

EXPANDING BOUNDARIES:
TRAVELING THEORIES IN THE AMERICAS

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Is it lack of imagination that makes us come
to imagined places, not just stay at home? [...]

Continent, city, country, society:
the choice is never wide and never free.
Elizabeth Bishop, "Questions of Travel"

I am a traveler. I have a destination but no maps.
Others perhaps have reached that destination already,
still others are on their way. But none has had to go
from here before—nor will again. One's route is one's
own. One's journey unique. What I will find at the
end I can barely guess. What lies in the way is unknown.

P. K. Page, "Traveler, Conjuror, Journeyman"

A condição do viajante . . . é indispensável ao europeu que quer impor um
significado ao seu Outro no próprio campo do Outro.
Silviano Santiago, "Por que e para que viaja o europeu?"

1. Preliminary Travels

In the above quotes, two North-American women writers who
traveled to Brazil in the twentieth century express their view of the

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potential of travel and the continuous possibilities of moving from one place to another in an endless list of “choices” that grant each journey a unique quality—“one’s route is one’s own.” Page’s traveler is also a “conjurer” who performs clever tricks and makes things appear and disappear—a magician who, in her reading, uses painting to create his or her own version of reality from the scenes observed while traveling (“Traveler” 36-37). Traveling becomes thus not only a trope for movement and transference, but also for creation, rereading and translation. Of interest here is precisely this connection between traveling and translation as tropes that informs the encounter of cultures and the blurring of boundaries.

Both Bishop and Page, when writing about traveling in the texts from which these quotes are taken, are referring to the specific context of their travels to Brazil. Bishop, an American who was brought up in Nova Scotia, Canada, came to Brazil as a tourist in 1951, but having decided to stay, lived here with Lota de Macedo Soares, in Ouro Preto, Petrópolis, and Rio de Janeiro until 1966. Page lived in Brazil from 1957 to 1959, following her husband as Canada’s Ambassador—an experience that she describes as surreal and wonderful. Both writers, before coming to Brazil, were highly acclaimed poets, who, once in a new land, devoted their time and energy to writing about traveling in the country: Bishop set out to write *Brazil* (1962) for the *Life World* series, a project that she never entirely finished. Page, on the other hand, published in 1987 her *Brazilian Journal*, a book based on letters and extracts from her journal, written during her stay in Brazil. Besides those works, both wrote poems about their experiences and their encounters with the cultural other.

Following the trope of the “travel” extensively explored by the poets in their travel/writing in Brazil, this essay discusses the development of contemporary theories of postcolonialism in view of their interaction with other theorizations, or better, of their traveling to/from the Americas. The metaphor of “travel” is also of central importance to a discussion of what has been termed “postcolonialism”

in the Americas. This metaphor pervades not only the theory developed both in Brazil and in Canada, although very often in different contexts, but is also a relevant part of the literature produced in these countries. My aim is to discuss how this metaphor has been appropriated in the Brazilian and North-American (with a special focus on Canadian) critical discourses and how it can be envisaged as a productive space and time-bound concept in relation to postcolonialism in the Americas, creating a locus for a transnational dialogue with a view to exploring possible venues of critical intersection.

Jamaica Kincaid, a writer from the Caribbean island of Antigua now residing in the United States, presents yet another, less optimistic or idealized and more poignant, view of traveling—as compared with those of Bishop and Page. As if answering Bishop's question in the poem "Questions of Travel"—"Should we have stayed home and thought of here?" (93)—, Kincaid states, in relation to the English travelers (whom she equates with the colonizers for historical reasons) in Antigua:

for I can say to them what went wrong: they should never have left their home, their precious England, a place they loved so much, a place they had to leave but could never forget. And so everywhere they went they turned into England" (24).

This bleak view endows traveling with a bleak mission: colonization or neo-colonization. In *A Small Place*, an autobiography of life in Antigua and also a critical essay on traveling, Kincaid blatantly condemns traveling and tourism as forms of exploitation and destruction. For her, a "tourist is an ugly human being. . . . an ugly, empty thing, a stupid thing, a piece of rubbish pausing here and there to gaze at this and taste that" (15-17). In a similar vein, in the poem "The Permanent Tourists," Page accuses the "somnolent" and "terrible tourists with their empty eyes" of being incapable of feeling or

participating in the scene observed from a distance and “never enter[ing] the event.” They “lock themselves into snapshots” so that they can later “conjure in memory / all they are now incapable of feeling” (*The Hidden Room* 113, v.1). In Page’s case, however, as I argue elsewhere, her role as a tourist in Brazil undermines her critique of cultural bias (Almeida 2001). Despite her biting critique of tourism in Antigua, however, Kincaid reveals a deep understanding of the ambiguous nature of traveling:

That the native does not like the tourist is not hard to explain. For every native of everyplace is a potential tourist, and every tourist is a native of somewhere. For every native of every place lives a life of overwhelming and crushing banality and boredom and desperation and depression, and every deed, good or bad, is an attempt to forget this. Every native would like to find a way out, every native would like a rest, every native would like a tour. (18)

2. The Native and the Traveler

In this quote, Kincaid expresses a lucid awareness of the dual purpose of traveling—each traveler belongs to a place that he or she attempts to leave in search of something else. The native can be, in distinct contexts and different temporal dimensions, both a traveler and someone who resents the traveler. The nature of travel implies an exchange upon bases that are not always symmetrical or equalized and involves, in Eva-Marie Kroller’s words, “the multiplicity of the researcher’s persona and his/her conflicting rhetorical voices” (88). Mary Louise Pratt, another Canadian critic who focuses on the theme of traveling, pinpoints simultaneously the possibilities and dangers of writing from what she terms, the “contact zone”:

“contact zone” is an attempt to invoke the spatial and temporal copresence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures, and whose trajectories now intersect. . . . A “contact” perspective emphasizes how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other. It treats the relations among colonizers and colonized, or travelers and “travelees,” not in terms of separateness or apartheid, but in terms of copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power. (*Imperial Eyes* 7)

Implicit in Pratt’s formulation is the dual interaction that derives from these contact zones in the sense that in this interactive movement not only does the dominant center or the metropolis modify and interfere with the periphery or marginal groups but, very often, the latter influences, determines and alters the former, appropriating modes of representation by reading and translating them in a different light.

Along the same lines, James Clifford envisages “travel” as term of cultural comparison and as a translation term. He argues that the meaningful project of comparing and translating different traveling cultures has to grapple with the fact that travelers, whether from a colonial and historical past or from a late twentieth-century postcolonial context, “move about under strong cultural, political, and economic compulsions and that certain travelers are materially privileged, others oppressed.” These conditions determine a crucial aspect of traveling that involves “movements in specific colonial, neocolonial, and postcolonial circuits, different diasporas, borderlands, exiles, detours, and returns” (35). For Clifford, the notion of travel points to borderlands and frontiers and covers different displacements and interactions which travel as a translation term evokes. The etymological duality of the term (*tradittore, traduttore*) suggests that translation simultaneously brings people together and distances them: “all translation terms used in global comparisons—terms like ‘culture’, ‘art’, ‘society’, ‘peasant’,

'mode of production', 'man', 'woman', 'modernity', 'ethnography'—get us some distance *and* fall apart" (39).

In this context the issue of traveling, for both Pratt and Clifford, is part of a decisive agenda in contemporary critical debates—one that intersects with relevant notions of post-colonialism. For Clifford, in particular, such interaction is more productively discussed in terms of a comparison between (and, above all, a translation of) different cultures in contact.

3. Traveling Theories

In *Questions of Travel*, Caren Kaplan analyzes the metaphors of travel and displacement as analytical categories in contemporary critical discourse, showing how "[r]eferences to travel, displacement, borders, diasporas, and homelands abound in contemporary criticism" (22). She sees the traveler as an agent and trope of modernity, literally and figuratively traversing various boundaries but also participating in creating these same boundaries. She observes how these metaphors are pervasive in modern cultures and how they are connected to increasing disparities of wealth and power among discursive nations and communities. She argues that the concept of travel in the twentieth century cannot be disconnected from the historical legacy of the development of capitalism and the expansion of imperialism that foster cultural, social and economic inequalities. For her, this "traveler" is a mythic figure that occupies a specific position identified as "a Western individual, usually male, 'white', of independent means, an introspective observer, literate, acquainted with ideas of the arts and culture, and above all, a humanist" (50). This figure, which coincides with that of a tourist, is an agent of modernity that confirms and legitimizes the social reality of dichotomous constructions such as First/Third Worlds, developed/ underdeveloped, center/periphery. In this context of binary oppositions analyzed in light of postcolonial theories, Kaplan observes that relations have shifted from military /economic

agendas in the colonial past to a cultural/economic focus in postcolonial terms. The “Third World” is emblematically located in a defined periphery in which stereotypes work to justify foreign policies—therefore, in her words, an emblematic example of a stereotypical view of the third world conceives Brazil as a “cannibalistic, amorous, seductive culture” (84). Ironically, it is precisely this stereotype of the cannibal in relation to Brazil that returns later on to haunt critical discourses about cultural traveling, translation and dependency.

