

After Hispanic Studies: On the Democratization of Spanish-Language Cultural Study

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This essay scrutinizes the professional demographics by subfield specialization at several university cohorts to demonstrate the overwhelming overrepresentation of Peninsular themes (and thus a eurocentric register) in Spanish-language cultural studies in the US. While Mexico has approximately three times more inhabitants than Spain, many departments do not have a *single* specialist on Mexico — but 97.7 percent of departments surveyed had *multiple* Peninsular specialists. Departments culturally engineer classrooms towards eurocentric aesthetics by over-hiring specialists in Peninsular fields, which concomitantly overrepresents those disciplines in pedagogy, publications, departmental norms, and nomenclatures. This hegemonic model presupposes a euro coloniality/superiority, making classrooms a forum of social misrepresentation and nondemocratic portrayals of cultural goods like literature, film, art, idioms, and spoken accents in Spanish. The eurocentric model has notable outcomes in student behavior: undergraduates in such environments are much more likely to choose Spain over Latin America for study-abroad.

This article argues that the traditional eurocentric hiring norms should transition to a more democratic approach, so that the cultures and societies — and thus *people* of those societies — be treated in a more egalitarian fashion. A conviction to abandon Hispanic studies as privileged player in Spanish-language cultural study strives to undo the colonial controls that yet inform curricula, and gestures towards a new future. Detaching our faculties from the implied belief that European (Spanish) culture is pre-eminent requires a restructuring of both critical vocabularies and professional norms. In the context of such comprehensive and perennial disciplinary eurocentrism, endorsing Latin-American studies as a privileged location is not only necessary, but decades overdue. If pedagogical canons are democratized for the long term, the myth of Spanish exceptionalism, upon which present canonic imbalances are maintained, will cease to be self-evident.

KEYWORDS academic hiring, Latin-American studies, Spanish, academic colonialism, eurocentrism, pedagogy

In a field as diverse as Spanish-language literatures and cultures, the overrepresentation of one subfield can have unintended consequences that are disparaging and even counterproductive for the discipline. After being dominated by Peninsular themes and what was generally termed ‘Spanish-American’ or ‘Las Españas’ study, a generation ago the field underwent a paradigm shift that opened a separate Latin-American register. This period of transition (in which we are still engaged) has resulted in a retraction of Peninsular specialists as a percentage of all hires in Spanish-language cultural studies, as Latin-American societies were re-imagined with cultural sovereignty. As the data in this essay demonstrate, this hiring shift has stabilized at approximately a one-to-one ratio; that is, there are nearly an equal number of professors who specialize in Peninsular as compared to Latin-American cultural topics in the US academy.

The normalized faculty (and thus pedagogical) ratio is enormously eurocentric — as there are approximately ten times more speakers of Spanish in Latin America as there are in Spain. While this circumstance influences the linguistic and cultural subjects treated in classrooms, it also constructs an immensely uneven symbolic significance towards the cultures (and thus the peoples) in each division of study. This essay argues in favour of a new approach to hiring in Spanish-language disciplines, one in which departments shift towards a balance of Peninsular and Latin-American specialists that is more democratic and not so heavily weighted towards eurocentric models.¹

The questions posed here are not solely pedagogical; the cultural axes that favour European Spanish language and culture have a colonial character, one that has restabilized itself within the multiculturalism that has been somewhat standardized in US higher education since the Civil Rights movement. The present hegemonic model of cultural power that US academy foments presupposes a euro coloniality/superiority,² and the classrooms are thus forums of social misrepresentation and nondemocratic portrayals of cultural goods, such as literature, film, art, idioms, and spoken accents in the Spanish language.³ The eurocentric aesthetics promoted through this pedagogical model have important outcomes in student behaviour. As this essay will detail, US undergraduate students who are immersed in a eurocentric academic environment are much more likely to choose Spain over Latin America as the location for their study-abroad programme.

Eurocentrism is the cultural residue of colonialism. The social mechanisms (the imposition of obligatory language, religion, aesthetic norms, and so on) were employed as cultural paradigms that functioned as power ancillaries to military presence in colonial societies. In order to better control resources, levy taxes, and realize military conscriptions, among other goals, the politicization of conquered communities actively subordinated and stigmatized pre-Columbian social tendencies, cultures, and languages. Over the centuries, this process disseminated the myth that the cultural systems of the Spanish crown (and later of Creole leaders during the republican period) replaced or overtook pre-Columbian and otherwise non-eurocentric

sociocultural realities.⁴ Contemporary eurocentric scholarly approaches generally function in correlation with several of these colonial myths:

- cultural expressions deriving from the colonizer's aesthetic are more appropriate to interpret than indigenous elements
- art and literature of the subaltern are heavily influenced by colonizing norms, and
- the presence of European culture in the Americas is a generally positive phenomenon.

