Posthegemony

Political Theory and Latin America

JON BEASLEY-MURRAY



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Posthegemony / FULL TEXT FOR PRESS / November 22, 2010 / Page vi / BLANK

Contents

Introduction: A User's Guide	ix
Prologue: October 10, 1492	1
Part I CRITIQUE	
1. Argentina 1972: Cultural Studies and Populism	15
2. Ayacucho 1982: Civil Society Theory and Neoliberalism	68
Part II CONSTITUTION	
3. Escalón 1989: Deleuze and Affect	125
4. Chile 1992: Bourdieu and Habit	174
Conclusion: Negri and Multitude	226
Epilogue: April 13, 2002	284
Acknowledgments	297
Notes	301
Bibliography	325
Index	353

Posthegemony / FULL TEXT FOR PRESS / November 22, 2010 / Page viii / BLANK

Introduction

A User's Guide

In this book there are two texts which simply alternate; you might almost believe they had nothing in common, but they are in fact inextricably bound up with each other, as though neither could exist on its own, as though it was only their coming together, the distant light they cast on one another, that could make apparent what is never quite said in one, never quite said in the other, but said only in their fragile overlapping.

— Georges Perec, W

One beginning and one ending for a book was a thing I did not agree with.

- Flann O'Brien, At Swim-Two-Birds

Definitions

There is no hegemony and never has been. We live in cynical, post-hegemonic times: nobody is very much persuaded by ideologies that once seemed fundamental to securing social order. Everybody knows, for instance, that work is exploitation and that politics is deceit. But we have always lived in posthegemonic times: social order was never in fact secured through ideology. No amount of belief in the dignity of labor or the selflessness of elected representatives could ever have been enough to hold things together. The fact that people no longer give up their consent in the ways in which they may once have done, and yet everything carries on much the same, shows that consent was never really at issue. Social order is secured through habit and affect: through folding the constituent power of the multitude back on itself to produce the illusion of transcendence and sovereignty. It follows also that social change is

 \mathbf{X}

never achieved through any putative counterhegemony. No amount of adherence to a revolutionary creed or a party line could ever be enough to break things apart. The fact that now people no longer believe in radical change as they may once have done does not mean that everything will carry on much the same. Social change, too, is achieved through habit and affect: through affirming the constituent power of the multitude. But change is not a matter of substituting one program for another. This book offers no blueprint, because the multitude betrays the best-laid plans.

By "hegemony," I do not mean mere domination. To say "posthegemony" is not to say that domination is at an end. Command and control, exploitation and oppression, still manifestly continue. If anything, they are now more savage and more pernicious than ever as the state increasingly permeates everyday life and as politics becomes "biopolitics." Nor by hegemony do I mean the concept in International Relations of a single dominant world power. It may be that such a power no longer exists, but this is more a symptom of posthegemony than the main issue. By hegemony I mean the notion, derived from the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, that the state maintains its dominance (and that of social and economic elites) thanks to the consent of those it dominates. Where it does not win consent, this theory suggests, the state resorts to coercion. By contrast, in stressing the role of habit (rather than opinion) I point to processes that involve neither consent nor coercion. A focus on habit enables us to grasp the workings of the habitus: a collective, embodied feeling for the rules of the social game that is activated and reproduced beneath consciousness. And in stressing the role of affect (rather than emotion) I turn to other feelings: the impersonal and embodied flow of intensities that undermines any concept of a rational subject who could provide or withdraw his or her consent. But in stressing the notion of the multitude (rather than the people) I show that subjectivity continues to play a vital role: the multitude is the subject of a constituent power that is prior to the constituted power of the state and the sovereign. Habit, affect, and the multitude are the three components of a theory of posthegemony. All three are responses to the puzzle posed by the seventeenth-century philosopher Benedict de Spinoza: "No one has yet determined what the body can do." Habit describes the way in which bodies act out the regular and repetitive activities that structure daily life. Affect indicates the power of a body (individual or collective) to affect

xi

or be affected by other bodies. And the multitude encompasses an expansive collection of bodies that, in organizing itself so as to increase its powers of affection, constitutes society and drives time onward. All three terms, moreover, refer to immanent processes: they incarnate a logic from below that requires neither representation nor direction from above. Or rather, they undo the spatial metaphor of "above" and "below." They are sufficient unto themselves. So although we may think about posthegemony negatively, in terms of flight or exodus from the current order of things — moving beyond ideology, escaping social constraints — the real question concerns the reverse process. What is the origin of the wrinkles in immanence that give rise to the illusion of transcendence, the fiction of hegemony, the presupposition of the state, and the presumption of a social pact? Why do we stubbornly take these effects for causes? For in fact what we most immediately perceive are bodies, with their habitual movements, their affective intensities, and their multitudinous interactions. Posthegemony is an attempt to rethink politics from the ground up, rooted in the material reality common to us all.

I am not the only person to have advanced a concept of posthegemony, though this book is the first to define it at such length and in these terms. Sociologist Scott Lash, for instance, argues that "power now...is largely post-hegemonic" and suggests that "cultural studies should look mostly elsewhere for its core concepts." But Lash's conception of posthegemony is purely temporal: he argues merely that power is now posthegemonic. My aim is a more comprehensive critique of the idea of hegemony and of the cultural studies that, as Lash rightly but too reverently observes, it defines. Likewise, theorist Nicholas Thoburn contends that social theory has to take account of the fact that the concept of civil society (for Gramsci, intimately linked to the notion of hegemony) no longer holds.4 My criticism of the notion of civil society is again more wholesale: I argue that it has always been an accomplice of state containment, a means to stigmatize affect and the multitude as somehow barbarous and apolitical. By contrast, political theorist Benjamin Arditi is skeptical of the proposition that the era of hegemony is at an end, but he argues that politics is, perhaps increasingly, not simply about hegemony. Arditi points to two forms of posthegemonic politics: the exodus or defection of the multitude; and the viral politics of informal networks. (I see no significant distinction between the two.) Both are "ways of doing politics that xii

bypass the neo-Gramscian logic of hegemony and counterhegemony characteristic of most of what is usually inventoried under the name of 'politics' today." For Arditi, posthegemony supplements but does not replace politics as "usual." If anything, in his view posthegemony reinforces the concept of hegemony, by giving it "an outside to define it." My disagreement with traditional politics, however, is again more sweeping: I argue that it offers at best a temporary palliative, at worst a fatal distraction from the real workings of power and domination.

