

Intimate Governmentalities, the Latin American Left, and the Decolonial Turn.

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Breny Mendoza raises several key questions about the turn to the left and/or the decolonial turn in Latin America, particularly as this transformation is playing out in Honduras. As she points out, in Honduras social movements are at the forefront of resistance not only to the coup but also to various forms of modern/colonial power. Like in Honduras, in countries that have shifted to the left at the state level (e.g., Ecuador, Bolivia, Venezuela), many activists and critical scholars have pointed out the multiple processes taking place simultaneously, and as part of this, the ongoing contradictions among the goals of social movements and those of socialist states. The move by indigenous movements and other activists, as well as that of cultural studies scholars, to rethink the dualisms that so pervade colonial/modern logic, including that of (neo)developmentalism, capital and citizenship, is perhaps at the center of the many ongoing struggles we see concerning how to imagine and institutionalize “another world.” This “another world” has been addressed in various ways, from theorizing another form of production to producing alternative form(s) of knowledge – questions that have great ontological, epistemological and political significance, at least when posed by those interested in a truly decolonial turn. As Breny alludes to, the Honduran

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resistance movement's emphasis on constitutional reform exemplifies the strategy used by other left-turning governments to remake the nation. Much of the emphasis, at least originally and on the surface, has been on Latin American states' shift away from the global neoliberal agenda; that is, on the anti-neoliberal or post-neoliberal turn. As Arturo Escobar points out (2010), Latin America was the first region to undergo structural adjustment measures – of the most extreme kind, inspired by Harvard University's Jeffrey Sachs – and also the first where states so widely adopted (often forcibly) a World Bank/IMF inspired neoliberal restructuring agenda. Yet more recently it was also the first to resist the inequalities emerging from that process and from modern/colonial capitalism more generally, including perhaps most notably in the turn to the left, which we have now seen in up to twelve countries, or about two-thirds of the region, to varying degrees.

I want to respond to Breny's commentary by focusing on an example of constitutional reform that has already occurred: namely, that of the 2008 Ecuadorian constitution and the broader *revolución ciudadana* that President Rafael Correa (2007-present) has promoted. I'll also bring in some examples from the 2008 Bolivian constitution and Evo Morales' MAS (Movimiento al Socialismo) administration (2006-present). As I have followed the debates within social movements and in the constitutional assembly process, a few key disjunctures stand out, including the following: (1) the well-known disjuncture between the turn to the left and the decolonial turn; (2) a lack of analysis of the governance of intimacy (Lind 2010a) and biopolitics in both leftist and decolonial accounts of "another world"; and (3) decolonial vs. liberal challenges posed by activists in the remaking of Latin American nations.

First, for the most part I would argue that the Ecuadorian state is not participating in a decolonial turn but rather in a turn to a leftist form of alternative modernization, akin to Chavez's production regime in Venezuela, Morales' in Bolivia, and Bachelet's center-leftist concertación in Chile (among possible others). I state this with the caveat that of course one can find many examples of decolonial strategies in Ecuador, including in the constitution itself, yet mostly the Ecuadorian state is focused on alternative modernization. As in Bolivia, Venezuela and Chile, the Ecuadorian state has continued to rely on the extraction of hydrocarbons and other resources; this is so despite the fact that the 2008 Constitution grants nature equal rights to human beings and generally advocates "well-being" over economic growth ("well being" being the translation of *sumaq kawsay* in Quichua or *el buen vivir* in Spanish). And to make matters worse – what analysts could not have predicted when the Correa administration was first inaugurated – when indigenous communities have resisted the state's developmentalist presence, including its ongoing exploitation of nature and endorsement of the nature/culture dualism despite the new constitutional language, they have been repressed. Most sectors of the organized indigenous movement have been alienated by the Correa administration; currently there is little dialogue between the two. And although Bolivian President Morales himself identifies as *indígena*, he too has alienated indigenous and peasant communities in Eastern lowland Bolivia concerning his administration's plans to build a highway on their land – a direct blow to local communities and also a denial of his own constitution's declaration of nature as having constitutional rights. In Chile, indigenous protestors of Bachelet's policies were arrested and labeled as terrorists (Richards in press). What these