However, those who were (and are) multilingual or monolingual in Spanish in Latin America generally have a significantly more diverse cultural index than can be contained by the traditional eurocentric approaches, and this dilemma eventually spurred a transition in how the academy regarded the supermajority of the Spanish-speaking world (that is to say, Latin America), a shift that began in conjunction with other social revolutions of the 1960s.⁵

In concert with the rise of the Civil Rights movement, since 1970 a new mapping of scholarly work has reframed the discipline of Spanish-language cultural studies in the

TABLE 1 COHORT I: PERCEIVED ELITE INSTITUTIONS

| | % |
|--|---|
| Perceived elite institutions | Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Chicago, Stanford, NYU, Pennsylvania, Duke, Indiana, Illinois, Cornell, Georgetown, Columbia, Virginia, Texas at Austin, Brown, Penn State, Purdue, Berkeley, Vanderbilt, UNC Chapel Hill, Minnesota, Ohio State, UC Irvine, UCLA, Kansas, Tulane, Indiana, UC Boulder, Pittsburgh, Wisconsin, UC Santa Barbara |
| Peninsular (153) | 47 |
| Latin America (174) | 53 |
| Most weighted to Peninsular | 66 |
| Most weighted to Latin America | 90 |
| Equal (1:1) or within one faculty member | 47 |
| Average Peninsular overrepresentation | 470 |

Sources: *US News and World Report* top 25; National Research Council top 25 'top notch'

TABLE 2 COHORT II: FLAGSHIP PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS IN SOUTHERN BORDER STATES

| | % |
|--|--|
| Flagship public institutions in southern border states | UC Berkeley, University of Arizona, University of New Mexico, University of Texas-Austin |
| Peninsular (18) | 39 |
| Latin America (28) | 61 |
| Most weighted to Peninsular | 50 |
| Most weighted to Latin America | 66 |
| Equal (1:1) or within one faculty member | 40 |
| Average Peninsular overrepresentation | 390 |

TABLE 3 COHORT III: SCHOOLS WITH OVER 50 PER CENT LATINO AND ENROLMENTS OF 5,000+

| | % |
|---|---|
| Schools with over 50% Latino and enrolments of 5,000+ | U. Puerto Rico Mayagüez, U. Puerto Rico Río Piedras, Florida International, U. Texas El Paso, U. Texas Pan American, Universidad del Este (PR), East Los Angeles College, Hartnell College (CA), Imperial Valley College (CA), Southwestern College (CA), Miami Dade College, Richard J. Daley (IL), Del Mar College (TX), South Texas College, University of Texas Brownsville |
| Peninsular (17) | 37 |
| Latin America (28) | 63 |
| Most weighted to Peninsular | 50 |
| Most weighted to Latin America | 74 |
| Equal (1:1) or within one faculty member | 20 |
| Average Peninsular overrepresentation | 370 |
| | of departments |
| | of democratic balance |

TABLE 4 COHORT IV: TEN LARGEST US UNIVERSITIES BY ENROLMENT
(EXCLUDING ONLINE INSTITUTIONS)

| | % |
|--|--|
| Ten largest US universities by enrolment | Arizona State, Central Florida, Ohio State, Minnesota, Texas-Austin, Texas-A&M, Florida, Michigan State, Penn State, Florida International |
| Peninsular (44) | 46 |
| Latin America (50) | 54 |
| Most weighted to Peninsular | 55 |
| Most weighted to Latin America | 61 |
| Equal (1:1) or within one faculty member | 70 |
| Average Peninsular overrepresentation | 460 |
| | of departments |
| | of democratic balance |

TABLE 5 TOTAL COHORT: FORTY-FOUR DEPARTMENTS

| Total cohort | % |
|--|-----------------------|
| Peninsular (198) | 44 |
| Latin America (254) | 56 |
| Most weighted to Peninsular | 66 |
| Most weighted to Latin America | 90 |
| Equal (1:1) or within one faculty member | 45 |
| Average Peninsular overrepresentation | 440 |
| | of departments |
| | of democratic balance |

US. Re-imagining Latin America as a culturally sovereign entity radically reshaped the composition of the professoriate: over several decades this democratization (reducing the number of specialists in Peninsular themes as a percentage of all faculty in Spanish-language cultural topics) granted many perennially repressed communities localized spheres of academic focus. However, the contraction of Peninsular appointments has levelled off at roughly 50/50 and today there is generally a one-to-one ratio

of cultural specialists in Peninsular study to specialists in Latin-American themes in US universities.⁶ Thus, despite the immense demographic imbalance between Latin America and Spain, the cultures and languages of these imagined communities are examined with approximately equal representation in the US academy.⁷

The data presented in Tables 1–5 were taken from departmental websites in January and February 2014. (The ‘perceived elite’ cohort departments are from the *US News and World Reports* ‘Top 25 Modern Language Programs in the World’ and/or National Research Council’s Top 25 institutions in Spanish in the ‘viewed by faculty as top-notch’ category.⁸) The survey includes tenured or tenure-line faculty members; the subfield statistics are based on departmental or self-reported ‘interests’, ‘field’, ‘specialty’, ‘discipline’, or other related expression of academic concentration. Specialists in subnational Peninsular topics (Catalan, Basque, Galician, and others) are included in the ‘Peninsular’ cultural cohort; the ‘Latin American’ cultural cohort includes specialists in pre-Columbian, indigenous (and other non-European disciplines), and Brazilian. Faculty members whose listed specialization was in a non-area subject (such as second-language acquisition or business Spanish) were not included in these data.⁹

The figures shown in Tables 1–5 confirm that, with very few exceptions, US departments hire faculty members in Spanish-language cultural fields through a framework that is comprehensively eurocentric. There appears to be an internal system of structuring Latin-American and Peninsular cultural study that treats each theme with approximately equal weight. While the faculty bodies varied slightly from cohort to cohort, just one institution — Pittsburgh — had a faculty demographic that was representative of the communities in the target subject.²⁰ These demographic norms in faculty hiring have profound consequences on how departments structure field curricula (number of seminars offered in each cultural topic) and how the disciplinary canon is organized (number of material tracts studied from each region).