My understanding of posthegemony is, like Arditi's, related to debates within Latin American studies about the political and theoretical limits to the concept of hegemony rather than simply about its contemporary obsolescence. In his 1990 book Modernism and Hegemony, the Marxist cultural critic Neil Larsen engages with both the "crisis of representation" in modernist aesthetics and the "crisis of hegemony" that has long seemed to plague Latin America. He argues that this supposed crisis of hegemony is in fact merely its inversion: it is a hegemony enshrined in cultural goods rather than political discourse that thereby "render[s] visible what is hidden in the posthegemonic conditions of the center," that is, that aesthetics can no longer be a refuge from "the real space of hegemonic state power." Larsen does not develop this concluding and rather gnomic hint that the collapse of the state, its inability to articulate a coherent or convincing discourse, is really its expansion into culture as a whole, its disarticulated diffusion throughout what was once imagined to be civil society. Five years later, however, critic George Yúdice takes up the term "posthegemony" as part of a qualified defense of civil society. Likewise observing "a weakening of the articulation of national discourse and state apparatuses," Yúdice argues that "we might say that, from the purview of the national proscenium, a posthegemonic situation holds." Again, posthegemony in this instance means mostly that hegemony is no longer tied to the state; but it also implies that hegemony has expanded well beyond national boundaries, "to naturalize global capitalism everywhere."7

I agree with Larsen and Yúdice that today power is obviously at work everywhere, that representation has collapsed, and that the state is effectively dissolved into what was once known as civil society. But this means that civil society, which is defined by its distinction from the state, has now withered away.⁸ This

xiii

diffuse ubiquity of politics is what, following the French philosopher Michel Foucault, I term "biopolitics." It is not the expansion of hegemony but its evacuation. More clearly than ever, power works directly on bodies, in the everyday life that once appeared to be a refuge from politics. Yet for Larsen and Yúdice, posthegemony is ironically hegemony's triumph: hegemony is everything and everywhere. I argue that it is this misconception that lies at the root of cultural studies, encouraging a populism that equates the state's dissolution in the everyday with its disappearance altogether.

Discussion of posthegemony within Latin American studies took a new turn following an engagement with subaltern studies. Despite adopting the Gramscian concept of the "subaltern" with alacrity, refashioning it to refer to nonelite members of colonial and postcolonial societies, the South Asian historians who formed the subaltern studies group in the 1980s took issue with what for Gramsci was the related notion of hegemony. For the group's founder Ranajit Guha, for instance, the subaltern is inconstant and unpredictable and refuses to admit the existence of any single sphere (secular, religious, or nationalistic) within which hegemony could be sought or won. Hence "the swift transformation of class struggle into communal strife and vice versa" for which the best-intentioned narrative of solidarity can offer "only some well-contrived apology or a simple gesture of embarrassment."9 Guha suggests that the subaltern inevitably turns its back on or betrays any putative hegemonic project: it refuses to give consent to consent. If hegemony is the struggle to gain consent, it requires the prior, implicit agreement that it is consent that is at issue in political struggles. Hegemony itself has to become dominant. As Guha argues in Dominance without Hegemony, this implies an equation between civil society, the nation, and the state: an echo chamber within which the terms of struggle are more or less predetermined. 10 But the subaltern always disrupts the boundaries of any such delimited space. Subalternity deconstructs hegemony: as postcolonial critic Gayatri Spivak consistently argues, the subaltern is the mute and impossible remainder that always undoes hegemony's claims.¹¹

In books published in 2002 and 2001 respectively, Latin Americanist cultural critics Gareth Williams and Alberto Moreiras redescribe subaltern remainder in terms of posthegemony. In Williams's words, posthegemony "permits us to give a name to hegemony's subaltern residues, negative languages, fragmentary responses, cultural

Introduction

leftovers, and fissured experiences." He continues: "Posthegemony, in this sense, is no longer a name for the hegemony of transnational capital, but the name of those 'places in which hegemony ceases to make sense." "12 Or, in Moreiras's version, the realization that hegemony can never exhaust the "infinitude of the social" enables "a radical opening to the subaltern position, calling as such for the permanent destabilization of hegemonic ideology and the passage to a thinking beyond hegemony." 13 Posthegemonic subalternism, in this account, maintains a vigilant and unceasing critique of power on the basis of hegemony's inevitable failures. It warns against the hegemony of hegemony: against, that is, any belief in hegemony's promises that it may one day become total, its fiction of an all-inclusive pact. In reality, Williams and Moreiras suggest, the more that hegemony expands, the more its perimeter is violently and viciously patrolled by state forces. As hegemony approaches its limit, the disjuncture between hegemon and subaltern is all the more arbitrary, all the more the site of conflagration and genocide.

Where I differ from Williams and Moreiras is that I am not content with deconstruction, with posthegemony as permanent critique or labor of the negative. Subalternism holds on to a distinction between inside and outside, and so perpetuates the fundamental binarism of both hegemony and civil society: a differentiation between hegemon and subaltern, civil and fanatic. Subaltern studies still believes in a social contract designed to separate civilization from barbarism, even if it champions the nether side of that distinction and refuses any myth of closure. To put this another way: Gramsci always conceded that hegemony was necessarily incomplete. And in the Argentine Ernesto Laclau's reelaboration of hegemony theory, what matters is what he calls the incommensurability between a hegemonic signifier that aspires to represent the whole of society and the real that always recedes from such claims to universality. The difference between hegemony theory and subaltern studies is simply that the political polarity is inverted: whereas Gramsci and Laclau would insist that politics means playing the game of hegemony, Spivak, Williams, and Moreiras question the rules of that game by pointing to the aporetic excess for which it can never account. But they seldom doubt the game itself. (Hence Moreiras, in his more recent book, *Línea de sombra*, now describes his project as parahegemonic.) By contrast, then, in my conception posthegemony goes beyond the wreckage of any hegemonic

xiv

project. I aim to redescribe and reconstruct an image of society that no longer depends on that society's own self-portrayal. My project is constitutive as well as critical. Central to this work of redescription and reconstruction is the concept of the multitude, which I take from Italian political theorist Antonio Negri. The multitude, Negri argues, preexists modern society, as "the conjunction of persons who inhabited a pre-social world that had to be transformed into a political society," haunts its institutions, and then returns in modernity's death throes. It is both excessive and foundational. The multitude is an agent of violent transformation and also the constitution of what is to come. Perhaps posthegemony can affirm its constituent power.