leaders are discovering (or perhaps what they are having confirmed) is that while they can create an anti-neoliberal agenda, they cannot necessarily create a post-capitalist economy based on non-capitalist forms of social and economic life, nor a post-liberal order that transcends liberal classifications of identity. There are glimpses of this, within the state and outside. For example Ecuador's National Plan of Living Well attempts to institutionalize the "solidarity economy" alongside the capitalist economy, and the 2008 Constitution provided for an Inequality Council which would, in theory, address five axes of inequality based on race, ethnicity, ability and gender in an intersectional and transversal way. This has yet to be institutionalized, however. Moreover, we can see clear attempts within social movements to create a post-capitalist economy that challenges the modern/colonial versions of governmentality found in these states. But regardless one must distinguish between the political ideals of 21st century socialism envisioned by social movements, on one hand, and on the other, the kinds of governmentalities created by these socialist states.

The second disjuncture I see draws from the above scenario and speaks to how the governance of intimacy – or intimate governmentalities – and biopolitics are (or are not) understood as part of this process. Thus far much of the emphasis has been on competing modernities among the hegemonic Euromodernity and indigenous and Afro-modernities. Less has been done to understand how notions of life and intimacy comparatively figure into these competing accounts, and how this shapes current political processes. Rather, these issues – which scholars such as Arturo Escobar (1995) have noted are central to modern, colonial, developmentalist governmentalities – continue to be sidelined and/or compartmentalized. While of course there are exceptions, debates on life or intimacy

pertaining to indigeneity follow one trajectory (e.g., an emphasis on sustainability and overcoming the nature/culture dualism); debates on these same issues as they pertain to sexuality or gender typically follow another trajectory (e.g., an emphasis on citizen rights or the right to bodily integrity and autonomy). And generally speaking, debates on modernity/coloniality, capitalism and states invoke a kind of heteronormativity that is left unexamined by most analysts, despite the fact that by now many scholars and activists have pointed out the central significance of heterosexuality as a social institution in shaping modern/colonial economies and social life (see Lugones 2010 for a discussion of this topic). Some refer to “men” and “women,” including in discussions of gender complementarity vs. gender (in)equality, without questioning the construction of these categories themselves (beyond the obvious dualism). Moreover there is no doubt that narratives of reproduction, gender, heteronormativity, sexuality, intimacy, kinship, life, death, etc. continue to be central to both right-wing and leftist forms of governance, to both neoliberal and “post-neoliberal” forms of production, and to the alternative modernities being sought by indigenous and Afro-Latin American social movements. Categories of “the family,” “gender,” “sexuality” are no more or less “modern” than categories of “race” or “ethnicity.” Yet scholars tend to under-theorize the former categories and write them off as “simply modern,” as solely “reformist,” or as a “side issue” and therefore uninteresting for a discussion of alternative modernities or “another world.”

However some of the most interesting examples of post-liberal, post-capitalist and anti-neoliberal practices have come out of “modern/colonial” social movements such as

the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer movement in both Ecuador and Bolivia – movements that are mostly ignored by scholars of global justice studies and Latin American cultural studies. These movements, while perhaps small in comparison to indigenous movements when seen through the Eurocentric lens of visibility/invisibility (on this topic, see Horn 2010), are deeply significant for understanding how both capital and states structure and govern people’s intimate lives, including how they think, feel, express love, desire, seek forms of attachment, understand themselves and their “communities.” Capital defines how love itself is or is not valued, as well as constructed (Wesling 2012). Likewise, state practices institutionalize modern/colonial notions of intimacy, kinship, sexual practice, etc., thus attributing value to some intimate arrangements while rendering others invisible, undeserving or deviant – a phenomenon institutionalized as well through arenas of global governance, most notably the development industry (Lind 2010b). Colonial/modern states have long governed reproduction, including through miscegenation laws banning interracial marriage, prostitution laws, laws criminalizing sodomy and/or homosexuality, and laws concerning biological reproduction itself (e.g., abortion, birth control). In many cases new left governments have opposed reproductive rights and same-sex marriage – two current hot button issues – converging more with right-wing ideologies than with the various social movements that supported them, including the feminist and LGBTI movements (Lind in press; Viterna in press). Why, for example, is there no discussion of how “the family” is being disputed in various kinds of modernities? How does this play out in indigenous contexts, as former Bolivian Director of Cultural Patrimony, David Arequipa, also a founding member of the well-known La Paz-based political drag community, Familia

