

IMPRESA DA UNIVERSIDADE DE COIMBRA  
COIMBRA UNIVERSITY PRESS



HOMENAGEM A  
IRENE RAMALHO SANTOS

# THE EDGE OF ONE OF MANY CIRCLES

ISABEL CALDEIRA  
GRAÇA CAPINHA  
JACINTA MATOS  
ORGANIZAÇÃO

LESSONS IN TRANSNATIONALISM  
AS A FRAMEWORK OF KNOWLEDGE  
IN THE CRITIQUES OF JOSÉ MARTÍ,  
RANDOLPH BOURNE, HERBERT BOLTON  
AND WALDO FRANK\*

*Maria José Canelo*

**Resumo:** Este ensaio apresenta um estudo comparativo acerca das formas como o imaginário transnacional foi abordado numa seleção de textos de José Martí, Randolph Bourne, Waldo Frank e Herbert Bolton. O estudo examina em que medida estes intelectuais entenderam o transnacional como uma moldura de conhecimento alternativa e com base na qual se poderiam desenvolver interações mais igualitárias, no âmbito das Américas.

**Palavras-chave:** José Martí; Randolph Bourne; Herbert Bolton; Waldo Frank; Americas; transnacional; *mestizaje*; *borderlands*.

---

\* I would like to thank Maria Irene Ramalho for having introduced me very early in my training as a researcher to what is called now, some twenty years later, the field of inter-American studies. Despite other detours, past and presumably future ones, I believe the interest for inter-American studies will always stay with me.

**Abstract:** This essay offers a comparative study about the ways the transnational imaginary has been tackled in a selection of writings by José Martí, Randolph Bourne, Waldo Frank, and Herbert Bolton. It addresses in particular how these intellectuals envisaged the transnational as an alternative framework of knowledge for the Americas on the basis of which more equal interactions could develop.

**Keywords:** José Martí; Randolph Bourne; Herbert Bolton; Waldo Frank; Americas; transnational; *mestizaje*; the borderlands.

Transnationalism has of late become a popular analytical tool in literary and cultural studies. If the nation is usually posited as the classic framework which is able to encompass and foster our understanding of categories such as race, language or ethnicity according to a paradigm of unity and homogeneity, transnationalism is used as the analytical device which allows us to understand nations and their citizens through the relations they establish with other nations. Transnationalism therefore offers a different framework regarding the classical relation of antagonism and essentialism at the core of inter-national relations. Finally, in de-centering the nation, transnationalism tends to break away from ideologies of exceptionalism that ground hierarchies among nations. Heidi Shukla and Sandhya Tinsman identify transnationalism as a category that “focus[es] on shared histories of connection and interaction between the peoples across, beyond or underneath national boundaries and regions – a paradigm directly opposed to the bounded and often essentialized ‘national histories’ of discrete countries, as well as to the central organizing principle of a North-South dichotomy” (Shukla & Tinsman 2).

But why has transnationalism become a fashionable tool now? Without trying to provide an extensive revision of this question, it is important to notice that transnationalism largely emerged as the most apt answer to globalization and the expected waning of the nation state.<sup>1</sup> But the idea of the transnational is nothing new; it is there since the oldest empires and has been refashioned in new empires or other formations ever since. What I am particularly interested here is the way it has impacted on American Studies, given the field's central preoccupation with the definition of a national identity. Indeed, from the late 1990s on, the so-called New Americanists started to challenge the ideological foundations of American exceptionalism and called for a transnational understanding of the U.S. instead. By the same time, Chicano scholars such as Gloria Anzaldúa and José David Saldívar were questioning the rigidity of borders and claiming for their role in connecting rather than separating nations. These critical efforts gradually favored the loosening of the national bonds and the reaching out for connections outside the nation; for American studies, it meant to conceive of the U.S. as a nation in relation with, instead of isolated from, other nations. The time was ripe for what Carolyn Porter in 1994, as acting ASA President, called a "post-American" perspective and the lead was assigned to the Americas: a post-American perspective had to examine the "intricate interdependencies" that animated the Americas but tended to hide beyond national unities (Radway 10). Working further on the concept, Shelley Fisher Fishkin remarked that the transnational "requires that we see the inside and outside, domestic and foreign, national and international, as interpenetrating" (21). In other words, a transnational approach fosters comparative analyses, dispensing