Structure

Before constitution, critique. This book has two parts. The first is a critique of cultural studies on the one hand, and the social scientific discourse of civil society on the other. I suggest that cultural studies' reductive definition of politics in terms of hegemony, with its insistence on culture as discursive articulation, substitutes culture for the state and therefore also confuses culture and state. This is true even of a more idiosyncratic definition of hegemony, such as that of anthropologist William Roseberry, who rejects hegemony as consensus but still stresses that hegemonic projects aim to construct "a common discursive framework." 15 At its limit, the logic of hegemony simply identifies with the state by taking it for granted. My argument proceeds by way of a history of cultural studies, to show how and why hegemony theory became its distinguishing feature, as well as through a close reading of Laclau, the foremost theorist of hegemony. I then examine the way in which a focus on civil society excludes culture from the political in the name of rational discourse. At its limit, however, civil society theory is overwhelmed by the affects it sets out to exclude. Here my argument works through an account of the discourse of new social movements and democratization to explain how and why the venerable concept of civil society has been revived over the past twenty-five years, as well as by way of a close reading of Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato, the most thorough theorists of civil society. What cultural studies and civil society theory share is an emphasis on discourse and on transcendence. They fail to confront immanent processes: either the xvi

embedded institutional structures that underpin discourse (in the case of cultural studies) or the affective flux that escapes it (with civil society theory). Moreover, neither are concerned with the means by which the state, or state effects, are constituted. Social science straightforwardly assumes that all politics is state politics, and posits civil society as the portal through which social movements must pass. Cultural studies simply forgets about the state, and so lets it in by the back door, while transfixed by its fetishized substitutes.

My critique of cultural studies and civil society is also, pragmatically, that they mimic the structures of power that they set out to understand. These are the structures that have been paradigmatic in twentieth-century democratic societies: populism and neoliberalism. Cultural studies is, effectively, populist. Civil society theory is, for all intents and purposes, itself neoliberal. Despite the best intentions of their practitioners, neither can be the standpoint from which to launch a critique of, respectively, a populism that claims culture can substitute for the state and a neoliberalism that purports to exclude culture from its domain. At best they can offer distorted glimpses of a politics beyond populism or neoliberalism, for instance in cultural studies' concern for everyday life or civil society theory's anxious fixation on social movement fundamentalism. Only posthegemony, with its understanding of what I call the double inscription of the state (as both immanence and transcendent quasi-cause), provides a foothold from which the unsaid as well as the said of these political formations can be observed and analyzed.

The book's second part turns to affect and habit as forms of (dis)organization beneath and beyond discourse, and so beyond the conceptual apparatus of cultural studies and civil society theory. Affect and habit are the basis of posthegemony. I examine French philosopher Gilles Deleuze's conception of affect, for which immanence is generally a space of liberation, and then sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's conception of habitus, for which it is social control that is immanent and all the more effective as such. Though these two approaches appear to be opposed, I argue that they are complementary, not least because each opens up to the other at critical moments: Deleuze's theory of affect when it has to account for the suicidal state, and Bourdieu's theory of habitus when social crisis reveals the potential creativity of resistance. Together, Deleuze and Bourdieu point to the need to take account, first, of the state's double inscription and, second, of the various possible modes of

xvii

immanent organization. In conclusion, I suggest that Negri's theory of the multitude helps explain the state's doubleness: multitude and state incarnate a sometimes complicitous confrontation between constituent and constituted power. Yet the multitude is also a social subject that constitutes itself through resonance and repeated encounters on the plane of immanence, offering the prospect of forms of community that might do without transcendence, that is, without either the state or sovereignty. I warn, however, that the multitude may turn bad and ultimately become indifferent to the Empire that it confronts. The concept of "corruption" that Negri employs to differentiate the two is in the end insufficient. Against Negri, then, I argue for a distinction between good and bad multitudes. I further caution that even should the multitude fully emerge, autonomous and unlimited, we may hesitate at the end of history that would result. Hence, inspired by the Irish novelist Flann O'Brien, I offer two endings: a conclusion that meditates on uneventful eternity and death, and an epilogue that rejoices in insurgent history and life.

We may or may not want to embrace posthegemony as a political project for what Negri prophesies will be a future constituent republic. But posthegemony as analysis offers a new understanding of the constitution of the present and of the origins and the limits of politics and political theory. It offers new tools for political and historical investigation. My move from critique to constitution contends that these three theorists (Deleuze, Bourdieu, and Negri) can be productively combined to trace a social and historical plane of immanence, a political and social theory that would reject, and yet also explain, transcendence at every point. This is the book's affirmative project, its elaboration of a theory of posthegemony that rereads social processes in terms of affect, habit, and the multitude. Posthegemony encompasses populism and neoliberalism, but it also goes beyond them, and beyond even modernity's contractualist tradition of which the current so-called left turns (Chávez, Morales,... Obama?) constitute the apogee and last gasp. It outlines a path through the everyday biopolitics that structures our long postdisciplinary interregnum. For we are indeed now moving beyond the period in which the state is constituted by means of double inscription and entering a period in which immanence is (nearly) all, an epoch now posthegemonic in the temporal sense, beyond even the fiction of hegemony.

