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## Foreword

A pathbreaking study of U.S.–Latin American relations, *Close Encounters of Empire* is also a landmark of postcolonial studies in the Americas. The product of a conference at Yale University, this unusually coherent collection of essays reflects vigorous collective discussions, painstaking scholarship, and skilled editorial work. While the individual cases examine with sophistication a wide range of imperial encounters in the Americas, the introduction and the two concluding interpretive essays relate the studies to each other and discuss their collective achievements. I will exchange the opportunity to comment further on the case studies for the chance to discuss this volume's theoretical contribution to the broader field of postcolonial studies.

The authors of these essays treat postcolonial encounters in the Americas as complex affairs involving multiple agents, elaborate cultural constructs, and unforeseen outcomes. While evidently inspired by recent developments in social theory associated with cultural and feminist studies, as well as with poststructuralism and postcolonialism, the essays also build on a long tradition of Latin American scholarship on colonialism and imperialism. The book's theoretical importance results from the diverse ways in which its authors establish, often implicitly, a dialogue among these diverse bodies of scholarship.

In the introduction Gil Joseph highlights the significance of this dialogue, noting that the collection is distinguished by the pioneering use of postmodern approaches to the analysis of U.S.–Latin American relations. As Joseph observes, while the essays are informed by a postmodern sensitivity to the formation of subaltern subjects, the ambiguities of power, and the multistranded character of historical processes, they do not abandon a more traditional concern with large-scale historical contexts and overarching political relations. Through the interplay of these approaches, the essays treat the “encounter” between the United States and Latin America as a complex interaction among unequal social actors, illuminating in new ways their modes of cooperation, subjection, and resistance under changing historical conditions.

This collection's engagement with modern and postmodern approaches is also underlined by Rosenberg and Roseberry in the two interpretive

essays that close the book. Rosenberg contrasts this volume with studies that take a modernist perspective and emphasizes its affinity with postcolonial theory, postmodern studies of international relations, and culture-centered discussions of U.S. foreign relations. According to her, the recognition of the complexity and ambiguity of power systems has led to studies that reject the positivist conceits of the master narratives of modernism and that opt for the more modest goal of illuminating social reality through partial glimpses, attentiveness to localized context, and sensitivity to multiple stories and protean symbolic systems. For Roseberry, this volume's theoretical significance lies in its ability to draw on new perspectives while building on earlier modes of analysis. Seeking to bridge rather than to reinforce the gap between political economy and cultural studies that underwrites the modern-postmodern divide, Roseberry suggests that we read this book as effecting not so much a shift as a dialogue between these approaches.

Yet Latin America has been largely absent from the internal dialogue that has established the field of postcolonial studies in the metropolitan centers. Readers familiar with this field may be aware that it has been fundamentally defined by work produced about northern European colonialism in Asia and Africa, and that its critique of dominant historiographies (whether imperial, nationalist, or Marxist) has led to a significant reconceptualization of the making and representation of colonial histories (perhaps best exemplified by the scholarship of India's Subaltern Studies Group). However, both postcolonial imperialism and Latin America (as an area of study and as a source of theoretical and empirical work) are fundamentally absent from postcolonial studies' canonical texts. This volume counters both absences.

The inclusion of the Americas expands the historical referents and theoretical scope of postcolonial studies. The Americas encompass a vast territory where, since the end of the fifteenth century, European imperial powers (not only Spain and Portugal but also England, France, Holland, and Germany) have imposed various modalities of colonial control, learned from each other, and transplanted this learning to other regions. It is also the region where the United States has most forcefully practiced new modes of imperial domination as the world's major capitalist power. A lengthy postcolonial history has encouraged Latin American and Caribbean thinkers to confront imperialism's changing forms. From the perspective of the Americas, some of the pitfalls entailed by the *post* of *postcolonialism*, such as the notion that it denotes effective decolonization, are perhaps easier to avoid.

