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## Engagement in the cross-currents of history: perspectives on civilisation in Latin America

In this chapter, I explore Latin American experiences that shed light on the engagement of civilisations. Most of the theoretical engagements canvassed in Part I either sequester Latin American experiences or do not do them justice. In the past, Latin America has been judged poorly when questions of its civilisational character have been asked. Scholars in modernisation studies and area studies influenced by Louis Hartz's *The Founding of New Societies* saw the sub-continent as an offshoot of Western modernity. Hartz and modernisation scholars in sociology and political science left an intellectual impression of 'two Americas': a pace-setting northern civilisation and a deficient southern variant. After his break with functionalist sociology, Eisenstadt sought to rectify the impressions left by modernisation analysis in an important essay on the Americas as multiple modernities and a zone of civilisations (2002b). Arguing for the distinctive trajectories of all the Americas, he demarcated a proper civilisational status for Latin American modernity. While this essay was a landmark corrective, it did not go far enough in elucidating, first, the degree of engagement of multiple civilisations in Latin America and, second, the deep indigenous and African influences in the social constitution of Latin American societies. Beyond Eisenstadt's essay, there has been only a couple of major works contributing to debates in contemporary civilisational analysis around the Americas (Katzenstein, 2012b; Smith, 2006). More generally, remarks made at the end of Chapter 3 on the absence of research on Africa, new world societies and indigenous civilisations sum up the landscape of contemporary civilisational analysis at the time of writing. Where civilisational analysis has stretched its latitude to examine African, new world and indigenous civilisations, only limited progress has been made. This chapter begins to address these lacunae with modest moves to apply the model of inter-civilisational engagement outlined in Chapters 4 and 5 to modern

perspectives in culture and the arts, politics, theology and political economy produced in Latin America.

My purpose in this chapter is to set down a basis for understanding Latin America as a historical zone of engagement of many civilisations. In order to validate the southern continent as a distinct world region of inter-civilisational engagement, I address problems of identity and social movements in dimensions of cultural exchange and the reconstruction of civilisational models. First, I set the scene by examining 'Americanism' as a republican response to the fashionable preference for positivism in the nineteenth century. A counter-imagination contextualises Americanism and is common to modernist traditions and subsequent traditions of radical critique and activism. Second, I delineate modernist movements in philosophy, literature and poetry and the arts that made such modernist traditions. They flourished in the first part of the twentieth century. However, after the Second World War, modernism found radical expression in Latin American Marxism, political economy, liberation theology and indigenous social movements. Overall, I contend that modern Latin America has emerged from the cross-currents, conflicts and dissonances of civilisations. Furthermore, I argue that problems of authenticity and of historical continuity and discontinuity have been central to cultural and political thought of movement engaging international currents.

## Latin America in the cross-currents of history

Cultural and political engagement began in earnest for independent Latin American societies in the 1880s. Perspectives in culture and politics in post-colonial Latin America speak to an 'Americanism' expressed in the phrase *nuestra América*, first popularised by Cuban nationalist José Martí. In reaction to the prevailing positivist philosophies of science, race and government of the later nineteenth-century, twentieth-century thinkers developed independent viewpoints that presented Latin America with a positive complexion. A succession of modernists asserted a different perception of Latin America's place in global history. In different spheres and in different lexicons they re-articulated the Americanism Martí had in the 1880s and 1890s. The Latin America they envisaged entailed a counter-imagination of the 'North' as South America's other. What Martí expressed in history, others would continue shortly after in the modernist arts, literature, poetry, music and philosophy. A second wave of radical modernism emerged in Marxist politics, political economy, liberation theology and indigenous movements.

Modernism arose at the turn of the twentieth century as a movement of artists, philosophers, writers, poets, musicians and activists (Schelling, 2000). In a short time, they remedied the positivist cultures that had denigrated Latin America and venerated European doctrines of science, race and statecraft. A coalescing climate of incredulity towards evolutionist doctrines nourished modernist expression. As Miller contends, modernism's affirmation of the past brought together the twentieth-century intelligentsia as a Latin American movement (2008). By embracing history, they repudiated the Jacobin practice of erasing the past. In place of Europe's specific experiences of modernity as conditions of rupture, Latin America's modernists gave expression to distinct perceptions of time and history. The arts and philosophies of modernism were fostered in multiple dialogues with foreign currents in philosophy, literature, politics and art and with Latin America's own multi-civilisational past. Modernists made careful study of foreign trends. However, they also routinely tempered engagement of international currents with the struggle to find a place for them in cultural life. Writers, poets, philosophers and activists often turned to traditions they saw as their own when looking to place themselves in the world. They were at their most creative when unapologetically synthesising southern experiences with international genres, schools and styles.