xviii

Introduction

Latin America...and Beyond

Parallel to its theoretical argument, this book engages with Latin American social, political, and cultural history. This history is arranged as a series of case studies, each of which resonates with a specific aspect of the theoretical argument. My historical narrative moves from intensive moment to intensive moment rather than following a strict narrative teleology. It jumps from decade to decade. The case studies may perhaps be read separately, skipped, or, better still, supplemented or replaced by other cases that readers may wish to bring to and test with the theoretical matrix of posthegemony: if not El Salvador, then Colombia, say; if not Chile, then Poland; if not Argentina, then the United States. Running through these plateaus are several recurrent concerns: first, Latin American left movements from populism to Maoism, national liberation movements, new social movements, neopopulism, and the left turns; second, the role played by cultural genres such as film, television, testimonio, and the novel in Latin American societies; and third, the models of social structure found in Argentina, Peru, El Salvador, Chile, and Venezuela, and the relations between culture and politics in each. Throughout the book, theory and history are interwoven, even as each remains distinct and relatively autonomous. Within each chapter the historical and theoretical arguments are woven together via a mechanism of textual differentiation, in which the historical material bearing on Latin America appears in a different font. This arrangement is not to indicate any hierarchy of the theoretical over the empirical; indeed the historical and cultural could be viewed as the infrastructure for the theoretical, which the reader may or may not wish to peruse. The stories from Latin America include vignettes that have their own specific importance: for instance, the assault on a San Salvador hotel that was the real hinge between the Cold War and the Age of Terror; the Chilean shopping malls that reveal the true architecture of neoliberal consumerism; or the Gabriel García Márquez story that is a telling parable of bare life. In short, "you might almost believe," as French novelist Georges Perec notes in another context, that the two levels of text "had nothing in common, but they are in fact inextricably bound up with each other."16

A history of the contract also runs through my historical case studies. We see right at the outset of modern imperialism instances

xix

of contracts and compacts that fail to have their purported effect, not least the pact in the dark as the conquistadors read the so-called Requerimiento, designed to justify colonization to the natives, while its putative addressees were fast asleep in their beds. The pact does not establish the social relation it claims: that will have to be established by some other means, in this case by force. I analyze the theory of the contract in my concluding chapter, but the intervening historical analyses also involve failed pacts: a series of attempts to bind culture to state, or to secure the legitimacy of the state, that endlessly break down. Peronism, in chapter 1, is a compact between people and nation that is (almost) all-encompassing, that tries to sweep the people up in its promise of populist love that would come to stand in for the state, which spectacularly fell apart in the mid-1970s. Neoliberalism, illustrated in chapter 2 in its fatal dance with Peru's Sendero Luminoso during the early 1980s, is likewise expansive in its attempt to cement the whole of society to the state, but shatters in its encounter with the affect that it would abolish from civil society. In chapter 3 and its focus on the Salvadoran national liberation movement at its peak in the offensive of 1989, I examine insurgency and terror as the absolute limit of societies of control. The example of Chile in chapter 4, and its early 1990s transition from dictatorship to postdictatorship, considers everyday life and biopolitics, suggesting resonance and conatus (or striving) as concepts through which to understand the relation between culture and state, social movement and reproductive project. The concluding chapter revisits these case studies to recapitulate the crisis of the social contract in parallel with a theoretical argument concerning the multitude, the ambivalent and treacherous social subject that refuses all pacts and all solidarity. In the Epilogue, Venezuela's 1989 Caracazo and then the coup and countercoup of 2002 show how the multitude breaks even the contracts offered by Latin America's most successful pacted democracy and by its most promising instance of the current left turns, preferring unrepresented, perhaps unrepresentable, insurrection.

These case studies exemplify both the discontinuous history of state projects to bind the multitude and the unbroken red thread of the multitude's ever-expansive constituent power to which the state reacts. They point toward a history of the Latin American multitude through modernity: from the near mutiny on Columbus's first voyage of 1492 to the *chavista* counter-counterinsurgency of

XX

2002. This history might also encompass indigenous revolts during the colonial period, the wars of independence in the 1820s, or late nineteenth-century immigration and urbanization. Among more recent movements, one might consider the Zapatista uprising in Mexico or the *piqueteros* in contemporary Argentina. This would be an underground, alternative history of Latin America that would tell of insurgencies but also the stratagems by which hegemonic projects have attempted to turn those insurgencies to the advantage of the state: from the New Laws of the Indies, the Bourbon reforms, or the postindependence settlement, to the twentieth-century history that is more fully outlined here. It is precisely such mechanisms of reactionary conversion — of culture into state, affect into emotion, habit into opinion, multitude into people, constituent into constituted power — that are the ultimate interest of this book.

This is a book about political theory and Latin America, not political theory in Latin America or Latin American political theory. Its juxtaposition of the two terms is not quite contingent, not quite necessary. In one sense, its analyses of Latin American history and politics are interchangeable, almost disposable. In another sense, they anchor the theoretical argument. In still another, they contaminate and decenter it. The theory of posthegemony draws from but is also tested by Latin American history. Deleuze, Bourdieu, and Negri are European theorists, but European theory's passage through Latin America relocates and dislocates that theory. Passing such theory (and the theory of posthegemony) through other contexts would dislocate it in other ways, forcing revision and reappraisal. At the same time, at least one of my examples is not strictly Latin American at all: for all Columbus's bluster in front of his crew on October 10, 1492, he had not yet "discovered" the continent that would become the Americas. Indeed, the term "Latin America" would not be coined for another 350 years, and even now one would be hard-pressed to define its limits. Part geographical, part political, part cultural, Latin America overspills its bounds: is Belize Latin America? Québec? Miami? Lavapiés, Madrid? The Gaucho Grill, Manchester? Elsewhere I argue that Latin America becomes viral, diffusely global, in contemporary postmodernity.¹⁷ But the history of the conquest, of the colony and its immense transatlantic trade, of populism and neoliberalism, shows that Latin America has always been global, has always directly affected and decentered the

Introduction

global system. The Latin American multitude goes beyond regional borders to infiltrate the metropolis.