---

<sup>1</sup> In American Studies, the "transnational turn" is officially established by Robert Gross's essay "The Transnational Turn: Rediscovering American Studies in a Wider World" and John Carlos Rowe's study *Post-Nationalist American Studies*, both published in 2000.

with the traditional isolation of area subjects and makes the nation “a participant in a global flow of people, ideas, texts, and products” (24). As a result, it tends to reduce the perils of parochialism and essentialism and brings the category “American”, in this case, into the same plane as any other adjective of nationality.

My point in this paper is to examine how the transnational imaginary has been tackled at other crucial moments of U.S. nation building, most notably in the work of former Americanists, or maybe we should call them the Proto-Americanists, who wrote before the establishment of American Studies as an area discipline and certainly unaware of that development. Their critiques were nevertheless interrupted by contingencies of history that urged for strong nationalist discourses instead. I am referring to José Martí, Randolph Bourne, Waldo Frank, and Herbert Bolton, all of whom designed ideas of the Americas that were dialogical at core, as all of them to some extent anticipated one of the intellectual offspring of transnationalism within American Studies, inter-American Studies.

Because I believe the articulation of these critiques has been paid very little critical attention, it is my purpose here to offer a preliminary study of the ways Martí, Bourne, Frank, and Bolton built defenses of transnationalism as a framework of knowledge for the Americas. Despite their embeddedness in different historical circumstances (in a time frame that spans forty years, between 1891 and 1932), I intend to discuss comparatively their critical assessment of nationalism, colonialism, and imperialism; their focus on comparative knowledge as a condition for mutual respect and sovereignty; their conceptions of Americanness; and their elaborations of transnationalism as the alternative form of community, solidarity, and cooperation to replace the national order. My paper takes these as the key coordinates of the writings I selected for analysis.

## José Martí, Nuestra America

Amongst the intellectuals under scrutiny, Martí is the only non-U.S. citizen: “Nuestra America”/“Our America”<sup>2</sup> was written in the ‘entrails of the Monster,’<sup>3</sup> as he called the United States, during his exile as a revolutionary from the last standing Spanish colony, Cuba. Martí was clearly seeking for an alternative order to that of empire and he wrote this essay with a heart divided between the support the U.S. could give to liberate Cuba and the likely price for that interference. For Martí was well aware that the establishment of the Monroe Doctrine in 1823 at the outset of Latin American independence had grafted U.S. imperial hegemony into that very process. He also sensed that the coloniality of power,<sup>4</sup> the legacy of colonialism in the newly independent nations, easily inhered also in the forms and institutions of knowledge that migrated, largely unchanged, from the colonies to the postcolonial nation-states. Indeed, the most insidious form of corrupting influence might be the epistemic, not the economic or the political. “Nuestra America” was written just a couple of years before Martí’s death as Cuba’s first martyr, at the time when the US engaged in the Spanish-

---

<sup>2</sup> The essay was first published as “Nuestra America”, in *La Revista Ilustrada de Nueva York*, on January 10<sup>th</sup>, 1891, in the United States. Although I use the English translation as reference text, I keep the original designation in Spanish because it refers not just to the title, but to what evolved as a concept in itself.

<sup>3</sup> This is an expression Martí used in an unfinished letter to a friend, Manuel Mercado, dated 1895. See: <http://www.historyofcuba.com/history/marti/mercado.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> We owe this later formulation to the Peruvian critic Aníbal Quijano, who picked upon the same problems of dependency Martí was already addressing a century earlier. See Quijano’s article of 2000, “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America” (*Neplanta: Views From the South* 1.3: 533-580), and a previous belaboring of the concept in articulation with that of ‘Americanity,’ an idea that encapsulates the distinguishing features of American colonization *vis-à-vis* the development of European capitalism, in Quijano and Wallerstein, “Americanity as a Concept, or the Americas in the Modern World System” (*International Social Science Journal* 2 [1992]: 549-557).