With newfound energy and insights, modernist intellectuals selectively assimilated Western and Northern ideas, including those of other ambivalent modernists (Schelling, 2000). Their horizons also included reconstructed memories of pasts marginalised by the long Conquest. In the hands of creative modernists, Latin American cultural identity incorporated the deep past far more than their ideological forebears. Creativity involved syntheses of contraries, of painful and violent pasts with hopeful aspirations of the present. Critical modernists emphasised a number of binaries that were unified in tension with each other. Historical specificity and universality were opposites. So also were aesthetic affect and rationalist form, city and 'country' (in fact highlands, forests, pampas, lakes), deep histories and myth as well as short Euro-American histories, and the magical encounters coexistent in the arts with epistemological realism. The generic pattern of combination of opposites-in-tension is contingent on multi-civilisational inputs. The form of modernist creativity drew on the heritage and physical worlds of the Americas, yet it was also self-consciously shaped with Western and Northern influences.

Latin America's modernists produced syntheses through dialogue with foreign and local currents of social and philosophical thought. They were thus embedded in inter-civilisational engagement. As explored in Chapter 4, Collins's historical sociology of cultural traffic identifies networks formed by cultural flows in and

out of major intellectual centres (Collins, 2000, 2004). He seems unaware of Latin American networks, but his sociology of the milieu of creativity can still be usefully applied. In this regard, Latin America's cities should be counted as centres. Favourable socio-economic conditions and expansion of urban cultures created ideal public spaces for urban modernism (Miller, 2008: 30–6). Cities were expanding, especially where high-volume immigration was involved. Vibrant markets and industries gave the impression of economic dynamism. Education and political systems incorporated the middle classes and touched the working classes for the first time. By the turn of the century, parks, plazas, museums, cafes and galleries had sprung up in central urban spaces. Five cities stand out as seedbeds of modernism: Buenos Aires, Montevideo, Havana, Sao Paolo and Mexico City. As a term, *moderno* circulated readily in the idiom of growing city cultures (Miller 2008: 5–6). The modernist intelligentsia were situated in an urbane public sphere where cross-currents of culture, philosophy and politics flowed abundantly.

### *El moderno*: an intelligentsia for renewal

Latin America's modernism mostly pre-dated the Second World War. Reflecting on Latin American interpretations of *fin de siècle* European modernism, José Enrique Rodó, Alfonso Reyes, the Mexican muralists and José Mariátegui in turn brought into question background notions of 'civilisation'. After the Second World War, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Octavio Paz and Carlos Fuentes joined Jorge Borges in renewing modernist themes in Latin American literature, essays and poetry. The next two sections take up each cultural figure and their engagements in turn.

Rodó was a transitional figure who creatively adapted outside influences to Latin American identity. First published in 1900, Rodó's influential *Ariel* popularised self-confidence in Latin America and was an inspiration for many modernist works that followed. *Ariel* in fact inaugurated a transition to mild ambivalence (Miller, 2008: 23–30, 39–66). In a Romantic vein, Rodó's chief character – a surrogate for Prospero from *The Tempest* – praises the youthfulness of Greece, all the while affirming both a defence of the democratic polity of the United States and the spiritual potential of Latin America. The greatest states accumulate the 'imprint' of prior civilisations and create from them the 'spiritual environs' of holistic cultures (Rodó, 1988: 91–2). Rodó sensationally urges Latin America's youth to perfect the 'spiritual environs' of Latin America's materially robust cities in a unity of spirit and material culture (1988: 93–5). Rodó pleads, through the voice of Prospero, for Americans to pursue a project, or 'future', of civilisational richness. Yet the balance of argument in *Ariel* is about a poise of the material and ideal and the many civilisational sources of complex modern societies,

including Latin American ones. Although *Ariel* can be read as a cautionary tale about hubris, it can also be read in the spirit of Martí's vision as a tract on a future that draws on North and Latin American civilisational influences. Invoking Ancient metaphors, Rodó's tract reads:

More than once it has been observed that the great epochs of history, the most luminous and fertile periods in the evolution of humankind, are almost always the result of contemporaneous but conflicting forces that through the stimulus of concerted opposition preserve our interest in life, a fascination that would pale in the placidity of absolute conformity. So it was that the most genial and civilizing of cultures turned upon an axis supported by the poles of Athens and Sparta. America must continue to maintain the dualism of its original composition, which re-creates in history the classic myth of the two eagles released simultaneously from the two poles in order that each should reach the limits of its domain at the same moment. (Rodó, 1988: 73)

This passage reverberates with Americanism. Mexican Alfonso Reyes is next. He is remembered as a cosmopolitan whose Americanism never left him (Franco and Sánchez Prado, 2004). He was greatly impressed by Rodó's *Ariel*, which he helped to circulate in Mexico. Perhaps inspired by Rodó he venerated Greece, but his version of Greece was tempered by a national and regional ethos. Hellenism once 'Mexicanised' could be sustained through a broad appeal. Greece, thus construed, belonged to an imagined Latin America as well it did to Europe.