Spanish-language curricula criticism

While this examination of departmental faculty demographics by cultural concentration is without an apparent precedent, several scholars have analysed and discussed curricula formation in Spanish language and cultural study in recent years. There appears to be no unified concept about what is an appropriate method to restructure (if indeed restructuring is necessary), topics that are to be studied, and in what proportion.¹¹ James Fernández of New York University (NYU) has noted: ‘Spanish is simultaneously an American and a European language. The discipline of Hispanic studies must confront head on — both intellectually, in its scholarship, and institutionally, in its departmental configurations — the history and the current implications of this double identity’ (2000: 1964). The phrase ‘double identity’ is left unclear: should American/European Spanish-language cultures be treated with equal one-to-one weight, as they are now in the department which Fernández chairs? While there has been a slight shift towards Latin-American themes at NYU since the 1970s, the faculty demographic has remained overwhelmingly eurocentric during the tenure of Fernández.¹²

In ‘Hispanism in an Imperfect Past and an Uncertain Future’, Nicolas Shumway notes that, when he was a junior faculty member several decades ago at Yale and

Indiana University Northwest, the new faculty members were obliged to include ‘sufficient material from Spain’ (2005: 285). Shumway comments that the ‘appropriate’ weight in the 1980s was 60–40 for Spain over other Spanish-speaking regions (2005: 285). He goes on to note that ‘this notion of Hispanism also meant a majority of faculty appointments in Peninsular literature’ (2005: 285). Shumway mentions his general ‘disagreement’ with such an approach and concludes with this reflection: '[Hispanism itself] is an outmoded idea based on an essentialist, ideologically driven, and Spain-centric, notion' (2005: 297).

Among the most comprehensive recent reports on curricula development is Joan Brown’s *Confronting Our Canons*, a study that examines the Spanish-language canon across the US academy. (The topic was also the theme of a session which Brown chaired at the MLA Convention in 2012.) She argues in favour of a shared graduate canon that would organize scholarship upon a common platform. What is most striking about her data is how profoundly eurocentric the Spanish-language literary canon is, a verity that transcends the uneven composition of faculty specializations: ‘Works on 90–99% of graduate reading lists, what I call the core canon [...] included] nine works, all but one from Spain’ (2012: ix). Brown advocates on behalf of an increased presence of traditionally excluded genres, although she says very little about nuancing or abandoning the conservative eurocentric model. It appears that, in her reading, Latin-American culture is *not* an excluded genre. In particular, she envisions a canon that incorporates more work from women and non-heterosexuals, nonprint tracts, texts in non-Castilian languages, anything from the eighteenth century, and work from those whom she terms ‘exiled patriots, or residents from most of the Hispanic world’ (2010: 171). The reader is left to presume here that ‘exiled patriots’ means Spaniards, although exiled Latin Americans would significantly outnumber those from the Peninsula.

Brown is a specialist in Peninsular topics and perhaps her study should be understood through that lens. Indeed, the discussion of whom she terms ‘residents of most of the Hispanic world’ is infrequent and superficial, which gives the impression that her recommendations are geared more generally towards how *Peninsular* studies could be restructured and not the field as a whole, despite the few instances in her monograph which allude to the contrary. A major failure of *Confronting Our Canons* is that Brown discusses a very tiny sector of the target subject — Peninsular topics — and cultural tracts from the other 90 per cent of the Spanish-speaking world are generally ignored or treated perfunctorily, being mentioned with a seemingly token symbolism. Even if the existent problems that Brown cites were remedied through application of her model, which is a fine concept for Peninsular studies, if the faculties are not democratized towards Latin America, the supermajority of the target literatures and cultures will continue to be neglected.¹³

Similarly, the academic field itself is often termed ‘Hispanist’, ‘Hispanism’, and the more recent ‘Iberian-American’, each of which attempts to appropriate Latin-American topics and subordinate them to a Spanish centre. The nomenclatures have a radial implication which both initiates and sanctions the flawed concept that all cultural materials under this heading emanate from a singular source: the Peninsula. The terms also exoticize (and minoritize) speakers of Spanish in the US into a subordinate category, one that has been institutionalized through terms such as ‘heritage

speaker', which construct a foreignness for the tongue (and its literatures), and interpolate speakers of Spanish in the US with cultural distance and inappropriateness.

Outcomes of overweighting faculties towards Spain: study abroad

The conventional one-to-one Peninsular to Latin-American faculty composition prohibits a representative pedagogy on the cultures of the Spanish-speaking world. Spanish authors, playwrights, artists, historical figures, and so on, from Cid through Ruiz Zafón, receive more critical and pedagogical treatment than they should, a circumstance which concomitantly subordinates the work and histories of the unstudied demographic and enhances the perceived importance of Peninsular work in all cultural disciplines.¹⁴ Eurocentric departments are particularly misguided for US institutions, as Latin-American cultures, languages, literatures, histories, and family dynamics inform North-American cultures in any number of ways — especially since the US is a Latin-American nation, despite rarely being labelled as such. But the bulk of academic attention is misdirected towards an absent European Spanish-speaking community (and the histories, cultures, literatures, and languages of those societies). These departments might best be described as being in a state of cultural lag.

Study-abroad trends demonstrate an unfortunate consequence of this problem: Spain receives approximately the same number of American study-abroad students as all Latin-American nations combined (Institute of International Education, 2007–09). So, what causes students to esteem Spain so profoundly for an immersion experience? As the Spain/Latin America imbalance in study abroad essentially corresponds to the demographics of professor expertise in classrooms, it appears that students are interested in first-hand experience in regions which they study most often in class. In this way, the idealization of Spain in the minds of undergraduates is a product of a broad eurocentric aesthetic in US higher education, one that decolonial and post-modern approaches insist we must deconstruct. As the vast majority of students have not been to Latin America or Spain before choosing their study-abroad destination, the disproportionate number going to Iberia is an outcome that derives partly from what students read, study, hear, and see in their Spanish language and culture classes.