-American War as its first imperial adventure, as acknowledged even by exceptionalist historians.

“Nuestra America” became extremely popular in academic circles after the emergence of the area of inter-American Studies given its project for a counter-hegemonic formation. Martí was after all facing and criticizing another form of transnationalism, the empire. But his reworking of the transnational was profoundly different; it entailed that no nation in the Americas would survive on its own or be successful in facing alone the Colossus of the North. Conversely, he proposed a new dynamics: instead of enumerating differences as in any national project, he underlined the affinities among the central and southern American republics with a view to endorse solidarity and cooperation amongst them.

“Nuestra America” avows the need for Latin America to articulate its own identities in order to be able to come to terms with the U.S. Reciprocal knowledge was a condition for fair relations and respect between the North and the South but Latin America had to assume itself as a coherent entity for a start. Martí began the article with a metaphor of uneven power, the sleepy town (Latin America) and the giant in seven-league boots (the U.S.), whose antagonism lies in opposing ideas: passivity and aggressiveness. The sleepy town in America had to be on the alert for the giant’s swift arrival and sleep with a weapon for a pillow. Yet, belligerency stops at the metaphor, for Martí (2002) means “weapons of the mind,” “trenches of ideas” which are “worth more than trenches of stone” (288). At the heart of Martí’s project lies a powerful reflection on the nature of knowledge and its role in political relations and political emancipation as well. Martí perceived very early on that no one under the coloniality of power could escape what was later theorized as the coloniality of knowledge (Mignolo 2008). For Martí it was clear that while there was a correlation between governance (the laws) and knowledge (290), the Latin American nations could

not be free. Martí's critique, in its awareness of the articulation between the coloniality of power and the coloniality of knowledge, reveals typical postcolonial concerns. To acquire full sovereignty, that is, to avoid the translation of old (Spanish) colonialism into new (U.S.) imperialism, Latin American political independences had to go side by side with the creation of alternative epistemologies built from what Walter Mignolo (2008) was later to deem a new place of enunciation or "the colonial difference" (239). I take Martí's project in "Nuestra America" as the colonial difference.

At the heart of the conflict between North and South, Martí (2002) locates the uneven exchange of knowledge:

The urgent duty of our America is to show herself as she is, one in soul and intent, rapidly overcoming the crushing weight of her past. . . The disdain of the formidable neighbor who does not know her is our America's greatest danger and it is urgent. . . that her neighbor come to know her, and quickly, so that he will not disdain her. Out of ignorance, he may perhaps begin to covet her. But when he knows her, he will remove his hands from her in respect. (Martí 295)

Knowledge entails respect but he largely attributes Latin America herself the responsibility for being ignored by the United States. To Martí's mind, ignorance of a Latin American identity started as self-ignorance because for centuries the habit of thinking with the colonizer's mind had been the rule: "We were a whole fancy dress ball, in English trousers, a Parisian waistcoat, a North American overcoat, and a Spanish bullfighter's hat" (293). Latin America incarnated the identity of the other offered by colonial and imperial powers because it was ashamed to assume its own *mestizo* identity; this difference meant its originality and authenticity. Martí's paper is first of all an effort to assist Latin America in getting to know



herself in creating the colonial difference as a new place of enunciation.

Two points are fundamental in this coming of age of Latin America that will eventually lead to the stage designed in the essay “Nuestra America”: the first is to acknowledge the *mestizo* culture and the second, to beget distinct forms of knowledge. He called for local institutions, “born from the country itself” (Martí 290), both governments and universities, for he allies both to originality, creation, and emancipation. Accordingly, he named governors “Creators”, since to govern according to local knowledge was to create anew and in response to the particular needs and interests of the local realities. Martí’s view of the local did not entail nationalism, though; it aimed at forms of knowledge in harmony with “nature”, or the country’s natural elements (290). As he argued, “To know is to solve. To know the country and govern it in accordance with that knowledge is the only way of freeing it from tyranny” (291). Contrastingly, imported knowledge, be it born of colonial or imperial imposition, was “false erudition” (290).