Reyes's philosophy was cautious about the absolutism of either Reason or Spirit (Miller, 2008: 109–42). In Latin America, the absolutism of unrestrained Reason would result in a universalism that would be unviable in the tumultuous environment of African, creole, Hispanic and indigenous influences (Reyes, 1950). European philosophies of history were not sufficiently relevant to Mexico. Distant from the heartlands of philosophy, Reyes underlined the particularities of Latin American history and its historical mindset. He spent a life building a philosophical system on selections from European sources that accommodated the particularities of Latin American history (Franco and Sánchez Prado, 2004). He did not wantonly abandon the achievements of European philosophy, but cast them in southern hues. His philosophy of history prejudiced neither Hegel nor Nietzsche. History did not have a direction, but neither did it lack meaning. Above all, Latin America was a significant part of history: 'We are not a curiosity for aficionados, but an integral and necessary part of universal thought' (cited in Miller, 2008: 125). Americanism when viewed from Mexican fringes, as it was by Reyes, was a different sort of peripheral universalism, at once threatened by its position south of the United States, yet vitally enriched by many traditions. The neglect of Latin America's multi-civilisational history was not only the sin of Europeans.

The post-revolutionary technocratic state in Mexico was fanatically positivist. Its investment in positivism left the state unreceptive to the many civilisational identities and influences that formed Mexico. His preference was cultural engagement.

Reyes responded to the aftermath of the 1910 revolution with caution, asserting culture over violence and peaceful progress of all over cataclysmic rupture. Others of a later period had a different relationship to the heritage of the Mexican Revolution altogether. The Muralist Movement seized the opportunity to alter the direction and content of the arts. Simple imitation of traditional European art was out and fusion of American and Western influences was in. What the muralists prescribed was the form and the imagery of Mexican identity as a blend of civilisational inputs. The indigenous past was redeemed and validated. Not only were *mestiza* elites depicted, so also were peasant masses. Diego Rivera was a singular figure in the genre, and the most interesting from the point of view of the influences on Mexican art. For Rivera, American classicism held broad appeal because it incorporated indigenous aesthetics at a deep level. Classicism tapped a desire for authenticity through depiction of indigenous motifs and themes. It was a gateway to new expressive styles and a new popular culture. This is not simply a Romantic reflex, but a way of forging a national tradition with an international reputation. In Rivera's innovative art, the syncretism of styles and meanings, on one hand, posits authenticity at the heart of his aesthetics while, on the other hand, expressing political commitment to a new popular cultural genre. Rivera adapted indigenous iconographies for a revolutionary culture capacious enough to attract Marxists and patriots alike. Beyond Rivera, the muralist movement constituted itself as a milieu in its own right through its prodigious work. It was a milieu deeply influenced by its exposure to international critics. In this they were far from passive in portraying a breadth of historical experiences. In its most vivacious and adventurous period in the 1920s and 1930s, the Muralist Movement variously captured revolutionary optimism, humanism and suffering. Just as José Martí and José Enrique Rodó demanded a place for America in schemes of world history, the muralists implored the world of the arts to find a place for an original Mexican culture. Along with other modernist artists they made significant contributions to the cross-currents of Latin American culture.

Cross-currents also washed through José Mariátegui's Marxism. His outlook was characteristically American and resulted from a creative fusion of Western Marxism and indigenous traditions (Schutte, 1993: 18–71). Not only was Marxism localised in an inter-civilisational environment, the ontological hostility it harboured at the height of Stalinism to indigenous traditions and to Christianity was discarded. Mariátegui's Peruvian Marxism attracted revolutionaries deterred by the hostility shown by pro-Soviet Marxism to Christianity and seeking escape from the suffocating orthodoxy of Stalinism. His philosophy

earned him a reprimand from official communist parties (Schutte, 1993: 54–7). For the other side – dissenting left-wing Christians – his critique of the ‘slave morality’ of the Church establishment was a lightning rod. Marxism was vitally Americanised during the 1920s and 1930s through Mariátegui’s initiatives. Renewal of a Latin American genus of Marxism would remain sporadic until the early 1960s. It is little wonder that the generation radicalised during that tumultuous decade was drawn to his version of Latin American thought (Miller, 2008: 143–86). The American and multi-civilisational consciousness that Mariátegui promoted furthered a Latin American Romanticism, a passionate ‘reenchantment of the world’ (Lowy and Duggan, 1998: 82).

The appeal of Mariátegui’s politics and philosophy to later radicals came from his blend of elements as well as his ability to speak to the problem of re-enchantment. His thought comprised a heterodox combination of Freud, Nietzsche, Gramsci and Georges Sorel. The result was a far-reaching critique of Western rationalism. The manner in which he distinguished modernity and capitalism, history and authenticity and organised religion and revolutionary spiritual transformation showed an understanding of the multidimensionality of modern social formations that nineteenth-century positivism had been incapable of (Mariátegui, 2007). Moreover, his critical advocacy of a unity of revolutionary passion, reason, spirituality and modern culture revealed the rudiments of a sophisticated combination of Romantic and Enlightenment traditions (Lowy, 1996: 17–18; Lowy and Duggan, 1998). Despite the antinomies internal to his conception of culture, his version of *mestizaje* thought and practice reached beyond the polarities of Latin American culture in the nineteenth century.