Perhaps posthegemony starts in Latin America, or in discussions of Latin America, but that is no reason for it to stop there. After all, most everything begins in Latin America: modernity, nationalism, the industrial revolution, among other world-historical processes. 18 The theories that are the object of my critique — cultural studies and civil society theory — also have a hidden Latin American history. Returning the theory of hegemony (via Laclau) and the theory of civil society (via Cohen and Arato) to a Latin American milieu repositions those theories in the contexts for which they are most adequate. I give those theories their best shot: not only do I choose what I claim are their strongest and most developed articulations (in Laclau and in Cohen and Arato), I also test them in contexts that should be favorable to their assumptions. Hence the choice of locations in which to test the theory of posthegemony: if posthegemony can do a better job of explaining the Central American liberation movements (the point of entry for cultural studies in Latin America) and the transition from dictatorship in the Southern Cone (favored locale for civil society theory), then it is all the more adequate to explain other conjunctures. This is why I am happy to leave, say, zapatismo or the piqueteros out of my analysis, even though these are the movements that have to date most attracted scholars who work with theorists such as Deleuze and Negri. 19 I take for granted that posthegemony best explains these phenomena, if it also best explains the FMLN and the Chilean new social movements. In other words, although the theory of posthegemony arises from a specific Latin American context, it is not beholden to any one location. It is, I hope, portable. With every iteration, however, the theory is bound to change. Something always escapes!

xxi



Christophe Colomb appaise une revolte à bord (Christopher Columbus puts down an attempted mutiny). Nineteenth-century French lithograph. Courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, negative no. LC-USZ62-20454.

Prologue

October 10, 1492

When we reach the sea we'll build a bigger boat and sail north to take Trinidad away from the Spanish Crown. From there we'll go and take Mexico from Cortez. What a great betrayal that will be. We will then control all of New Spain. And we will stage history as others stage plays.

— Aguirre, Wrath of God

The Fiction of Hegemony

Even empires seek validation. No power can subsist on coercion alone. Hence Antonio Gramsci's famous distinction between "hegemony" and "direct domination": hegemony is "the 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant social group," and direct domination is exercised by "the apparatus of state coercive power which 'legally' enforces discipline on those groups which do not 'consent' either actively or passively." Hegemony, in fact, is primary: for Gramsci, power is grounded in consent, and force is employed only secondarily, "in moments of crisis and command when spontaneous consent has failed." Coercion supplements consent, rather than vice versa. Hegemony is, in Gramsci's view, the bedrock of social order. It is through the pedagogical activities of intellectuals in civil society that the state maintains its grip over the exploited, and the dominant group cements the "prestige" that it "enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production."1

At first sight, the *Requerimiento* that justified Spanish claims to the Americas is a classic illustration of the relation between hegemony and coercion. Formulated in 1512 or 1513 by legal scholar Juan López Palacios Rubios, the *Requerimiento* ("Requirement"

or "Summons") was a text to be read by the conquistadors when they encountered indigenous peoples. The document filled a hole in Spain's legal claim to the New World, complementing and rationalizing the traditional European law of conquest. It outlines the case for the Empire's legitimacy, based on the papal donation of the New World to Castile in 1493, by way of a brief history of God's creation from Adam to the Spanish monarchs Fernando and Juana. Above all, it offers its indigenous addressees a choice: submit, or face violent subjugation. "Wherefore as best we can, we ask and require you," the declaration states, "that you consider what we have said to you, and that you take the time that shall be necessary to understand and deliberate upon it." Its audience is then to "consent and give place that these religious fathers should declare and preach to you the aforesaid." Should, however, they refuse their "'spontaneous' consent" to occupation and Christian preaching, the indigenous are to expect the worst: "We shall powerfully enter into your country, and shall make war against you in all ways and manners that we can." This is hegemony as a pedagogic enterprise designed to legitimate power, backed up by the threat of coercive discipline: the Requerimiento appears to encapsulate Gramscian theory in a nutshell.

On closer examination, however, Spanish practice had little in common with hegemony theory. The indigenous were seldom if ever given any real opportunity to consent. Most obviously, the Requerimiento was written in Spanish, a language that they did not speak. How would they agree to what they could not comprehend? Even where there was some attempt at translation, "the interpreters themselves did not understand what the document said." Moreover, as historian Lewis Hanke notes, the circumstances in which it was spoken "might tax the reader's patience and credulity, for the Requirement was read to trees and empty huts when no Indians were to be found. Captains muttered its theological phrases into their beards on the edge of sleeping Indian settlements."4 Sometimes the invaders read the document only after they had already made prisoners of the natives. At best the exercise devolved into a dialogue of the dumb, as when the Zuni Indians in what is now New Mexico responded to the reading with a ritual of their own, laying down "a barrier of sacred cornmeal" to prevent the Spaniards from entering the town.⁵ No wonder historian Henry Kamen calls "the final result... little more than grotesque"; he reports that even the document's author "realized it was farcical." Spanish chronicler Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo is said to have commented to his compatriot Pedrarias Dávila that "these Indians have no wish to listen to the theology of this Requirement, nor do you have any obligation to make them try and understand it." Contrary to claims that the *Requerimiento* was an instance of "Spanish rulers requir[ing] subject peoples to reiterate and reaffirm Spanish hegemony on a regular basis," in fact here hegemony is not at issue. The indigenous never had the option to consent; they were in no position to reaffirm anything.

Affects and Habits

Despite its transparent fictiveness and patent absurdity, the Requeri*miento* still served a purpose. For it was aimed not at the indigenous, but at the Spanish. Under the guise of an appeal to the consent of the subjugated, it shaped the habits and affects of the subjugators. The very fact of its redundant reiteration reveals that it was an exercise in habituation. And it was repeated for the Spaniards, not for their victims, who heard it only once, if at all. Each time the conquistadors recited the ritual declaration, their desires were synchronized and unified as part of a joint project. Rather than a gesture of incorporation, the edict was an act of constitution. Its confident self-justifications obscure the fact that it was needed only because the imperial state was so weak. It enfolded these European adventurers' often excessive energies into an enterprise directed as though from above. The Requerimiento had nothing to do with any putative hegemonic project; it was a properly posthegemonic mechanism. It worked all the better precisely because it appeared to be part of a campaign, however ridiculous and ineffective, to win hearts and minds, precisely because its object seemed to be elsewhere. The Spaniards could feel superior to the dumb Indians who did not know what had hit them, but they themselves were as much in the dark as anybody else. The Requerimiento functioned far beneath consciousness or ideology.