Governors or Creators originated in the University but the latter had to redirect its orientation towards local knowledge: “How can our governors emerge from the universities when there is not a university in America that teaches the most basic elements of the art of governing, which is the analysis of all that is unique to the peoples of America” (Martí 291). Hence his argument that “[t]he European university must yield to the American university. The history of America from the Incas to the present must be taught in its smallest detail, even if the Greek Archons go untaught. Our Greece is preferable to the Greece that is not ours. . . we must be the trunk” (Martí 291). This refoundation of knowledge was the condition for Martí’s ideal of Nuestra America to come into being as a transnational cultural and political coalition.

Martí's call to arms is based on notions of solidarity but also on the idea of a common, if diverse, identity. He ponders on the traits of a Latin American identity which he understood to be opposite to the U.S. Anglo-Saxon ideal and elaborated as *mestizaje*: "Our feet upon a rosary, our heads white, and our bodies a motley of Indian and criollo we boldly entered the community of nations" (291). Those who denied their relation to the indigenous, who were ashamed of the Latin American cultural or ethnic component, were betrayers, who "disown[ed] their sick mother and le[ft] her alone in her sickbed" (289), a crime all the most reviling when they left to join the armies of North America (289). Solidarity went hand in hand with knowledge: "The trees must form ranks to block the seven-league giant! It is the hour of reckoning and of marching in unison, and we must move in lines as compact as the veins of silver that lie at the roots of the Andes" (289).

### **Randolph Bourne, the cosmopolitan transnation**

Randolph Bourne is the only critic here who focused on a particular nation, the United States, instead of the Americas or the larger hemisphere. He nevertheless fully fits the purposes of this study since his challenge is precisely to conceive of the U.S. as a transnation. He engaged in a critique of the chief issues standing out in Martí's, Frank's, and Bolton's writings and is actually the one who went deeper into finding the political mechanisms to sustain a transnational dynamics.

Writing during the First World War,<sup>5</sup> in what was in the United States a context of escalating nationalism, heightened fears of

---

<sup>5</sup> The essay "Trans-National America" was first published in 1916, in the *Atlantic Monthly*.

both inside and incoming immigrants, and general repression of difference, Randolph Bourne addressed immigrant integration in a radical perspective, while playing with ideas of diversity that draw a bridge to Martí's concept of *mestizaje*. I assume belongingness and difference as core ideas in Bourne's critique. His views on difference are particularly insightful in the sense that not only did he radically revise the assimilationist model in place to value the contribution of the immigrant's difference, as he essentially positioned his critique as a decolonial emancipative gesture, for his implacable critique of the European traditions still in place in the U.S., from nationalism and homogeneity to aggressive international competition. To some extent, Bourne was also building a colonial difference for the U.S. (as he reimagined it) in relation to Europe, just like Martí did, in "Nuestra America."

Bourne (1977) commented on the obvious fact that, against all hailed assimilation programs fostering integration, the war led immigrants to retrieve their original memories and traditions, having a disuniting effect (248). Had Americanization failed? Certainly the melting-pot had. Bourne dug deep into the meanings of Americanization to the point when he inverted the paradigm: Americanization should be examined from the perspective of the immigrant and bearing in mind the immigrant's own contribution. He took Americanization as an active instead of passive process for this was the false premise of the assimilationist model. Assimilation techniques emptied out the immigrant community's spiritual substance, something impossible to be replaced; whatever took its place was doomed to be artificial, sterile, unable to foster a true integration. It could therefore only breed a shallow nationalism that was no real alternative to what he called "old nationalism" (255), a compound of competition, exclusion, inbreeding, pride, and self-interest amounting to "scarcely veiled belligerency" (257). Based on inherited forms of nationalism, the assimilationist scheme

could never offer immigrants a true sense of belonging in the new nation; but Bourne's hope was that the U.S. could develop a more positive form of national feeling, one able to avoid the obvious temptation of homogeneity.