Above all, though he remained connected to universal Marxism, his thought discerned in Latin American culture living traditions to be honoured and advanced. Mariátegui’s Marxism connected the ‘Indian problem’ to the project of socialism (Mariátegui, 2007). Consequently, he viewed the Conquest as a violent rupture of pre-Colombian civilisations, and not a civilisational advance, as Soviet Marxism would have it (Schutte, 1993: 29). In many ways, he went further by founding an original Marxism with the highest level of recognition of indigeneity of any political ideology.

## Post-war modernism: literature, political economy and beyond

As Lowy and Duggan argue (1998), Mariátegui is a landmark figure in Marxist engagement with Latin American Romanticism. The thread of Romanticism runs through Latin American modernism as a whole. Writers and philosophers strived

for a place in Universal History for Latin America on grounds that are typically Romantic. The theme of authenticity denied to Latin America by the long shadow of colonialism is a frequent one of popular literature. As a result of the Conquest, Latin American cultures are marked by a peripheral mood of abandonment. Estranged from autochthonous roots – and at the same time also from the promises of modernity – Latin America is ‘not quite anywhere, its search for identity necessarily following a labyrinthine path’ (Schelling, 2000: 9). How did post-war modernists confront the condition of searching for a place in the world?

The image of labyrinthine quest is made explicit in the influential works of renowned authors Jorge Borges, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Carlos Fuentes and Octavio Paz. It is the civilisational motif for Latin America. For Borges, Latin America’s conditions produce an imagination of urban labyrinths. The labyrinths he depicts in his short stories are paths on an endless quest for knowledge – paths that lead only to further marvels, rather than an Archimedean point. He invokes an infinite and unknowable universe, which is not only out in the heavenly cosmos, but inside the mind. Human thought has its own labyrinths that continuously unfold layers of meaning in a quest similar to the exploration of the physical world by the natural sciences. He thought the labyrinths had a universal appeal. Borges’s thematisation of quests through the labyrinth in Latin American culture is a characteristic shared with the other post-war modernists. For the other three – Paz, Fuentes and Marquez – the feeling that Latin America was unable to achieve modernity and was searching for a place in world history was expressed as a state of solitude in the labyrinth. Though addressing Mexican culture, Paz’s world view has ramifications for the entire sub-continent and is paradigmatic of the labyrinthine quest. According to Paz, citizenship has constructed the Mexican as an abstraction in denial of colonialism, the Conquest and current-day Indian identities. The denial is deepened by the mythologisation of the Mexican state. Mythic continuity is monumentalised in the National Museum of Anthropology and History and in Mexico’s official history. The real ‘other’ Mexico struggles to erupt into public space, Paz concluded decades before the advent of *Zapatismo*. When it does so, the past erupts into the present. The image of a deeply authentic Latin America searching for a way out of its solitude is shared with compatriot Carlos Fuentes, though Fuentes’s rendition is more exasperated. Fuentes argues that no genuine Latin American modernity has been realised, even if the resources for modernising currently exist. Even democracy has brought antinomies and crises such as drugs and entrenched gang violence. On his counsel, the most promising strategy for renewal in Latin America is the return to Hispanic roots. Where Paz and Fuentes come together – along with Gabriel Garcia Marquez – is the point of solitude. Solitude is rendered as Romantic doubt about modernity’s intrinsic value, as

well as the feeling of abandonment outside of modernity. In fact, doubt and ambivalence are the great expression of Latin America's Romantic modernism. From the periphery, solitude in fact is reconstructed as a motif of modernity anchored in a particular time and place. The reconstruction of the motif of solitude is a paradox. Romantic doubt is a perception of solitude as an experience of modernity. Romanticism was itself nourished by inter-civilisational engagement. Western influences are ever-present but indigenous and African cultures are affirmed as Latin American.

Both early and late modernists built bridges with the radical movements of their own times. The later authors of solitude spoke to the social movements and were in different degrees related to them (Borges being an exception). They spoke to another current of modern inter-civilisational engagement – the traditions of radical critique from the 1960s to the opening of the twenty-first century. It seems plausible to argue with Miller that 'the themes of secular spirituality, participatory solidarity, integration of the past with the present, and hospitality' were a common denominator of myriad Americanist discourses (2008: 19). Beginning with dependency theory and Latin American critiques of the 1960s, a major counterpoint emerged to contest the presumptions made about Western civilisation as the telos of secular modernisation. Modernisation analysis framed US policy advice to governments and shaped US foreign policy in the region up until the mid-1960s. Its axiom was that a break with traditional forms would produce institutional development leading to an enlargement of prosperity. Prosperity, once secured, would immunise Latin America against communism. Rostow's theory of 'take-off' was an influential instance of this line of reasoning. As a Northern theory, it was an external model fashioned in the United States.