Some may maintain that an important component of study abroad is visiting the neighbouring countries and, consequently, part of the draw to Spain (instead of a country in Latin America) is its proximity to the rich and distinct cultures of Europe. However, one could make the same case for any Latin-American nation, as the composition of that region is as culturally and linguistically diverse as Europe, if not more so. Moreover, as Spain and Colombia have nearly the same population, if we were to retrace history and imagine that Colombia was both the colonizer and the culture that was receiving the nonrepresentative scholarly attention which presently benefits Spain, it is conceivable that nation would receive the same number of US students studying abroad as Spain and all other Spanish-speaking nations combined. Such is the force of the aesthetics that are constructed, celebrated, and institutionalized through formal education. The conceptual ideas of Spain and Latin America are constructed in classrooms (through often eurocentric scholarly approaches) and the results are clear: weighting our pedagogy towards Spanish themes has significant influence on what students imagine to be the 'best' experience in Spanish-language

culture. To study a text or a painting in a classroom setting is to celebrate a cultural artefact, and the first-hand experiences in Spanish-language culture that undergraduates seek are an important signifier of how the overrepresentation of Peninsular topics in classrooms influences student behaviour.

On Peninsular apology

There are many reasons to support the portrayal of current faculty paradigms as ostensibly constructive: Spain is the ‘home’ of the language; the ‘classic’ texts, seminal to the culture itself, like *Poema del mío Cid* and *Lazarillo de Tormes*, derive from that imagined community; there is a canon of important work — from Cervantes through the post-Franco period — that is foundational to Western literature itself and these command a close focus on Peninsular themes; not to mention the transcendental body of work in visual arts like that of Velázquez, Goya, and Picasso; Buñuel and Almodóvar. Our current faculty demographics are structured to reflect that supposed reality: these works are so significant, so essential to comprehending the culture of ‘Spanish language and cultures’ (as per the general departmental self-identifier), that it is productive and, it seems, even necessary to overweight our curricula and our faculty appointments towards these topics.

An apologist for the contemporary nondemocratic faculties might also argue that Peninsular themes form one conceptual ‘unit’ with several dimensions (often understood as medieval, golden age, twentieth century, and so on). The focus in that context should be on how we weight respective conceptual units and sub-units. Is it appropriate to have a department with three Peninsular specialists but only one (or none) who studies Southern Cone, Andean, or Mexican topics? In the case of Mexico (and many other regions), we could conceivably form similar Spanish-language cultural sub-units: colonial, independence, contemporary, and migratory. Mexico is a region that has more Spanish speakers than any other and approximately three times more inhabitants than Spain, but that community does not have a *single* specialist (never mind representatives of sub-units) in many of the departments examined in this study. Meanwhile, 97.7 per cent of departments studied in this survey (43 of 44) have *multiple* specialists in Peninsular topics.¹⁵ The Mexican community as a whole — despite being three times as populous as Spain and a central part of the cultures of the US — is being actively subordinated to the eurocentric norm: Spain triumphs due to the conservative nature of the academy and its myths of cultural importance.

These nondemocratic and nonrepresentative aesthetics are constructed, iterated, and sanctioned through institutionalization. They must be repeated and elaborated so that they continue to exist — and the concept that departments at US institutions *should* give equal weight to Peninsular and Latin-American themes is one that is historically specific; it has been invented by way of custom, a dearth of focus on the canon (in comparison to other cultural fields),¹⁶ and a lack of scholarly dialogue about the implementation of democratic values to Spanish-language cultural studies in general. These tendencies have caused the hiring norms (and thus the composition of the professoriate) to continue in a conservative, circular, and conformist tradition that repeats the models of the past.

'Spanish'-American cultural essences?: on Latin-American cultures

Another important argument in favour of overrepresenting Peninsular topics might focus on the supposed role that Spanish culture (texts, plays, painting, and other material) has had in the development of Latin-American authors/artists. Several salient Latin-American writers, including Gómez Suárez de Figueroa (*El Inca*), Gabriel García Márquez, Carlos Fuentes, and José Martí, among many others, spent significant periods of time in Spain. Moreover, as these authors almost certainly read the canonic Peninsular writers during their formative years, we should — according to the traditional model — adequately address those authors in our curricula approach. A proponent of such a concept would argue that, due to the importance of these outstanding and seminal cultural figures, we should place special attention on Peninsular texts in order to appropriately study and appreciate Latin-American work. To this end, for instance, Brad Epps has characterized the field itself of Latin-American studies as a ‘mode of Hispanism’ (2005: 233). In such approaches, Spain must remain — today and for all time — at the centre of our Latin-American studies.

The authors from Latin America who spent periods in Spain were almost certainly subordinated to eurocentric models of value during their formative years. Their realities were saturated and, to a certain extent, controlled by the material culture of a distant society, one that shared certain characteristics with their own. To overload our reading of these authors with the influence of this absent and supposedly superior cultural model, however, is to submit our present analyses to the same shortcomings: the supposed cultural mimicry of Peninsular norms — a concept that seems to be at the centre of such eurocentric approaches to Latin-American tracts — should be understood (if it is indeed the case) as an aesthetic constructed on the imagined inferiority of local (Latin-American) rites, ceremony, and symbol, a circumstance that we should be actively deconstructing by reframing our curricula away from these historical axes of inquiry. The structural presuppositions inherent to eurocentric approaches are forms of cultural violence: they strive to maintain and legitimize the inequalities of the status quo through interpolating people and communities with imaginary affiliations and relationships.