Along similar lines, the Brazilian critic Silviano Santiago explores the way the metaphor of travel is a fundamental element—and I would say a foundation myth—in Latin American literary and cultural production. Likewise, Antonio Candido sees traveling as a recurrent trait and a significant characteristic of Brazilian national cultural practice. Like Bishop, who implicitly questions the need and reason for traveling, Santiago asks the same question but develops his argument further by enquiring: “why and for what does the European travel” (“Por que” 189-190). By immediately exposing in the title of the article the direction the travel that he is about to discuss will take—from the metropolis to the colony in the figure of the European—Santiago stresses the expansionist and colonizing mission of the European traveler in the colonial past and in the neocolonial present. In an attempt to justify traveling by what he terms “an ethics of adventure,” the traveler, acting according to an ethnocentric bias, makes believe that he (the traveler in Kaplan’s conception is usually male) is discovering what in fact already exists.

Opposing the metaphor of the traveler as an adventurer, Silviano devises a less noble and more pernicious one—that of the “corsair,” the traveler that in his view enacts the role of navigator and colonizer to spread the ideology of the empire. Like Clifford, Silviano believes that the role of the anthropologist in the modern world is to rescue the metaphor of the traveler from total denigration. Citing Lévi-Strauss, he states that “the anthropologist would be the unhappy consciousness of the European traveler and colonizer”—unhappy because of his

awareness of his role as perpetrator of exploitation and his powerless and hopeless condition to change an ingrained mentality and situation. The modern tourist, on the other hand, would be the embodiment of the contemporary traveler/explorer who travels in search of that which is entirely false and fabricated. In this context, this traveler is useless for the other who receives his visit. On the one hand, for the European traveler, Santiago ironically points out, traveling is indispensable because it aims at imposing a meaning on the other precisely in his/her own territory. Santiago eventually parodies his own original question and asks: "Why and for what does the inhabitant of the New World travel"? According to him, the intellectuals of the new world "were always brave enough to see what was European about them." He cites, as an example, the Brazilian critic Oswald de Andrade who devised the theory of "anthropophagy" in an attempt to rewrite the biased concept of colonial cultural dependency ("Por que" 202-205). In turn, for Andrade, anthropophagy is "a metaphor for the cosmopolitan enterprise of absorbing both foreign and native cultures as the means to construe a hybrid and unique Brazilian cultural identity" (Bellei, "Brazilian" 91).

Nevertheless, according to Santiago, the Latin American critics have to deal with two major drawbacks and biased assumptions: a temporal dimension of belatedness and the issue of lack of originality. These conditions are inherently connected to the colonial history and to the contemporary neocolonial capitalism of the colonized culture. For Santiago, the Latin American intellectual faces a challenge of devising critical theories that will simultaneously acknowledge our dependency and belatedness, and struggle against the colonized position of what he terms a "Eurocentric encyclopedism" ("Apesar" 20-22)—or, I would say, the challenge of devising theories that would actually leave the country and travel. Andrade's modernist cultural anthropophagy, Santiago claims, works as an antidote against "Eurocentric encyclopedism". Not only is he aware of the dependency that colonized countries face, but he also calls attention to the fact of colonization

precisely to enhance its potential to inscribe that which is different in the totalizing universal discourses. The predisposed notions of belatedness and dependency are subverted and replaced by original critical discourses from their locus of enunciation—in this resides a “paradoxical,” and therefore productive and critical, movement (“A pesar” 23-24). Another instance of resistance against eurocentrism, I would claim, is Santiago’s theory of the in-betweenness of Latin American discourse, which will be discussed later.

Oswald de Andrade’s “Manifesto antropófago,” published in 1928, established the basis of Brazilian modernism as initiated in the Week of Modern Art in February 1922. It is probably the Brazilian theory that has been most recognized in critical discourses outside Brazil. In Sérgio Bellei’s words, the “emphasis on an international and cosmopolitan (rather than on a national and xenophobic) dimension of the *modernista* project ... is particularly important for the comprehension of Brazilian *antropofagia*. . . . this cosmopolitan bias makes the experience of traveling abroad an essential element in the life and writings of the founding father of Brazilian *antropofagia*” (“Brazilian” 91). Interestingly, the fact that Andrade does not turn his back to the international scene, but recognizes its influence and usefulness (as Santiago points out), professing the need for our discourse to travel is instrumental for the recognition of his work abroad. Anthropophagy therefore claims the need for Brazilians to devour that which is foreign and produce something new, originally Brazilian. Rather than totally ignoring the colonizer’s biased view of the colonized as a cannibal, “Oswald the Traveler,” as the Brazilian critic Antonio Candido refers to him, adapts the trope of cannibalism for his own use, with a new twist: the imperative for an intentional digestion of foreign stereotypes to produce a possible model for national identity. In fact, cannibalism is a survival strategy in the sense that it resists being assimilated by the dominant discourse. As Bellei points out, “there was, on the one hand, the awareness of a superior Western culture as an object of desire and on the other the awareness of the distance between this culture and the