Bartolomé de las Casas, the sixteenth-century Dominican priest and defender of the indigenous, provides one version of the *Requerimiento* ritual. He tells us that when the Spaniards

Prologue

learned that there was gold in a particular town or village... [they made] their way there at dead of night, when the inhabitants were all in bed and sound asleep and, once they got within, say, half a league of the town itself, read out the terms of this edict, proclaiming (and only to themselves): "Leaders and citizens of such-and-such a town of this Mainland. Be it known to you that there is one true God, one Pope, and one King of Castile who is the rightful owner of all these lands. You are hereby summoned to pay allegiance, etc. Should you fail to do so, take notice that we shall make just war upon you, and your lives and liberty will be forfeit, etc." Then, in the early hours of the morning, when the poor people were still innocently abed with their wives and their children, they would irrupt into the town, setting fire to the houses and burning the women and children alive and often the men, too, before the poor wretches realized what was happening.9

Asleep in their beds, at dead of night, with the Spaniards half a league away, the indigenous are literally kept at a distance. Cultural critic Alberto Moreiras describes the *Requerimiento* as "differential inclusion"; but here the indigenous are not included at all. The native inhabitants can neither accept nor reject the choice that the Spaniards offer. They are beyond the pale of any possible community. Everything takes place before consciousness can take hold, "before the poor wretches realized what was happening." The invaders are speaking "only to themselves." But the mechanism in which they are participating depends no more on their understanding than it does on that of their victims. Moreiras points out that the indigenous inhabit a space that is "already marked by death and remains as such illegible." The *Requerimiento*, too, is illegible, however much it is read: it defies interpretation, as if to show that its meaning is of little consequence.

Subalternist historian Patricia Seed shows that the *Requerimiento* drew heavily on the Islamic tradition of *jihad*, or holy war; it was a hybrid text that "often led to considerable incomprehension by traditional Christian observers both inside and outside Spain." Unheard by its notional addressees, and almost as mystifying even to those who pronounced it, the edict's manifest content is beside the point, just as "whether the Spanish conquerors believed in it or found it personally compelling or convincing was irrelevant."¹¹

The text appears to seek consent and so to expand the community of believers, but those to whom it offers that possibility remain out of earshot, while those who are already within the circle are there regardless of any beliefs they might hold. The Requerimiento is comparable to the Bible proffered before the Inca Atahualpa in Cajamarca as the conquistador Gonzalo Pizarro advanced in his conquest of what is now Peru. The indigenous emperor threw the book to the ground because it did not "speak" to him; this sacrilege toward the holy word was taken by the Europeans to be proof of his barbarism and justification for bloodshed. Yet, as cultural critic Antonio Cornejo Polar observes, the Bible would have been equally illegible to most Spaniards, including Pizarro himself, not least because it was written in Latin.¹² The book was more fetish than text, a shibboleth whose signification was purely incidental. Neither the Bible nor the Requerimiento were documents that demanded interpretation; they were instead touchpapers for the violent explosion of imperial expansion, code words in the "protocol for conquest" enacted by the Spaniards in the dark.¹³

Las Casas had no illusions about the Spaniards' motivations: they were driven by the search for gold. This was no civilizing mission. Indeed, the Dominican's complaint was that the Requerimiento bore no relationship to the reality of Spanish practice. Las Casas was hardly an anti-imperialist. If anything, his campaign was for the Spanish state to give substance to the fiction of hegemony.¹⁴ For Las Casas, the scandal was the unbridled desire that reduced the conquistadors to savages more dangerous than the indigenous peoples themselves; their "blind and obsessive greed" made them "more inhumane and more vicious than savage tigers, more ferocious than lions or than ravening wolves."15 But he failed to see that the Requerimiento channeled that affect. It placed the lust for gold under the sign of a narrative of progress, and more importantly it unified the conquistadors, huddled together in an alien landscape. The act of reading helped bind the affect mobilized in their hunt for gold, counteracting that affect's centrifugal tendencies by organizing it as part of an ecclesiastical, imperial, and monarchical hierarchy before the men were let loose as a war machine "irrupt[ing] into the town."

The *Requerimiento* consolidates relations between the Spanish conquistadors after the fact of domination; it embodies them as agents of the state, as subjects of constituted power. Everybody

knows that the text itself is unpersuasive! Instead of persuading the colonized, it works on the colonizers to establish a common habitus that lies beneath ideology and beneath hegemony. As the invaders repeatedly intone these words that they themselves barely understand, they become habituated to a ritual through which the Spanish state, even at great distance, seeks to regulate their activities. Its men will at least have been singing from the same hymnbook, whatever their beliefs about or consent to the claims made in the hymns themselves. This is "dominance without hegemony," in subaltern studies theorist Ranajit Guha's words, "the fabrication of a spurious hegemony" 16 that nobody believes, but that serves (thanks to the notarization and record keeping that the edict itself demands) to emplot Latin America within a historical narrative generated by the European state. The subalterns will, simply, be eliminated, their culture excluded from the ambit of a Christian universe defined in terms of the centrality and rights of the Catholic monarchy. But the indigenous are never really a threat to those rights: the danger lies within, from the possibility that the conquistadors themselves might (as depicted in Werner Herzog's film Aguirre, Wrath of God [1972]) establish a counterstate on American soil. Behind the Requerimiento is the fear of betrayal, of sedition, of the threat posed by the men-at-arms who purportedly represent the Crown abroad.

The Multitude and the Pact

Postcolonial studies focuses on the relation between colonizer and colonized, between Empire and its outside. It thereby takes the state, and what goes on inside, for granted. Empire encounters the subaltern at its limit, but it already carries a multitude within. The agents of imperialism are as much escaping state control as expanding it. Colonialism's weak point is always the passage between center and periphery, metropolis and colony. The Spanish Empire was forced to establish an immense bureaucratic apparatus to guard this intermediate space, threatened constantly by piracy, fraud, desertion, and mutiny. The name given to this bureaucracy was the Casa de Contratación: the "Contraction House," or Office of Contracts. The European state depended on a diffuse group of adventurers and ne'er-do-wells to expand its sphere of influence until it covered the entire known world; but it had simultaneously to reign in this renegade subjectivity, to maintain the bounds

of the social contract. Empire stretched the state to its limit: the Crown's gravest problem was always its "inability...to control events from a distance." The multitude, a motley crew that resisted authority, representation, or leadership, constituted Empire but also undermined the very power that it brought into being.