Gabriel García Márquez lived in Spain in the 1960s, wrote there, and returned often for visits over the years. He was the principal author of a plea to the Spanish government to reject the Schengen Agreement, which requires Latin Americans to have visas to enter Spain:

Al entrar a España no tengo la impresión de llegar, sino la de volver. Quizás a muchos españoles les resulte extraño este sentimiento, pero les aseguramos que esa sensación es la típica del criollo, la del indiano, la del colono o del colonizado nacido en esos territorios de lo que fue el antiguo imperio de España. Si nos atrevemos a hacerle un reclamo a esa gran nación que nos enseñaron a considerar, con razón o sin ella, como nuestra Madre Patria, es por el hondo convencimiento que tenemos de no ser ajenos a España.

[...] sabemos que es cierto, que nuestra imaginación, nuestra lengua mayoritaria, nuestros referentes culturales más importantes provienen de España. Aquí nos mezclamos con otros riquísimos aportes de la humanidad, en especial con el indígena y el negro, pero nunca hemos renegado, ni podríamos hacerlo, de nuestro pasado español. Nuestros

clásicos son los clásicos de España, nuestros nombres y apellidos se originaron allí casi todos, nuestros sueños de justicia, y hasta algunas de nuestras furias de sangre y fanatismo, por no hablar de nuestros anticuados pondoneros de hidalgo, son una herencia española. (García Márquez, 2001: 1)¹⁷

García Márquez's description of what has been termed 'roots tourism' forms a troubling discourse of long-distance imagined nationalism that should be situated in the eurocentric, colonial framework — it is a subaltern's plea for independence.¹⁸ The Schengen Agreement (like the US Visa Waiver Program) blocks European visitation rights to all but the wealthiest Latin Americans — it is a political and economic form of neocolonialism.¹⁹ In the face of the repression that is the visa system, there is desperation — and these are not issues that ceased to exist at some point in the distant past (Schengen was approved in 1989 and is currently active). The letter is symbolic of a subjugated and yet colonized group attempting to win favour through feigning union. Part of the decolonial process is forging localized aesthetic concepts through literature, art, and thought; and the material in the above letter is a chapter in that process: the repressed intending to hold onto a vestige of liberty, namely the freedom to move from place to place unencumbered.²⁰

The García Márquez letter recognizes the power of states. Another of his reports on these laws focuses on individual agency. In a second declaration, also in print, García Márquez dropped the cultural subordinate tone ('el hijo perdido de España, la "Madre Patria"'), saying: 'The first Spaniards who came to America did so without visas and firing in all directions. They joined up with our women and took our gold [...]. He also said in remonstration of the law that he would never again return to Spain (quoted in Riding, 1989: 1). Indeed, Latino intellectuals and authors over the centuries have been generally ambivalent towards Spain, if not openly hostile. As Nicolas Shumway points out: 'Even well into the twentieth century, the obligatory youthful journey for all Spanish American elites was to France, not Spain' (2005: 288).

Conceiving 'Latin America' as an entity is at the same time an attempt to connect, on an immense scale, disparate peoples through assumed cultural resemblances. The post or decolonial plight unifies and the language does somewhat too, but, should we insist on conceiving and reiterating this imagined unity? Carlos Fuentes notes that, since the initial European incursions, Latin Americans have identified not with Spain but with the cultures 'de sus lugares de nacimiento, con sus naciones, con su geografía, con su historia [...] distintas de la historia de España' (1997: part 3). Fuentes describes the subordinate relationship which Latin Americans have had with Spain as the catalyst of a shared identity, one that derives from repression and colonialism, and results in 'una identidad [...] común' (1997: part 4). Fuentes goes on to underscore that these are not concepts from the past; the struggle for cultural and social representation and autonomy is one that 'aún no termina' (1997: part 4).

Post-national and post-area studies imagine their tracts to be a critical leap forward driven by the need to disentangle traditional hegemonies, particularly those related to national imperialisms. But we are yet to be in a polarized colonial period between Spain (and the US) and Latin America due to, precisely, the controlling and imperialist power imbalances that have been codified in the Schengen Agreement

and US Visa Waiver Program — *and* through the curricula preferences that exist at US universities, which openly treat Latin-American culture as less important than Peninsular culture.²¹ If the academy is to remain mired within the problematic assumptions inherent to area studies,²² ‘Latin America’ as a conceptual unit should exist until there is equality in economic, political, and cultural terms. This move towards equality should begin in our classrooms by treating Spanish-language communities through demographically stable pedagogy. While it may appear that radical moves towards representative faculties could manifest reductive resolutions, the status quo is already unethically reductive towards Europe. Unless institutions of higher education are fundamentally reformed towards post-area cultural studies (a concept which, unfortunately, has scant traction within academic institutions at the present time), an endorsement to Latin-American studies of the same policies that granted Peninsular studies such a privileged location in the status quo is not only necessary for the contemporary academy, it is decades overdue.