cultural and material conditions of backwardness of a marginal nation. His [the modernist artist's] function was essentially to travel between these locations with the purpose of, if possible, dissolving the frontiers between them" ("Brazilian" 92). One of the values of Andrade's theorization lies in its paradoxical movement (Santiago's words) and ambivalent strategy (Bellei's argument). The paradoxical and ambivalent notion of Andrade's theorization render it a powerful tool as a Brazilian or Latin American (as some would claim) theory of national identity, especially, I would argue, in postcolonial terms.

I would like to use Clifford's notion of travel as translation, or maybe, as Sneja Gunew sees it, as "faithless translation," a concept which for her is "inherent in the trope of cannibalism" (20), as a form of cannibalism that is similar to the travels of Andrade's traveling anthropophagus. What Gunew observes, albeit in a different context, can be quite significant here: "it has become clear to me that not only are we enmeshed in the phenomenon of traveling theory where theories metamorphose in response to the local circumstances in which they are embedded but that terms we think of as being global or universal have a very particular local and national meaning" (13). Following this line of thought, Andrade's theory of anthropophagy travels both within Brazil and also outside the country, adding new concepts to its basic tenets and, in different contexts, metamorphosing into quite distinct notions.

Within a Brazilian context, Andrade's anthropophagy is reappropriated years later, in the 1950s, by Haroldo de Campos and the Brazilian Concretist Movement. Campos's notion of "transculturation" aims at discussing national cultural production in light of the universal. As Bellei puts it, "'anthropophagic transculturation' is aestheticized as an autonomous cultural practice that, produced by exceptionally creative minds, transcends local history and economic conditions" ("Brazilian" 103). In this sense, anthropophagic transculturation fails as a national critical discourse because it translated Andrade's anthropophagy only to discard its social project and political

commitment, reducing it to a question of aesthetic values. Transculturation is also the term used by the Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz to describe not only the acquisition of a different culture, but also the loss of an original culture. The new culture is distinct but maintains the traces of the two previous ones that generate it (96-97). Ortiz's theorization predates Campos's and maintains the social and political tone ignored by the latter.

Santiago's notion of the space in-between to refer to the condition of Latin American discourse also draws implicitly on Andrade's anthropophagy. In his words, Latin American discourse resides "in-between the sacrifice and the game, the prison and the transgression, the submission to the code and the aggression, the obedience and the rebellion, the assimilation and the expression—there in this apparently empty space ... is where the anthropophagic ritual of Latin American literature takes place" ("O entre-lugar" 28). According to Walter Mignolo, "Santiago, like Ortíz, was sensitive to the marginality of his "Westernness" and the particularities of loci of enunciation under transcultural, bilingual, and "in-between" conditions. For Santiago (1978), 'transculturation' became the 'entre-lugar do discurso latino-americano' (the space in-between of Latin American discourse)" (187). Mignolo, via Ortiz, arrives at Santiago as a possible pioneer thinker of cultural transculturation, but as I have been trying to show, Santiago's theorization owes a great deal to Andrade's notion of Anthropophagy and so does, we might conclude, Ortiz's definition of transculturation. Like Andrade, Santiago brings to the fore the paradoxical and ambivalent nature of Latin American discourse, caught between two shores but making a conscious choice in favor of an "anthropophagic" ritual.

4. Postcolonial Cannibals

While Gunew's trope of the postcolonial cannibal relates to faithless translation and addresses Women's Studies, especially in

Canada, I would like to employ it to discuss the metaphor of travel as a central motif in discussions of postcolonialisms (in the plural) in the Americas. As shown above, this metaphor permeates the contemporary critical debate from North to South and, more importantly for my concern here, from South to North. Implicit in the line of thought I have developed is a concern for our historical and theoretical moment. The critics discussed here have a central point in common: they emphasize the “traveling” nature of theoretical discourse. The concepts and ideas intersect, interact and are translated, digested and reproduced with a difference, with specific implications. To quote Santiago, “emphasis is given to the difference that the dependent text manages to create” (“Apesar” 23).