In contrast, dependency theory had far greater traction and indeed was rooted in sub-continental thought. It styled itself as a radical response to the failures of modernisation. The other main perspectives contesting modernisation doctrines came from Marxist political economy and Latin American structuralism authored by Raul Prebisch and the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA or *CEPAL*). Latin American dependency theory built on both while diverging from each. From Marxism, *dependencistas* took a radical critique of imperialist domination and further radicalised it. Though dependency theory has an unclear lineage in Marxism, its proponents could claim an intellectual ancestry in Trotsky's pioneering notion of uneven and combined development. The Cuban Revolution gave a general boost to powerful existing traditions of the sub-continental Left. Latin American Marxism could trace a lineage back to an inter-cultural fusion of indigenous, Hispano-American and Western influences. The neo-Marxist credentials of dependency theory are not in doubt, though it has attracted critiques from Marxists also. As one type of analysis of imperialism,

this school of thought pictures dependency as rooted in large-scale extraction of surplus value from the Third World, Latin America being the consummate case. From structuralism, it took the problematic of *dependency* as a starting point, while demurring on the gradualism of the ECLA's policy prescriptions. Despite the differences between theories of dependency theory and the political economy of Prebisch and the ECLA, they each framed Latin America in the same terms. Both camps equally typecast the two Americas in juxtaposition: imperialist Anglophone capitalism in the north at variance with dependent development in the south. There were other Latin American sources of inspiration also, including liberation theology and Cuban Marxism.

Critiques of modernisation analysis constitute a kind of Southern Theory (Connell, 2007: 140–55). Critics have been more penetrating than their northern counterparts. They had a critical heritage of social, cultural and political thought, which had accumulated in Latin America over the course of the twentieth century. Added to that was an established conceptual base. Fernando Cardoso, Andre Gunder Frank, Paul Baran and Samir Amin all retained the key concepts of the ECLA's research – especially core and periphery – even though they were critical of Prebisch's more favourable theses about foreign technology and investment. Cardoso in particular can be credited with reinventing dependency theory with a less schematic conception of the international division of labour. He claimed that internal class relations could shape relations with multinational capital. Likewise, distinct internal processes of state development could have an impact on how industrialisation of important sectors took place. In other words, specific figurations of state, economy and civil society mattered in determining the patterns of dependent development. Cardoso stood out with such ideas.

Accounts of the fate of dependency theory are widely available and it remains a reference point for radical approaches in political economy, sociology and political science. Moreover, dependency theory continues to reverberate amongst successive left-wing movements in Latin America. Its own origins coincided with the movement for a theology of liberation and both arose consubstantially with New Left Marxism. The focus falls here on liberation theology, as it is highly influenced by the cultural cross-currents symptomatic of inter-civilisational engagement.

### Liberation theology: a movement at the crossroads of ontologies

Liberation theology was preceded by Paolo Freire's pedagogy and his notions of liberation, consciousness-raising and praxis (Schutte, 1993: 142–9). Self-consciously sociological and philosophical, liberation theology gained definition

in Latin American responses to the reform of Catholicism by Vatican II and the 1968 Latin American Episcopal Conference at Medellín Conference. Liberation theology found a collective voice in Latin America, even though liberation theologians were never more than a minority at the episcopal level (Lowy, 1996; Segundo, 1976). Numerical weight may have been unattainable, but the moral authority garnered from the popular base communities was enough to give liberationism international influence beyond sheer numbers in the Church.

In Latin America, liberation theology performed a vital task of memory-making through *conscientisation*. Apart from providing cultural and political expression of the suffering of the lived present, liberationists have borne witness to class and civilisational memories. By creating the spaces for making memory and then reinterpreting memory in relation to scripture, liberation theology was able to introduce dialogical construction of cultural memory and traditions. Comparable developments occurred in the Pacific in black liberation theology movements (Shilliam, 2015). In Latin America, the spaces for memory-making look particularly pertinent to the interface of indigenous- and Euro-America where modernity is an experience of violent social imaginaries. Where the phenomenological condition of solitude might be a kind of cultural endowment of the Conquest, religion via liberation theology could hermeneutically construct another collective memory, connecting the living in protest at the violent and disordered past. In this respect, liberation theology should be seen as a modernist movement relating past and present (Lowy, 1996).