I will treat the encounter between modern and postmodern approaches that informs this collection on postcolonial encounters in the Americas as the opportunity to move beyond the limitations of either approach. The following five propositions, derived from my reading of this book, are but some tentative steps in this direction.

1. *Culture/Political Economy*. While the scholarship on U.S.–Latin American relations has traditionally centered on political economy (largely through works influenced by the dependency perspective), recent studies inspired by postcolonial theory tend to focus on the culture of imperial-subaltern encounters. Yet “political economy” and “culture” are ambiguous theoretical categories that refer both to concrete social domains and to abstract dimensions of any social domain. The traditional focus on political economy entails a neglect not only of domains outside the economy, but also of the cultural dimension of economic practices themselves. In postcolonial studies the current focus on culture has opened new areas of inquiry, yet has tended to neglect the study not only of economic and political relations, but also of the materiality of cultural practices. A recognition that the separation between culture and political economy is itself culturally constructed would help overcome this oversight.

2. *Metanarratives/Ministories*. One consequence of the various “turns” (discursive, linguistic) and “posts” (postmodernism, postcoloniality) has been the tendency to identify political economy with modernist master narratives and cultural studies with postmodern fragmented stories. While one approach typically generates unilinear plots, unified actors, and integrated systems, the other produces multistranded accounts, divided subjects, and fragmented social fields. Yet there is no reason why social analysis should be cast in terms that polarize determinism and contingency, the systemic and the fragmentary. The critique of modernist assumptions should lead to a more critical engagement with history’s complexity, not to a proliferation of disjointed vignettes and stories.

3. *Fluid Subjects/Complex Wholes*. The field of postcolonial studies has focused on the range, inner complexity, and fluidity of the subjects and locations involved in imperial encounters. Yet the analytical inclusion of fluid subjects and unstable terrains must be complemented by the analysis of their articulation within encompassing social fields. These fields of power are internally ordered, and their systemic properties have effects that must be analyzed. Fragmentation, ambiguity, and disjuncture are features of complex systems, rather than their opposite. Lest we miss the forest for the trees, the task remains to understand the complex architecture of parts and whole.

4. *Borders/Bodies*. Imperial encounters entail the transcultural interaction of the domestic and the foreign under changing historical conditions. This process does not involve the movement of discrete entities from one bounded body into another across fixed borders, but rather their reciprocal transformation. The borders between the dominant and the subaltern are multiple—from the physical frontiers that separate them to the “contact zones” where imperial and subaltern actors interact. In imperial-subaltern encounters, bodies and borders are mutually defined and transformed through asymmetrical processes of transculturation.

5. *Imperialism/Subalternity*. Imperial-subaltern encounters occur in social landscapes structured by differing modes of exploiting nature and labor. The social identities formed in these landscapes—constituted by such relations as nationality, class, ethnicity, gender, religion, race, and age—cannot be analyzed without reference to these forms of exploitation. A focus on the complex articulation of these asymmetrical relations avoids reductionist explanations that dismiss culture as a mere epiphenomenon, discursive accounts that disavow the material dimension of domination, and essentialist interpretations that celebrate as resistance any form of subaltern response and adaptation. Studies of specific postcolonial encounters must address the encompassing landscapes of power in which they unfold and the persisting colonizing effects of (post)modern empires.

The Americas have always been a site of unexpected transfigurations. It would be a welcome irony if on the social terrain of the Americas—so saturated by a history of imperialism and by reflections on it—the turn to postmodern discursive approaches converged with or emerged as a material turn, understood as a move toward a fuller recognition of the complex wholeness of social reality. By bringing excluded objects of study into view and refining the way we view them, *Close Encounters of Empire* advances the project of developing a perspective on imperialism capable of confronting its ongoing colonizing effects on territories, peoples, and knowledges. This critical perspective will permit a fuller understanding of the colonial and postcolonial past, as well as more adequate responses to the new forms of subjection and inequality of the ever-changing postcolonial present.