfil Batalla, in a review from pre-Hispanic times until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, attributed the problems of identity to the control mechanisms that were present in fields such as education, religion, politics, economics, etc. The determination was a common denominator in the works considered. However, the presence of a utopian thought with a perspective to the future nuanced the mechanicism and radical historicism because, in all cases, “the agency” of Mexicans and Latin Americans was conceived as capable of pursuing other directions, always positive in relation to the present.

The latter is related to the ideological implication [ideology], that is, with the set of prescriptions that allowed taking a position in social praxis (WHITE 2010). The production of these authors expressed a disenchanting subjectivity, tragically traced and akin to the thesis of colonial determination, promoting movements in favor of cultural transformation. This last aspect gave a “radical” meaning to their narrations because they expressed “the utopian condition as an imminent [need] that inspired their concern to promote the revolutionary means for the realization of their utopia” (WHITE 2010, p. 33).

The conjunction of these elements forged a conceptual stamp of “Latin Americanness” that transcended the boundaries

## Final considerations

of the works of O'Gorman, Bonfil Batalla and Zea. In them, utopia and dystopia served as an opposition to the dialectical model that sustained their interpretation of history, matter which was expressed in the ambivalence given to this historical entity that struggles to change and not remain what it has been and what it is. These authors conceptualized coloniality as the center where the problems that made Latin America a project, something unrealized, gravitated. Their productions expressed the anxieties that found expression in social, artistic and intellectual movements (positivism, muralism, literary modernism, "indigenism", Latin American Marxism, etc.) that, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, constituted the referents of thought in the region. Today, it is possible to say that figures such as O'Gorman, Bonfil Batalla and Zea were emblems of Latin American social thought from the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the present.

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