Bourne's interest in asserting the transnational as an engine of knowledge lies precisely in his praise of difference, in this case, of cultures foreign to the national unit. These should be seen as enriching rather than disruptive of national unity and the U.S. society should be the one to assimilate into the immigrant's heritages. Bourne is possibly the most radical of these four intellectuals, in the sense that not only did he promote knowledge of the immigrant but he also sought to establish the immigrants' differences as the U.S. society's own difference, thus dislocating Anglo-Saxon privilege. Bourne's new projected nationalism therefore required the U.S. to revise its obsession with authenticity and assert its national identity in terms of diversity instead, in what he calls "the first international nation. . . a cosmopolitan federation of. . . foreign cultures, from whom the sting of devastating competition has been removed" (258). In relation to this point, Martí's theory of Latin American *mestizaje* comes to mind, although Bourne is considering European immigration alone.

In Bourne's view, the war had produced in the U.S. an intellectual battle amidst imported European ideas: "America has been the intellectual battleground of nations" (258) of which traditional nationalism was a case in point. Bourne's transnationalism was the product of this battleground, a form of attachment based on "a cosmopolitan federation of national colonies" (258). This design was complemented by particular forms of community including new forms of citizenship: the corresponding form of Americanness was essentially cosmopolitan: "[c]olonialism has grown into cosmopolitanism, and [the American's] motherland is of no one nation, but all who have anything life-enhancing to offer to the spirit" (258-59). Individual creativity should therefore be bolstered

instead of muffled down and the University was the ideal place to promote it given the cosmopolitan experience it enhanced: “In his colleges, [the American] is already getting, with the study of modern history and cultures . . . the privilege of a common outlook such as the people of no other nation of today in Europe can possibly secure” (258).

As in Martí’s critique, the University takes centerstage as the site where a new form of cosmopolitan knowledge could be developed. Unlike nationalism, this form of cosmopolitanism was unifying at core but relied on solidarity and cooperation, rather than competition. It was a balanced combination of bookish knowledge and social experience provided by the diverse environment of the University:

Indeed, it is not uncommon for the eager Anglo-Saxon who goes to a vivid American university today to find his true friends not among his own race but among the acclimatized German or Austrian, the acclimatized Jew, the acclimatized Scandinavian or Italian. In them he finds the cosmopolitan note. . . the clue to that international mind which will be essential to all men and women of good-will if they are ever to save this Western world of ours from suicide. (Bourne 259)

The new cosmopolitan knowledge is essentially based on difference and it also draws a bridge to Herbert Bolton’s concept of comparative study, when Bourne argues that this diverse community of students praise on one another’s differences precisely as differences: “They are more valuable and interesting to each other for being different” (259). Social exchange is fundamental as a complement to “the cold recording of facts” (260) because actual contact with difference eventually reinforces an “intellectual sympathy” that will unite instead of dividing (260) and favor cooperation towards a common goal; for Bourne, this is “the destiny of America” (260).

Bourne also resorted to new legal instruments, or citizenship forms, to match his wider ideal of the transnation and the modes of belonging it involved. He highlighted the notion of dual citizenship, practically a taboo in times of war: “Dual citizenship we may have to recognize as the rudimentary form of that international citizenship. . . Once a citizen, always a citizen, no matter how many new citizenships he may embrace” (260-61). Yet, dual citizenship was but one step in the ultimate commitment to put in place a transnational or cosmopolitan mode of belonging: “[t]he attempt to weave a wholly novel international nation out of our chaotic America will liberate and harmonize the creative power of all these peoples and give them the new spiritual citizenship, as so many individuals have already been given, of a world” (263). The fact that transnational citizenship would entail people’s creativity in particular connects Bourne’s thought to that of the other critics under analysis. Bourne’s defense of creativity as a feature of transnational citizenship resonates in Martí’s defense of the colonial difference and certainly also in Waldo Frank’s ideas on spirituality.