Christopher Columbus was a Genoese adventurer who believed he had visionary inspiration. For over a decade, he hawked his idea for an expedition over the Atlantic to a variety of private and public interests. In the end, he won the backing of the Spanish monarchy, but his enterprise was essentially a private one. Spain itself barely existed as a modern nation-state: the crowns of Castile and Aragon had come together with the wedding of Ferdinand and Isabella in 1469, but it was only with the "reconquest" of Andalusia and the expulsion of Jews and Moors from the Iberian peninsula two decades later that the state could even aspire to the fantasy of territorial integrity and ethnic and cultural homogeneity. Columbus gained royal approval for his voyage just days after the king and queen rode into Granada in triumph in January 1492. This year of settling boundaries was also a year of great movements of peoples, "swarms of refugees." Jews who were camped around the ports and on seagoing vessels were given the order to "leave port on August 2, 1492, the day before Columbus set sail."18 In the early morning of August 3, as Spain consolidated its territorial and ethnic limits, Columbus's small fleet — the Niña, Pinta, and Santa María — constituted a seemingly insignificant line of flight westward. Something always escapes.

Columbus's crew had reason to flee. Tradition portrays them as convicts motivated by the royal pardon they received for signing up. 19 Historian and sailor Samuel Eliot Morison plays down this account of a crew "composed of desperate characters, criminals, and jailbirds," but he does confirm that at least four of the men had indeed been reprieved from death row by enlisting. 20 Even the full-time seafarers among them operated at the margins of the law. Columbus's main associate, Martín Alonso Pinzón, who captained the *Pinta* while his brother Vicente took charge of the *Niña*, had "like many other mariners...occasionally engaged in piracy as well as legitimate trade." This was an expedition packed with potentially unruly subordinates, exacerbated by an imbalance between crew and officers in that each ship's crew was exceptionally large, perhaps double the normal complement. 22 In any case, Columbus

had trouble with his men from the start. Even before they set sail, several of the crew on the *Pinta* "had been grumbling and making difficulties," and were suspected of sabotaging the ship at the Canaries.²³ Once underway, the admiral was increasingly worried about a possible mutiny, and with good cause: Las Casas reports that as early as September 24, when they were almost exactly in mid-Atlantic, some of his crew argued "that the best thing of all would be to throw [Columbus] overboard one night and put it about that he had fallen while trying to take a reading of the Pole Star with his quadrant or astrolabe."²⁴

The voyage is longer and farther than any of the men had expected. From early on, Columbus is aware that the sheer extent to which they are collectively venturing into the unknown is a likely cause for dissent. From September 9 (just three days after leaving the Canaries) he maintains a double log, with "two reckonings, one false and the other true," of the distance traveled each day, because he is worried that his crew might "take fright or lose courage if the voyage were long."25 Only landfall will resolve the men's concerns, yet land is frustratingly elusive. Expectation runs high, however. From September 14 Columbus reports that there are many sure signs of land, provoking a veritable interpretosis: there are no innocent objects in the Atlantic traversed by this convoy. On September 16, seeing "many patches of very green seaweed, which appeared only recently to have been uprooted[, a]ll considered therefore that they were near some island." Likewise, a live crab on September 17 can be taken to be "a certain sign of land." On September 25, both Columbus and the crew are convinced that land has been sighted. They fall on their knees to give thanks to God, but "what they had taken for land was no land but cloud." A week or so later, these "many signs of land," previously heralded by Columbus with enthusiasm, have to be discounted as the crew lobbies for the expedition to return to investigate.²⁶ Columbus rejects their proposal, and insists that they continue on westward. Historians William and Carla Phillips argue that he must have wanted "to maintain his authority over the captains and their crews.... Allowing side excursions in search of islands would diminish the aura of certainty that he had been at pains to protect."27 Previous voyagers (notably Bartholomew Dias rounding the Cape of Good Hope in 1487) had been forced by their crews

to abandon further exploration; Columbus, too, is now seriously running the risk of mutiny.

As October arrives, the situation deteriorates. By October 1 there is a discrepancy of 121 leagues between Columbus's "true calculation" of the distance they have traveled and "the lower figure... shown to the men."28 By October 11 that discrepancy will have risen to at least 195 leagues, or almost a quarter again of the extent that the men are told they have traveled. Yet even the phony log shows that the fleet has sailed much farther than Columbus had predicted. In this context, what Morison calls the "incipient mutiny" of late September develops fast: "Columbus and the Pinzons needed all their moral force and prestige to prevent outbreaks or even mutiny."29 On October 6, in an "acrid interview,"30 Martín Pinzón himself questions the route they are taking, suggesting they should veer farther south, but Columbus countermands his associate. One version of the admiral's log has him reporting: "My decision has not pleased the men, for they continue to murmur and complain. Despite their grumblings I held fast to the west."31 The same day, in response to the near-mutinous atmosphere, with the crew of the Santa María demanding that the fleet turn for Spain, he summons a council of his captains; both the Pinzón brothers are persuaded to support the decision to continue.³² October 7 brings another false sighting of land, and Columbus changes his bearing slightly to the south. Two days later he tacks north. But by October 10, "the men could bear no more; they complained of the length of the vovage."33

In Morison's words, "October 10 was the most critical day of the entire voyage, when the enterprise came nearest to failure," as "all the smoldering discontent of the men flared up into open mutiny." Columbus "encouraged them as best he could": he held out "high hopes of the gains they could make" and "he added that it was no use their complaining, because he had reached the Indies and must sail on until with the help of Our Lord he discovered land."³⁴ Perhaps it was the multiple signs that led Columbus to claim that they had already "reached" the Indies, though if the signs could have been believed they would have seen land long before. Perhaps he was also referring to the fact that, by any measure, the fleet was now more than 800 leagues from Spain, and he had repeatedly declared that land would be sighted at 750 leagues. But these

arguments were now wearing thin. Even the ships' captains were turning against their admiral. "The mutinous crewmen began to rattle their weapons." The admiral had to forestall panic among his crew, on whom he was totally dependent. There was no one more vulnerable than Columbus, as he himself would later lament loudly and persistently.