Galan, set out to do as part of Morales' MAS administration? And likewise, how does this play out within largely mestizo/a and/or urban contexts, such that we see fissures in identity politics that also deeply challenge the colonial architecture of Latin American states? I have found that leftist activists and academics often will say, "oh, you're talking about biopolitics," without theorizing how biopolitics itself, including the governance of intimacy, is wrapped up in their own theories of "another world." Indeed, this kind of epistemological and political disjuncture seems to be at the heart of what Breny Mendoza refers to when she speaks of the Feminists in Resistance coalition's own quandary about whether to continue working with the male-dominated left in Honduras. While this type of quandary is by no means new, it is fascinating to see the disjuncture in intellectual thought about the governance of intimacy and biopolitics as it shapes all kinds of modernities/colonialities, structures or "geometries" of power (as Venezuelan Hugo Chávez calls it, drawing from Doreen Massey's work – see Escobar 2010), and epistemic communities and forms of knowledge. From a feminist perspective, to truly do this would require intersectional thinking, and the ability to think across and from the perspectives of various epistemic, cultural, social, economic and political "communities" (Richards in press; Lugones 2010).

An example from Ecuador illustrates this point. When the Constituent Assembly began meeting in 2007 to redraft the constitution, LGBT activists played various roles in negotiating the language of the new constitution. In particular, two strands stood out: A more mainstream liberal strand, led mostly by gay men, that focused on integrating gays and lesbians (as that was their emphasis) into the new constitution, based in part on a

liberal notion of affirmative action. The second strand, comprised primarily of trans and lesbian activists, utilized an intersectional approach to redefine the family in the constitution. Ultimately their language was included, stating that “the family” is no longer defined based solely on kinship or sanguine relations but rather on an “alternative logic” that includes non-blood/kinship based households and intimate arrangements. Ironically, while the Right successfully campaigned for marriage to be defined between “a man and a woman” in the 2008 Constitution, the self-defined *transfeminista* political sector mentioned above helped redefine the family in such a way that all non-normative families, including for example transnational migrant households, extended families, trans communities and same-sex households, can now potentially access state benefits laid out in Correa’s redistribution plan. Indeed, this is what legal activists are now working on: establishing the mechanisms by which so-called *familias alternativas* can access state resources. This strategy to redefine the family rather than seek integration of a new identity category (e.g., gay, lesbian, transgendered) into existing institutions such as marriage is indeed a decolonial strategy. The indigenous movement had long worked (somewhat indirectly) toward expanding/transforming the institution of marriage and state practices concerning parental rights as part of a logic of communal rights; this recent constitutional change is the starting point for an entirely new conversation about not only family but nation, well-being, sustainability, and the organization of social life. The out-migration of approximately 1.5 million Ecuadorians since 2000, primarily to Spain and Italy, and the subsequent growth of transnational households and kinship networks, played an important background role in this discussion as well – again marking the

intersectional approach taken here, which occurred as migrants' rights and queer politics converged, in this case (also see Herrera 2011).

This, the third and final disjuncture I address here, is an example of how one social movement – in this case, the loosely-defined network of LGBTI organizations, a political community shunned by most political sectors, both right and left, indigenous and mestizo, in Ecuador until the late 1990s – implemented a combination of decolonial and liberal strategies for their emancipation and decolonization. Often stereotyped as “entirely western” and “never indigenous” (both incorrectly), this movement contributed in its own way toward the decolonial turn that so many are seeking. It is this hope that people hold in the Correa administration, and likewise in the Morales and other administrations that have sought to restructure their states, constitutions, markets and social life and move away from a global neoliberal hegemony. While it is no longer easy to classify “left” vs. “right” (and perhaps never was, although I think these political trajectories converge now more than before), I’d argue that (de)colonization is or should be at the center of all social justice agendas – the kind of decolonization that frees all people rendered inferior, deviant or invisible, not just some of them.

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