Transatlantic approaches

Another possible argument regarding this demographic predicament might involve transatlantic approaches, which are, in a sense, an overture towards abandoning traditional area tracts with a gesture towards new conceptual spaces with multiple influences. Trans as a prefix, or another of the emergent cross-cultural/temporal imagined connections between communities, should be thoroughly vetted, however, as it often results in the unintentional marginalization of traditionally underrepresented communities. We might describe the field of African, American, and European tracts as dedicated to a horizontalized cultural history, its fertilizations, exchanges, translations, contacts, and mixtures, but we should be acutely aware of the danger of the subfield forming into a study of appropriation of European models in the Americas, an approach that results in the same dilemmas as other hyphens and prefixes. The transatlantic turn in Spanish-language studies should be one that is demographically stable, taking close care to ensure the bulk of attention is not garnered towards the European end of the Atlantic considerations. Indeed, in order for a transatlantic appointment in a Spanish-language department to be demographically stable with respect to the groups in question, the appointee’s interests/studies must be very heavily weighted in the direction of Latin America.²³

In what could be understood as a neoliberal form of transatlantic economic culture, the Spanish government finances many pan-Spanish-language initiatives that offer economic capital (often for cultural programmes) in exchange for expressions of cultural unity from Latin-American nations. For this reason, each of these initiatives involves the nondemocratic and somewhat nonsensical prefix ‘Ibero-’ which, possibly indirectly, alludes to a core component of the movements: entrenching, or at the very least expressing, a desired eurocentric identificational dimension in these Spanish-speaking societies.

- Iberoamérica Organización de Estados Iberoamericanos para la Educación, la Ciencia y la Cultura
- Espacio Cultural Iberoamericano
- Organización de Televisión Iberoamericana

- Secretaría General Iberoamericana
- Carta Cultural Iberoamericana
- Asociación de Estados Iberoamericanos para el Desarrollo de las Bibliotecas Nacionales de Iberoamérica
- Juegos Iberoamericanos
- Cumbre Iberoamericana.

The perceived union between Latin America and Spain, constructed often through capitalist and neoliberal/colonial — not democratic — interventions, is part of what authorizes the eurocentric register in our academic faculties. This concept should be closely examined as there are many cases in which this cultural amalgam is openly rejected in Latin America; and the reception of Latin-American migrants in Spain in many ways doubly contradicts the concept of one transatlantic socio-cultural community.²⁴ The imaginary unions benefit the capitalist interventions for Spain — the region that dominates much of the banking, publishing, and media in Latin America — but the cultural reality does not wholly correspond to what is implied by the Ibero- prefix.

A paradigm shift: should our faculties be democratic?

The overrepresentation of Peninsular themes in the US academy should be rigorously discussed by faculty members, deans, provosts, as well as authors and artists. In many ways the cultures of the US are moving further away from eurocentric aesthetics and theoretical approaches, and, indeed, the cultural ties between Spain and the US are dissolving in the midst of rapid demographic shifts towards Latin-American realities. Moreover, maintaining that a concentration on past norms, a nonlocal society, and an absent culture (when compared to that of Latin-American societies) is practical for US students to study is difficult looking forward, especially in consideration of the demographic shifts which have occurred in North-American societies in the last century.²⁵

In a solely democratic approach to forming a Spanish language and cultures department, 10 per cent of the professoriate should be specialists in Peninsular themes (because 10 per cent of the Spanish-speaking world resides in Spain). In order to reorganize the arrangement of departmental disciplines, our perception of a specialist (for the case of the Peninsularist) would change. In the same way that some departments of ten faculty members have one ‘Mexicanist’ who is expected to touch on all realms of that literary and cultural history, the same should be the case for Spain, with an important exception: the pre-colonial and early colonial periods, when the majority of Spanish speakers were yet to be on the Peninsula. As the seminal points of the language are the product of rich interlingual periods in Iberia — Celtic and Celt-Iberian presence, Ibero settlements, the Roman conquest and the Convivencia, and so on — in order to adequately address these seminal roots of the language itself, an exception to a democratic representation might be made by including one extra Peninsular specialist who specializes in those topics (this would be one hire in a theoretical department of ten, and proportional representation in larger and smaller departments). This would require the second departmental specialist in Peninsular themes to have a more broad register rather than the current norms, which generally

divide Peninsular study into medieval, golden age, twentieth century, and so on. Such a transition would require restructuring doctoral programmes — a transition which would occur seamlessly within the other paradigm shifts that would stem from a democratization of the field.

Universities presently culturally engineer the classroom dynamics towards Peninsular topics by over-hiring and thus overrepresenting specialists in those fields. An inherent characteristic of the appointment process itself concerns what subjects will be treated and the data demonstrate that these eurocentric mores, although often rejected in the academy, are yet broadly entrenched as hiring tendencies. Nevertheless, as ostensible supporters of egalitarian and democratic values, those with the capacity to enact change (hiring committees, deans, eminent scholars, and so on) should be actively deconstructing the present norms, nuancing the euro-aesthetic towards more democratic and localized concepts.

The analysis in this essay and the solutions put forth should be part of a complex whole. As Idelber Avelar comments: ‘democratization of cultural capital in the discipline not only lies in the canon and its expansion’ (2005: 279). It is also a paradigm of constructing aesthetic relevance and managing cultural and social appropriation of texts, academic and cultural appointments, refocusing scholarly importance and institutional awareness, and cultural growth and social consciousness. The few resources we have at our disposal should be engaged towards treating cultures — and thus the *people* of those cultures — in an egalitarian fashion.²⁶

After Hispanic studies

Eurocentrism is, in part, a product of the exigencies of cultural disciplines that have been divided into an area-studies basket. If (or, perhaps, *because*) these disciplines are absorbed in area-studies narratives that hinge on imaginary cultural geographies, how those cultures and geographies are manifest in our curricula and faculties should offer democratized, representative examples of the cultures they treat.²⁷ Detaching our faculties from the implied belief that European (in this case, Spanish) culture is preeminent would be accompanied by a crisis period during which the academy would restructure vocabularies of discussion on the present and past, the modes of cultural authority, and the dynamics of Spanish-language communities. A conviction to abandon Hispanic studies as the privileged player in Spanish-language cultural study would undo the imaginary glories of the past that are repeated in contemporary curricula, and gesture towards a new future.