Despite its regarded position as a first world country, as Canadian critic Mary Louise Pratt has noted, Canada suffered, like many third world countries, the historical effects of imperialism, colonialism and dependency, although at a different level (“Margin” 247). Many critics, such as Linda Hutcheon, Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, have also accurately pointed out that Canada underwent a different kind of imperialism and cultural appropriation in comparison with the invaded colonies of Africa, India and the West Indies. The process of colonization and independence in both Canada and Brazil took place in different and specific time frames, thus, rendering the use of the term “postcolonial” problematic in Canadian and Brazilian cultural and social contexts. The native population in these countries, however, received a similar treatment in that it was mostly destroyed, and what remains is kept in a peripheral position, undermined and exploited by mechanisms of power relations. Other critics, as in the case of Donna Bennet, on the other hand, broaden the scope of the term by applying the notion of postcolonial literature to any kind of position that resists imperialism, thus including countries such as Canada and Brazil (168).

Nevertheless, while the use of the term in relation to Canadian literature is more easily accepted among most Canadian critics, it has been a matter of great dispute in Latin American criticism. I would, however, side with those critics who, in Ania Loomba’s words, argue

that “thought as an oppositional stance, ‘postcolonial’ refers to specific groups of (oppressed or dissenting) people (or individuals within them) rather than to a location or social order, which may include such people but is not limited to them” (17). This “expansion of the term” would then account for a multiplicity of histories and oppositional positions (13). It is within this scope that a comparison between Canadian and Brazilian texts and critical discourses in postcolonial terms becomes feasible. To borrow Walter Mignolo’s words,

While I am aware of the difficulties involved in the uses and abuses of the term “postcolonial” (Prakash 1990; Shohat 1992), I am more interested at this point in its advantages. It allows me to think of modernity and postmodernity from a postcolonial perspective, that is, to view “modernity” and understand it from the fringes of colonial histories from the sixteenth to the twentieth century. (190)

The usefulness and advantage of the term lie, from my standpoint, in its power to create a situation that allows for the possibility of exposing and problematizing the dynamics of various modes of power relations in social, historical and cultural terms. Along these lines, the Brazilian theoretician Tânia Carvalhal has pointed out the similarities in outlook between Canada and Brazil, in the sense that they are both formed by a complex and pluralist social and cultural unity which has resulted from the process of colonization and the continuous wave of immigration. These countries, she argues, offer a good basis for the development of challenges about social and cultural differences and the construction of identities (154). She adds that, besides this initial similarity in attitude, there is in these countries a common interest in cultural issues, in the processes of appropriation, in the discourses of travel writing, in the theory of dependency and of postcolonialism (158).

One should be aware, however, of the danger of generalizing such complex issues, as they are derived from diverse social and political

conditions in specific countries. One should avoid holistic readings of their literatures as a homogeneous locus of expression of postcolonial theories. Canadian critics Irvine and Lewis caution against the danger of “packaging cultural products by nationality” and thereby encouraging readings that often lead to erroneous generalization (323). “When national characteristics are generalized,” they add, “individual differences can be lost and cause-effect patterns obscured” (327). Besides, it is often difficult to establish whether these so-called “national characteristics” are inherent or imposed by ideological and cultural stereotypes (324). There is, therefore, the need, as expressed by Tânia Carvalhal, of articulating these diverse cultural intertexts without denying their specificities (159). As Gayatri Spivak stresses, “the colonized subaltern is irretrievably heterogeneous” (“Can the Subaltern” 79). “Canadian” and “Brazilian” are adjectives that, in a postcolonial and postmodern context, run the risk of being used in a rather simplistic and standardized form. What should be emphasized is the complexity of such notions and the multifaceted issues that derive from an investigation of the contemporary tendencies in the literature and critical discourses produced in these specific countries. What interests me in this case is how the critical discourses and literary texts from these countries have often addressed similar issues that might be better analyzed in light of notions, as is the case of the concept of “spaces in between,” that engender powerful readings in postcolonial studies. As Santiago claims, in our contemporary reading strategies it is important to make the text of the dominated culture, that is, a decolonized text, react against that of the dominant culture (“Apesar” 23). In this context, our postcolonial cannibal is a traveler and a translator, one that moves between polarities of power in order to destabilize them. The ambiguous and paradoxical power of the trope of travel derives from its ability to deconstruct the ideological polarities that operate as conditions of possibility of traveling. It uses imperialist and colonizing discourses of travel as metaphors that lead to dialogues, interaction and the breaking of boundaries. In these postcolonial interchanges and

traveling metaphors, one cannot forget that although theoretically Brazilian and Canadian texts have much in common due to their shared colonial past, in social and political terms, in the present, there is a huge gap between the two. One hopes, however, that the texts produced by postcolonial cannibals will succeed in bridging the gap, at least theoretically.

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