### **Herbert Bolton, a larger history**

Both Waldo Frank and Herbert Bolton stand out in as far as Good Neighbor ideology is concerned and their intellectual projects can not be read outside that political and cultural framework. Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal provided a very welcoming ground to hemispheric reimaginings. Herbert Bolton’s text under examination, the 1932 Address to the American Historical Association is delivered in Toronto, Canada, the first time ever the Association met outside the U.S. This was a remarkable fact, according to Bolton, who saw the dislocation as a first step towards a much needed decentralization in the production of knowledge and in the acknowledgement of

the relations binding the Americas together. And Bolton was not just an ideologue; as a professor at the University of California, he created the first course inviting a comparative view on the Americas, titled "History of the Americas", having supervised hundreds of postgraduate students on the topic.

When Herbert Bolton (1964) gave his address "The Epic of Greater America," solidarity was a powerful leitmotif in international politics in the Americas. On the verge of the Great Depression and fears of another world war looming large in the horizon, Bolton sought to demonstrate that deeper and mutual knowledge among the American nations was the key to a more serious insight into the history of the Americas. Central to Bolton's proposal was a new historiography relying on comparative analysis which he developed after his studies of the U.S. and Mexico "borderlands". The concept borderlands underscored precisely the commonalities and reciprocal exchange along territories usually seen as mutually exclusive. He saw the area between Georgia and California as the "Spanish Borderlands" and signaled cultural exchange as its particular feature. Considering that he was a disciple of Frederick Jackson Turner, Bolton completely turned his mentor's influential frontier thesis upside down, not only demonstrating parallels in the historical development of the U.S. and other American nations, but also revising the notion of the frontier as a borderland that emerged, in Bolton's theory, as a permeable area of exchange, instead of a deep divide between barbarity and civilization.

Bolton was concerned with a too provincial view of history on part of U.S. scholars that ultimately led to exceptionalist perceptions: "the 'struggle for the continent' has usually been told as though it all happened north of the Gulf of Mexico. But this is just another provincialism of ours. The southern continent was the scene of international conflicts quite as colorful and fully as significant as those in the north" (308). In this manner, there was nothing unique and exceptional in U.S. expansion westwards or in the frontier: "The

Brazilian drive toward the Andes strongly resembles the westward movement in the United States and Canada” (308). Bolton’s critique works in two complementary ways: he provides a lesson in inter-American history by exposing key episodes in the history of the Americas as parallel and interconnected events; accordingly, hemispheric historical development could only be fully grasped by means of an understanding of what Janice Radway would later term its intricate interdependencies.

Bolton set in motion a different insight of American historiography based on a new pattern of knowledge situated on a larger background, the Western hemisphere. This brought to light mutual influences and interferences that were typically neglected by the orthodox lens of national historiography: “each local history will have clearer meaning when studied in the light of the others; and that much of what has been written of each national history is but a thread out of a larger strand” (303). This model study of local history in isolation was in effect one of the legacies of a history of European disputes that defined the historical course of the Americas. But Bolton was committed to identifying the “intricate interdependencies” between the American nations. His application of this idea to the holiest of U.S. events, the foundation of the modern nation through the Revolution, which he rather shared with the whole continent provides a good example: “Then came the American Revolution. This too was by no means a local matter. It lasted half a century – from 1776 to 1826 – and it witnessed the political separation of most of America from Europe” (313); by the same token, Bolton retrieved a much forgotten historical period shared between the U.S. and Canada: “The revolt of thirteen of the thirty British colonies laid the foundations not of one but of two English speaking nations in North America. One was the United States; the other was the Dominion of Canada” (314).