Liberationists expanded the repertoire of Christianity by stimulating questions of ethics in base Christian communities. Constant reinterpretation of scripture against the backdrop of present-day conditions put the economic and political order of the earthly world into question. Liberationists describe a three-step hermeneutical methodology that casts doubt on Western ontologies. The three steps are (a) involvement in the communities in which Christians serve, (b) theological reflection on the lived experiences of communities, and (c) programmes of action around deep-rooted inequalities (Gutierrez, 1973). Together the three steps ground salvation in the present and in living communities. Liberationist ethics surmise in Christ's teachings an obligation to save both body and soul. The separation of the two sides of being is a recurring theme in the Western tradition. It is a landmark of the Greeks, a landmark of Augustinian theology and a landmark of Cartesian dualism. Liberationist Christology discards the separation of body and soul in favour of a radical reinterpretation of the metaphysics of Christian purpose, turning the axis of Christianity to a profoundly this-worldly orientation. The history of salvation in the Kingdom-to-come is worked out in the present, not an ever-receding future, and therefore salvation must be bodily and it must redress deprivation. In this way, liberation theology tackles orthodox

Christianity's dualistic moral ontology of body and soul and the dualism of Western eschatological history. While parallel ontologies are articulated in other forms of radical Christianity (Rowland, 1988), the density of this ontological rupturing of Western metaphysics in Latin America is greater than elsewhere due to the articulation of liberation theology with other modernist and radical perspectives.

In pursuing the regeneration of community through hermeneutics, liberationist practices have produced a 'contextual theology' (Rowland, 1988: 126). The violence of the past is a hermeneutical challenge for this contextual theology. Enrique Dussel's hermeneutics seems the most comprehensive and most philosophical synthesis of Latin American and European traditions of thought (1996). Going beyond Paul Ricoeur to ask whether 'the dominated can "interpret" the "text" produced and interpreted "in-the-world" of the dominator' (1996: 86), he gives a qualified answer in the affirmative. Dussel's hermeneutics of alterity displace the legacy of *mestizo* identity perceived by Leopoldo Zea and other proponents of Latin American philosophy. Indigeneity can exist properly in his framework. Thus, however difficult reading the 'dominator's text' is, there are reasons to think that hermeneutics practised in indigenous base communities have helped recollect collective suffering in indigenous communal life and traditions, rather than presume the dissolution of culture and identity. The practices and experiences of indigenous communities have been voiced in the hermeneutical praxis of base communities.

More than just an innovative set of practices, hermeneutics brought a mode of learning to liberation theology. As a matter of principle, all had to learn in base communities and learning entailed a generalisation of communal life. In this respect, base communities resemble Weber's conception of soteriological community (Lowy, 1996: 32–4, 49–50). Hermeneutic circles formed spaces for the making and remaking of memory under, at times, the most difficult conditions. The grass-roots work of base communities was a cultural engagement of reform Catholicism and indigenous communities, which were repositories of cosmovision. Engagement gave validity to indigenous knowledge and created spaces for all-round learning. In those spaces, liberationists could learn in inter-cultural encounters.

As Latin American philosophy was in the background of liberation theology, the problematic of 'liberation' soon came to be a bridge between theology and philosophy (Schutte, 1993). When combined with what liberationists learnt from base communities, the notion shifted onto ontological grounds. What liberation came to signify reflected inter-civilisational engagement. Summarising liberationist Christianity, Gustavo Gutierrez defines it by radicalising Western dualism. He asserts that, for liberation theology, the temporal and mundane planes of reality fuse in eschatological salvation (Gutierrez, 1973: 69–72; Lowy,

1996: 45–6). The dualistic moral ontology of mind and body cannot be sustained when conditions of deprivation demand a world-transforming theology. For Gutierrez, ‘liberation’ is therefore a project of transformation couched in terms of ‘the turn to the poor’ and to active pursuit of social justice. In Gutierrez’s ethics, the ontological shift animating the theological turn to the poor delivers a new conception of being human. Moreover, he envisages a new orientation condensed from the historical experiences of inter-civilisational engagement with non-dualistic ontologies, particularly the inputs of cosmivision. The emancipatory politics that flowed from non-dualistic ontologies shifted the responsibility for finding redemption from heaven to earth. With an earthly purpose, theology could connect with nascent indigenous causes, new social movements and radical critiques picking up on the cross-currents of international thinking.

Seen in the longer history of Latin American social and philosophical movements, liberation theology dovetailed with prior currents and concurrent ones. The *CEPALismo* of Prebisch’s political economy, the anti-imperialist protest of the 1960s and 1970s, Latin American Marxism and dependency theory were especially important influences. Connection with social movements that emerged in the 1960s did not abate and gave concomitant currents of thought outlets for deliberation. Practitioners of liberation theology participated and contributed to those outlets with thought-provoking and this-worldly ideas about faith, hermeneutics and praxis.

Connection with other currents of thought enriched liberation theology, which in turn left a legacy for subsequent critiques on the ‘social question’. An original vein of critique emerged that emboldened the defence of the political and economic independence of Latin America. The theme continues the critique of neo-colonialism that commenced in dependency theory. Appreciation of the experiences of the South echoed the tradition of Mariátegui’s Indo-American socialism, the modernist arts, culture and literature and in sub-continental versions of Marxism. Over a century, traditions such as these issued from historical conditions in which multiple civilisations were violently hurled together and compelled to intermingle. The formations, social imaginaries and civilisational backgrounds of Spanish, Portuguese, Amerindian and African civilisations collided with each other to produce new worlds including syncretic versions of Christianity. Liberation theology was challenged and enriched by this received world. Gutierrez saw as much when he stated that ‘The discovery of the “other”, the exploited one, led ... to reflect[ion] on the demands of faith in an altogether different way from the approach taken by those on the side of the dominators’ (cited in Rowland, 1988: 127). The ontological reconstruction undertaken in liberation theology was a partner to the revival of indigenous cosmological horizons from the 1980s on.