Using a new, democratized and egalitarian educational structure, conceivably, would forge a new scholarly future that is more attuned to the cultural demographies of Spanish-speaking peoples everywhere. The present over-emphasis on Spain, its cultures and languages, would cease to crowd out other regional sensitivities, and it would redirect those reflections towards new connections or potential oppositions (migrant and non, for instance), which would complement (or perhaps replace) the Spain/Latin America binary that our contemporary academic structures command. New ‘trans’ labels that counterbalance the transatlantic frame would emerge, as the intercultural axes among Spanish-speaking communities are significantly more

diverse than the contemporary theoretical glimpses (often based on a Spain-Latin America imaginary duality) allow.

The aesthetic shifts that would accompany a democratized Spanish-language cultural and pedagogical canon would take generations to be comprehensively realized. The shifts in faculty demographics would occur over many decades, with more conservative institutions, presumably, appropriating changes long after they have been established elsewhere. The eurocentric utopia of today, manifest in faculties over-weighted towards Spain, has been constructed and reiterated for 500 years; if the cultural and pedagogical canon is a democratic one for the long term — for the next half millennium — the concept of ‘canonic importance’ inevitably will transition towards a more socially-representative model. Over time, the myth of Spanish exceptionalism, upon which present faculty and canonic imbalances are maintained, will cease to be self-evident.

Notes

¹ The study involved scrutinizing the professional demographics (by subfield specialization) at several cohorts of US universities with two principal ends: first, to demonstrate the overwhelming overrepresentation of Peninsular themes (and thus a eurocentric register) in the field of Spanish-language cultural studies as a whole; and second, to pose an argument in favour of changes in faculty appointment practices that would ensure a more democratic approach to the scholarly treatment of Spanish-speaking cultures. The ideas presented in this essay should be understood as conceptual rather than binding (or even necessarily implementable in the status quo); the interest is to illustrate the contemporary slant towards eurocentric pedagogy through a quantitative data set, and to foment a scholarly dialogue on how the field could be improved.

² For more on this topic, see Anibal Quijano’s ‘Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America’ (2000) and Walter D. Mignolo’s ‘Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality’ (2007).

³ In addition to the problems inherent to eurocentric cultural studies, inundating classrooms with Peninsular accents and vernacular has a significant effect on the Spanish linguistic norms in US higher education.

⁴ Several cases — such as that of Bolivia, where half the population did not self-identify as bilingual in Spanish until the 1970s (Wolfson & Manes, 1985: 298) — strongly rebuke the imperialist cultural mappings of the ‘Hispanic’ register in the American worlds.

⁵ Since then, the movement away from eurocentric academic models was an attempt to subvert the misapprehensions associated with perceiving Latin America as a cultural subordinate to Spain. In that scholarly tradition, Latin-American Spanish-language narratives (as well as other creative and

visual arts) should be interpreted as derivations of Peninsular spirit or a metaphoric ongoingness outside Iberia — a diasporic ‘Spanish’ art, as it were. That aesthetic interpretation locates supposed Peninsular influences in Latin-American art above those from local traditions or associated syncretizations, often imagining the work as European culture displaced to the Americas.

⁶ Another major dilemma in US Spanish-language studies, as I mentioned earlier, is the treatment of the subject itself as a ‘foreign’ language/culture in the US.

⁷ While the US is part of Latin America, US speakers of Spanish are excluded from these figures.

⁸ Across all cohorts, specialists in transatlantic themes comprised 3 per cent (20), pedagogy or linguistics 19 per cent (117), and other non-area specialists 4 per cent (23). Other non-area specializations included: business Spanish, gender studies, creative writing, trauma studies, *hétéronomies*, poetics, theory, and theatre and film (as well as no area of study indicated).

⁹ Sources: “National Universities Ranking” *US News and World Report* 13 March 2014. 1+ “Doctoral Programs by the Numbers” *Chronicle of Higher Education* 29 September 2010. 1+

¹⁰ As far as departmental naming trends, the ‘Spanish-American’ descriptor has fallen out of favour and many departments also avoid the charged modifier ‘Hispanic’ in favour of the more innocuous ‘romance’ or ‘Spanish and Portuguese’ studies.

¹¹ Many of these reports emphasize the importance of Spanish over other European languages in the classroom but say little on which dialect of Spanish and which Spanish-language cultures should be presented and with what representation (see: Fernández, 2000; García, 1993; Leeman, 2006).

¹² Román de la Campa remarks that the field is ‘in a constant state of flux’ (2005: 300) and scholars should ‘concur in the pursuit of new packaging for disciplines and scholars’ (2005: 300), but the department he chairs, like that of NYU, has a eurocentric hiring culture.

¹³ Brown’s text details ‘missing contents’ (2010: Chapter 4), which includes a short section on what she terms ‘geographical gaps’. This three-page segment focuses on Latin America in the canon and, more specifically, what she calls an ‘open secret’ (2010: 107): Latin-American studies are unbalanced because some regions are studied more than others. The problem with this approach is that she discusses regions of Latin America *within* Latin-American studies as a subfield, not the field as a whole.

