



Anachronistic Modernities: Outmaneuvering Racism to Transcend Coloniality

In 1981 Arno J. Mayer introduced a thesis that challenged the dominant version of modern European history. In his study of six major states during the second half of the 19th Century he argued that the aristocracy, not the bourgeoisie, had taken the leading role in shaping European economies and institutions to the start of World War I. The book was aptly entitled *The Persistence of the Old Regime*. This dossier is an attempt to explore a similar dynamic in *coloniality*, that world on the “other side” of modernity that was initially organized and continues to be thoroughly informed by race as an abstract concept, *racism* as the official promotion and execution of institutionalized racial differentiation, and *racism* as an ingrained cultural practice that continuously validates racial difference in everyday life.

The invention and codification of “racial” difference as a means to allocate labor resources based on skin color and ethnicity, following Jewish and Christian notions of predestination and tribal exclusivity, resulted in the political disenfranchisement, enslavement and genocide of entire populations, first in the Caribbean and then on a global scale, through a multitude of related systems of colonial exploitation that were supported by Canon, Roman and English Common laws as well as defended and justified through a myriad of discourses on religion, social ontology, belonging, nationalism, civilization and, most recently, identity politics and multi-culturalism. The refractory nature of those practices of racial differentiation as they continue to inform the system of labor organization, laws and political ideology make *racist ideology* the most insidious of modern ideological formulations. Despite continuous resistance, big and small, and major challenges to racism on the battlefield and on paper, the persistence of colonial structures in modern institutions and thought cannot be denied. As anachronistic as it is, racist ideology continues to outmaneuver all attempts to unravel its most ingrained and pernicious formulations.

This dossier is composed of two sets of essays separated by an interview with the Cuban graphic artist and Antillean intellectual Alexis Esquivel. The interview is illustrated by four of his most recent works of narrative painting that attempt to check and outmaneuver the calculations of racism and its history. Few works of art and thought are as critical, tactical and suggestive as those of Esquivel when sorting through the traps of coloniality.

The essays in Part I, *Racism and/as History*, explore the vast territory through which race, after being dethroned as queen of the early colonial economy and experience by the Revolution in Saint-Domingue, wandered through before returning strengthened and enlivened to reign over the modern age of empire and nationalisms. Alejandro Gómez conducts a monumental search through the record of movements and ideas in the Spanish-speaking Atlantic world to inform the processes that both challenged and blocked the quest for full emancipation and equality and documenting a “second golden moment” in the struggle. Consuelo Naranjo Orovio and José F. Buscaglia expose the genocidal impulses of early colonial nationalisms in Cuba and Puerto Rico whereas Shaun Irlam reveals the atavistic nature of modern imperial settler ideologies through a powerful critique aimed at *un-settling* the disturbing medieval fantasies that Isak Dinesen conjured in Kenya.

In Part II, *Lifting the Curse of Coloniality*, Francisco Fernández Repetto questions the repurposing of colonial iconography and symbols in the fashioning of a new discourse on modernity through public monuments in Yucatan. With the same sophistication, Karim Ghorbal reveals the weight of colonial institutions in current policies of positive discrimination in France and its colonies while suggesting a Fanonian critique that moves against the social and cultural hegemony of the traditional elites. Answering Oswaldo Costa’s call for an anthropophagous process of cultural decolonization Carlos Jáuregui’s essay closes the dossier by opening a major gap in the walls of the colonial Eurocentric bastion.

This dossier is dedicated to the free women, men and children of Saint-Domingue who in March of 1802, stranded behind the walls of the Fortress of Crête-à-Pierrot and facing certain death at the hands of the elite troops that First Consul Bonaparte had sent to reinstitute slavery in the colony, sang the anthems of the republic with the greatest revolutionary enthusiasm of all times. *Ah! ça ira, ça ira, ça ira.*

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