## Engagements with cosmovision, from liberation theology to 'post-neoliberalism'

In the revival of Amerindian ontology, the strongest movements have been in Ando-America. The civilisational presence propelled by indigenous movements into the public sphere has enlivened inter-civilisational engagement in cultural, social, political and economic life. Furthermore, denser public presence compels states to take seriously recognition of claims for different mixes of self-determination. A full presentation on the impact of the resurgence of indigenous America is not possible here. Elsewhere, I outline a prolegomenon on Amerindian ontology based on textual analysis of published communiqués of indigenous-led summits, confederations, alliances and organisations in Latin America (Smith, 2014a). All that can be recounted here are signs of engagement with ongoing liberation theology and the rise of the twenty-first-century radical Left.

The most forceful claim is around an alternative model of sovereignty. The Westphalian system of sovereign nation-states is no longer relevant to Latin America. In its place, indigenous movements have, since the 1990s, pressed claims for a 'pluri-national' form of human collectivity and coexistence. This inventive notion goes beyond assimilationist regimes of 'inter-culturality' where the protection of cultures takes place in separate and restricted isomorphic territories. There is a challenge to existing states to rethink mono-ethnic sovereignty, which has been met with constitutional reform and deeper commitments by governments in Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela. Indigenous movements have influenced the constitutional process through advocacy of an alternative relationship with nature and activism around defence of their lands. The demands from indigenous peoples for environmental protection and far-reaching response to global warming are more forceful due to the centrality of land, rivers, forests and mountains to their economic and ontological security. Land is the wellspring of cultural life and civilisational identity in indigenous world views. Consequently, a different ontology is expressed in indigenous movements opposed to the extraction model of the capitalist economy.

Does liberation theology connect with Amerindian 'cosmovision'? A full profile is beyond the current text, but there are two prominent pieces of evidence of connection since the 1980s. The first is the Colombian Quincentenary of 1992. Originally, it was touted as a seminal event for the Western hemisphere to commemorate the 'Discovery' of America. The prospect of widespread and possibly large-scale protests generated debate over the significance of the history of the Conquest. At stake was the ownership of American history. For indigenous

peoples, it was unambiguously interpreted as a celebration of civilisational conquest. The episode may be remembered as a watershed in historical interpretation where revisionist narratives were asserted and gained purchase in the public sphere. But in addition to the memory of the Quincentenary for some indigenous peoples the event posed the question of conditions of potential coexistence or of a civilisational settlement. What could a possible post-Conquest settlement be like? Internationally renowned Guatemalan activist Rigaberta Menchu conveyed this sentiment in words that prefigured conceptions of 'living well' (*buen vivir*): 'By seeking true democracy, true development and making sure that we at least begin to coexist, we can start to create conditions that will allow a genuine encounter of two worlds, of two civilisations in the future' (cited in Wright, 1992: 273). The response to the proposed celebrations was formation of new alliances based on regional confederations across the Americas to protest the Colombian celebrations. To some extent they sought out links with each other as well as other movements. The problem for the Church of 1992 was posed by Padre José Comblin, a veteran liberationist, in the late 1980s as follows:

Native Americans and Blacks are still in a state of exclusion from society and from culture, both of which originated in the Church ... [R]econciliation demands restitution: the construction of a civilisation in which all are able to develop their potentialities. But there is not only oppression of the Native Americans and the Blacks, there is also a rejected poor and Mestizo population which continues to be marginalized in the present ... Reconciliation in Latin America presumes a total inversion of the whole civilisational and cultural process. (Comblin, 2006: 169)

Unmistakably, reconciliation is configured here as an ethical responsibility in the multi-civilisational context of the Americas. The idea of a 'total inversion' implies that 'justice' in whatever form might be more important than reconciliation.

The second piece of evidence is more contemporary and relates to the lasting diffusion of liberation theology. While liberation had a definable clerical, pedagogical and activist intelligentsia, Lowy makes the argument that dissemination of its ideas and modes of activism left a lasting impression on social thought, political practices and, most directly, major indigenous organisations (Lowy, 2014). He recounts key organisations as heirs of earlier liberationist activism: the *Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas Del Ecuador (CONIAE)*, the Movement of Landless Peasants (*MST*) and the Unitary Peasant Confederation in Guatemala. In Brazil, base communities and the Indigenous Pastoral Ministry have built alliances with indigenous peoples struggling to defend their lands against the attrition resulting from mining and logging. Similar alliance-making has taken

place across Peru, Bolivia and Ecuador, including co-organising with indigenous spokespeople in international fora.