¹⁴ The Peninsular register correspondingly penetrates other realms of the academic world. For instance, *Project Muse* has a ‘Latin American and Caribbean studies’ subheading with twenty journals, five of which have ‘Hispanic’ in the title; there are twenty journals listed under the ‘Spanish and Portuguese literature’ subheading and eleven more listed under ‘Iberian studies’. The MLA organizes study groups under romance topics, and the Spanish-language subgroup is listed under ‘Hispanic literatures’, a category that includes three groups with a Latin-American focus and four concerning Peninsular culture.

¹⁵ Save Pittsburgh, which already has a democratic faculty with one Peninsular specialist.

¹⁶ English translation: When entering Spain I do not have the impression of arrival, but of return. Perhaps many Spaniards would find this sentiment strange, but we assure you that the feeling is typical for the Creole, the Indigenous, and the colonist or colonized people born in the territories of Spain’s ancient empire. If we dare to make a complaint to the great nation that we were taught to consider, rightly or wrongly, as our Mother Country, it is about the deep conviction that we have to not been outside Spain. [...] We know it to be true that our imagination, our majority language, and our most important cultural references come from Spain. Here we mix with other delicious contributions of humanity, especially the indigenous and black, but we have never renounced, nor could we do so, our Spanish past. Our Classics are the classics of Spain, nearly all of our names and surnames originated there, as did almost all our dreams of justice, and even some of the blood and fury of our fanaticism, not to mention our outdated feelings of gentleman-honor, they are all of Spanish inheritance (García Márquez, 2001: 1).

¹⁷ While English departments in the US have been reinterpreting the concept of ‘American’ literatures since the mid-1980s (see: Carafiol, 1992; Jay, 1991), the canon of literatures in English, French, and

Portuguese are, like Spanish departments, severely restrictive and eurocentric, with comparatively little representation from African, Asian, and Caribbean communities.

¹⁸ We might also point out that these writers do not represent the Latin-American median in economic, education, political, or cultural senses.

¹⁹ It is precisely this body of laws that constructs the political concept of an ‘illegal’ person within a socially-organized space. (Unless a felony is committed, a US citizen cannot be an ‘illegal’ in Europe, nor can a citizen of European be an ‘illegal’ in the US - because neither are subordinated to this visa process.)

²⁰ In order to further layer an analysis of this letter, written collectively by several Latin-American authors, we might consider if such a plea would exist if Latin-American governments were to subject Spaniards to the visa process. How would the same group express their perceived loss? Would these writers use such a moment to voice their perceived relationship to Spain? What makes their supposed affiliation with Spain so strong in this moment of their persecution by it?

²¹ This argument has been informed by Robert Young’s work on postcolonialism as a continuing force. As he notes: ‘The only criterion that could determine whether “postcolonial theory” has ended is whether [...] imperialism and colonialism in all their different forms have ceased to exist in the world, whether there is no longer domination by nondemocratic forces [...] or economic and resource exploitation enforced by military power, or a refusal to acknowledge the sovereignty of non-Western countries, and new literary history whether peoples or cultures still suffer from the long-lotringer after effects of imperial, colonial, and neocolonial rule, albeit in contemporary forms such as economic globalization’ (Young, 2012: 20).

²² Area studies generally employ supra-grouping mechanisms to collectivize individual cultural action. These modes are dependent upon the pre-existence of cultural groups that supposedly correspond to geography. The area cultural study approach requires a critical leap, one that perceives individual cultural action as a function of pre-categorizations (generally associated with geography) which are supposedly stable and sometimes plural or hybridized conceptualizations.

²³ It is worthwhile to note here a recent text on Spanish-language transatlanticism: Alejandro Mejías-López’s *The Inverted Conquest: The Myth of Modernity and the Transatlantic Onset of Modernism*. Mejía-López argues that Latin-American *modernistas* seized both linguistic and cultural authority from Spain towards the end of the nineteenth century. In this ‘inverted conquest’, these writers moved ‘the cultural center of

the Hispanic Atlantic westward to America' (2009: 4). This critic deftly observes: 'For Spanish critics, Spanish American modernismo and the way it was transforming and opening literary language in Spanish were a threat to the perceived purity of "Castilian" and to the linguistic, literary, and cultural authority of the nation' (Mejía-López, 2009: 99).

²⁴ Numerous are the ceremonies, rituals, and other Latin-American material cultural elements that openly reject Hispanic cultural roots. 'Quemando el año Viejo' is a New Year's ceremony realized throughout the Andean region, Central America, and Mexico, which has been interpreted as an anti-colonial rite (see: Herlihy, 2009: 30; 2011: Chapter 8). Upon winning a gold medal at the Atlanta Olympics, Ecuadorian Jefferson Pérez said: 'With this medal, I renounce the inferiority complex that they have put upon us for 500 years' (2004: 1A). In 2006, Bolivian president Evo Morales said that Latin America's 'campaign of resistance was not in vain',

and continued: 'We're taking over now over the next 500 years' (quoted in Herlihy, 2009: 32).

²⁵ This discussion does not delve into the local communities of these institutions, which are imperative to bear in mind when organizing a faculty demographic. Universities should take into account the local demographics when appointing faculty. Such initiatives, moreover, would inevitably democratize the faculty towards Latin America, as there are no major areas of the US with comparable numbers of Peninsular speakers of Spanish.

²⁶ As passively as inequality is being reinforced in our Spanish-language departments at the present time, a new direction for the discipline will be a significant gain for our students.

²⁷ Indeed, how the past cultural systems (even in the postcolonial period) have been engineered towards Europe should inform how we evaluate Spanish-language writing (and that of other idioms) today.

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