Columbus makes a pact with his men. The compromise he suggests is that "they would continue on their westward course for two more days (or three or four; accounts vary). If they had not found land at the end of that period, they would turn back."36 The precise details of the agreement are sketchy: it is omitted from the admiral's log and will become a bone of contention in a long-running court case years later in which the Crown will try to argue for the Pinzón brothers' share of the voyage's success.³⁷ Some accounts claim that it is Columbus who has to be encouraged to continue, and others that the Pinzón brothers are fully part of the mutiny. What is clear is that only this last-ditch attempt at compromise keeps the voyage going on October 10, 1492, and that there are good reasons why even Columbus might be losing heart. But an indication of the type of pact he might have made comes from the admiral's second voyage, in 1494. Then, he and his men are reconnoitering the coast of Cuba until, "fed by frustration and fantasy," Columbus gives up when he begins to suspect that it is not in fact part of the Asian mainland. This realization would threaten his cherished belief that he had indeed found a new route to the East Indies. So he again attempts a contract with his crew. "He called upon the ship's scrivener," Fernández-Armesto reports, "to record the oath of almost every man in the fleet that Cuba was a mainland and that no island of such magnitude had ever been known.... They further swore that had they navigated farther they would have encountered the Chinese." If the men break their oath, they face dire consequences: "a fine of ten thousand maravedis and the loss by excision of their tongues."38 If they refuse to abide by Columbus's fantasy, the crew lose their place within this newly constituted imperial order and are cast into mute subalternity.

On October 10 of the first voyage, the fictions validating Columbus's control are breaking down: he has given his men a false account of the distance traveled and has argued that they have already reached land, but the crew are no longer so prepared to

Prologue

swear agreement. They are an unruly multitude on the verge of overthrowing their master. His skin is only saved when, late the following night, the fleet finally makes landfall. Now the constitutive tension of Empire can be displaced elsewhere. Perhaps others will have better luck imposing the fiction of a contract, the illusion of consent. Or perhaps the slippage between constituent and constituted power will remain an open if unacknowledged wound throughout modernity.

11

Notes

Introduction

- 1. See Keohane, After Hegemony.
- 2. Spinoza, Ethics, 71.
- 3. Lash, "Power after Hegemony," 55.
- 4. Thoburn, "Patterns of Production."
- 5. Arditi, "Post-Hegemony," 215, 209.
- 6. Larsen, Modernism and Hegemony, 97.
- 7. Yúdice, "Civil Society," 4.
- 8. See Hardt, "The Withering of Civil Society."
- 9. Guha, "The Prose of Counter-Insurgency," 83.
- 10. Guha, Dominance without Hegemony, xi.
- 11. See Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?"
- 12. Williams, The Other Side of the Popular, 327 n. 7.
- 13. Moreiras, The Exhaustion of Difference, 263.
- 14. Negri, El exilio, 38.
- 15. Roseberry, "Hegemony and the Language of Contention," 364. Roseberry's version of hegemony is rather similar to Bourdieu's conception of a divide between discourse and "doxa": between "the universe of the thinkable" and "the universe of the unthinkable... what cannot be said for lack of an available discourse" (*Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 170). But Bourdieu would be the first to note that power works also through the unthinkable and the unsayable (in other words, through habit), not simply through establishing a framework for what can be said.
 - 16. Perec, W, [vii].
 - 17. Beasley-Murray, "Latin America and the Global System."
 - 18. See again Beasley-Murray, "Latin America and the Global System."
- 19. See, for instance, Holloway, Change the World without Taking Power, and Mentinis, Zapatistas.

Prologue

- 1. Gramsci, Selections from Prison Notebooks, 12.
- 2. Quoted in Hanke, History of Latin American Civilization, 1:125.
- 3. Kamen, Empire, 97.
- 4. Quoted in Williams, The American Indian in Western Legal Thought, 92.

Notes to the Prologue

- 5. Hoffer, Law and People in Colonial America, 56.
- 6. Kamen, Empire, 97.
- 7. Quoted in Kamen, Empire, 97.
- 8. Beezley et al., "Introduction," xiii.
- 9. Las Casas, A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies, 33.
- 10. Moreiras, "Spanish Nation Formation," 9.
- 11. Seed, Ceremonies of Possession, 88.
- 12. Cornejo Polar, Escribir en el aire, 40.
- 13. Seed, Ceremonies of Possession, 88.
- 14. See Castro, Another Face of Empire.
- 15. Las Casas, A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies, 96.
- 16. Guha, Dominance without Hegemony, 72.
- 17. Kamen, Empire, 87.
- 18. Morison, Admiral of the Ocean Sea, 148.
- 19. Fernández-Armesto, Columbus, 46.
- 20. Morison, Admiral of the Ocean Sea, 142.
- 21. Phillips and Phillips, The Worlds of Christopher Columbus, 138.
- 22. Cummins, The Voyage of Christopher Columbus, 55–56.
- 23. Columbus, The Four Voyages, 39.
- 24. Quoted in Fernández-Armesto, Columbus, 76; see also Bedini, Christopher Columbus, 695.
 - 25. Columbus, The Four Voyages, 47, 41.
 - 26. Ibid., 42, 43, 47, 49.
 - 27. Phillips and Phillips, The Worlds of Christopher Columbus, 150.
 - 28. Columbus, The Four Voyages, 48.
 - 29. Morison, Admiral of the Ocean Sea, 208, 210.
 - 30. Fernández-Armesto, Columbus, 50.
 - 31. Fuson, The Log of Christopher Columbus, 71.
- 32. See Phillips and Phillips, *The Worlds of Christopher Columbus*, 150–51.
 - 33. Columbus, The Four Voyages, 51.
- 34. Morison, Admiral of the Ocean Sea, 214, 215; Columbus, The Four Voyages, 51.
 - 35. Phillips and Phillips, The Worlds of Christopher Columbus, 152.
 - 36. Ibid., 152–53.
 - 37. See Morison, Admiral of the Ocean Sea, 216–20.
 - 38. Fernández-Armesto, Columbus, 109.

1. Argentina 1972

- 1. Nelson et al., "Cultural Studies," 3.
- 2. Hall, "Cultural Studies and Its Theoretical Legacies," 263, 262.
- 3. Nelson et al., "Cultural Studies," 10.
- 4. Johnson, "Reinventing Cultural Studies," 452.