The most conspicuous meeting point of the confluence of past indigenous and liberationist movements is in the so-called post-neoliberal governments formed at different times in Venezuela, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Argentina, Brazil, Cuba, Paraguay and Ecuador. The clumsy neologism of 'post-neoliberalism' generalises across quite diverse regimes. Governments exercising customary social democratic strategies of development have weaker relationships to indigenous movements and reformist theology. Radical governments aligned to Hugo Chavez's project of twenty-first-century socialism in Ecuador and Bolivia happen to have the largest social movements that vacillate between support for governments and opposition to their actions. The new radical Left captured Latin American governments in the first decade of the twenty-first century for movements and parties amenable to indigenous world views and to the influences of liberationist Christianity. Changing the rules was a priority. In every instance, constitutional reform reinforced connections with indigenous movements, though relationships between Left governments and social movements are complex and revealing of the complexities of holding government for the Latin American Left. Furthermore, constitutional reform is far from the be-all and end-all of political initiatives responding to dialogues with indigenous nations and movements. Strategies of reform aimed at a pluri-cultural and pluri-national polity are variously enacted in all states outside of the southern cone countries.

Bolivia stands out in this regard on two counts. First, the restructuring of the political order undertaken by the governments of Evo Morales went the furthest in accommodating an indigenous cosmivision. In contributing much to the project of founding pluri-national polities and the communal principles of *buen vivir*, Morales's Movement Towards Socialism (*MAS*) gave the greatest effect to a decolonial praxis. Second, in championing a realignment of humanity and Nature, Morales utilised indigenous ontologies to reimagine Nature as Mother Earth – a sovereign entity with rights, as well as the source of life, land and meaning. Morales was at the centre of the World Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth held at Cochabamba in April 2010. The intrinsic rights believed by the conference to inhere in the being of the biosphere are a reflection of the connection of the Morales administration to Amerindian ontologies. The will exists there and amongst other governments in this sphere to move beyond the extractivist patterns of production prevailing in Ando-America. However, diversifying development – while meeting commitments made to social justice – is a complex challenge for post-Westphalian statecraft. Governments aligned to the project of twenty-first-century socialism are still the best equipped to amplify indigenous ontologies and the influences of liberation

theology. They have had a pluralising effect on the political and cultural landscape, begun a project to transform statehood, promoted multipolar regional blocs and alliances and brought to the fore the most crucial environmental issues.

Liberation theology has also been an influence with movements elsewhere. First, in Brazil, where base communities have continued, liberation theology has plainly been influential in the formation of the Workers Party and its subsequent electoral successes. Perhaps it was even influential in the demarcation of factional space within the party and the movements it interfaces with. Second, African histories return in dialogues between liberation theology and contemporary movements around hybrid identities in Brazil, Cuba, Ecuador and Venezuela. Movements for hybrid identities make claims for recognition and rights, particularly Afro-Venezuelan and Afro-Brazilian movements. They assert presence as well as reminding all of the violent institution of transatlantic slavery. Third, the Chiapas diocese under Bishop Samuel Ruiz had a distinct liberationist direction in the lead-up to the Zapatista rebellion. Ruiz urged close links with groups in Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru, unquestionably putting broader solidarities on the agenda for the Chiapas communities. How substantial the consequences of liberation theology are after more than five decades must be considered provisional. Be that as it may, there are signs of some continuity of radical traditions through all this, especially in the movements and parties promoting the project of twenty-first-century socialism, though their fate is also undecided at the time of writing.

## Conclusion

Latin American interpretations of cultural and political engagement began in earnest in the early twentieth century. In the wake of José Martí's declaration of 'Our America', many modernist writers, artists, philosophies and revolutionaries fashioned affirmative Latin American identities. In visual works, critical philosophy, literature and politics doctrines, they condensed the form, styles and content of many civilisational influences, including the mobilisation of indigenous and African identities. Mindful of subaltern civilisational influences, as well as foreign ones, figures of the intelligentsia reflected historical experiences of the crucible of inter-civilisational engagement in the Americas. As the first currents of modernism declined, a post-war wave of more radical ones emerged. From the 1960s onwards dependency theory and New Left movements coincided with the development of liberation theology at a local level in base communities. Direct links in this lineage vary over time and many movements suffered under dictatorships and repression. The history of inter-civilisational engagement in

the context of conquest informs all the traditions of Latin American thought explored here. Latin American cultures after positivism no longer saw themselves in the image of Europe. The traditions that succeeded Europeanising positivist currents of the nineteenth century progressively defined a more radical sense of Latin American-ness.

This chapter interprets this phase of inter-civilisational engagement that produced non-Western perspectives on the relationships of civilisations and the syncretic creations emerging from them. By recognising and dramatising Latin American traditions, the analysis in this chapter brings insights into cultural and political engagement in new world environments. If conceptions of civilisation found expression as non-Western visions of civilisation in Latin America at the turn of the twentieth century, what other civilisational conceptions might be possible? Japan is the final case study we examine to look for other patterns of inter-civilisational engagement.