Bolton therefore offered “a larger perspective” or “a larger framework” that located national histories within a wide web of



European interests and disputes. He demonstrated, for instance, how the coming to being of the modern U.S. nation was in fact a joint history involving not just England, but also Spain, France, Mexico, and Canada (obviously he bypasses the Native American nations). In his urge to craft a common history, Bolton has been reproached for turning a blind eye to the differences this egalitarian stance hides; that you can not set up a poor tiny country like, say, Honduras, side by side the hegemonic power in the Americas and take them for equals. Waldo Frank, for instance, provides quite a distinct perspective *vis-à-vis* Bolton's regarding an awareness of the impact of economic difference in inter-American relations. Bolton's comparative methodology however retains the merit of breaking with exceptionalist and essentialist readings of U.S. history, or what he called U.S. parochialism.

### **Waldo Frank, new world reinvented**

Even before Roosevelt formally created the office of Good Neighbor Policy ambassadors to Latin America, Waldo Frank truly acted as one. He travelled widely in Central and South America, engaged actively in activities with writers and artists, and contributed to literary magazines. This relationship endured after Frank returned to the U.S. and regularly corresponded with Latin American intellectuals and promoted the publication of their work in the U.S. Besides Frank's essay under analysis, he wrote several books on his views both on the features of Latin American cultures and of the desirable relation between the U.S. and the region.<sup>6</sup> Aware of the complexity of what

---

<sup>6</sup> Titles such as *Our America* (1919), *The Rediscovery of America* (a novel, 1929) and *South of Us* (1931), the latter also known as *America Hispana* (its Spanish translation title), are very revealing about Frank's interest in Latin American matters,

he called the “America Hispana”, Frank rejected conjoining middle and southern countries of the Americas into one single whole. But he also assumed a pedagogical perspective in explaining the diversity of American nations, firstly because he articulated power inequality and economic dependency with ignorance, somewhat like Martí, but taking it one step further. Frank’s (1930) “new world” project is based on a model of organic relations between North and South America and the knowledge generated thereby. He asserted that “mutual knowledge” was a precondition for the Americas “to exchange, to co-operate, to collaborate creatively” (579).

The only common denominator in North/South relations so far was business. But business was, to Frank’s mind, the opposite of knowledge because it did not demand nor would generate “true understanding” (579). Business was based on unequal power and on economic relations whose model Frank singled out as “capitalist Powers and small debtor nations” (580) and inevitably resulted in relations of plain subjugation. This kind of commercial bonds required minimum market knowledge since they amounted to exploitation: “[a]nd exploitation gets along best with little understanding” (580). Dehumanization was the ultimate effect of this form of commerce: “To exploit your fellow man it is far safer not to see him *as a man*” (580).<sup>7</sup>

The “new world” would not be devoid of business, but it would be a place in which business was complemented by a mode of spiritual life. Hence his retrieval of the idea of the organic body: “Business is a necessary function in the upbuilding of a world. But it has no equipment to rule. It is the body-building, the muscle-building factor in the social organism: it is not the brain, not the nervous system,

---

on the one hand, as well as about his role in disseminating knowledge on Latin America and to foster closer contact to the U.S., on the other.

<sup>7</sup> Italics in original.

not the spirit. . . . Unless the body have [sic] spirit, it will perish; and unless the spirit has body it remains unborn” (586).

Frank also added that there was concern in the U.S. about this kind of relationship but it tended to be misguided, for common complaints of commercial exploitation usually resulted in sheer populism, in calling to sentiment instead of building on strategies to deepen mutual knowledge (580). The other potential critical strategy on these matters was academic knowledge but it in turn created abstract knowledge that objectified Latin America: “[it] make[s] us. . . merely know *about* them” (580).<sup>8</sup> Frank’s alternative proposal was for a type of knowledge that supported reciprocity and solidarity, based on a new relationship between North and South that he defined as a “sense of kinship, the experience of mutual advantage” (579). This could lead to “a living experience” capable of generating “common knowledge and common need” (580), clearly envisaging a relation of interdependence between North and South.

As regards Latin America, Frank noted that the past itself proved that ignorance could only prompt cultural immaturity, following Spain’s model of ruling over the colonies in isolation, cutting off contact amongst them (581). To compensate for this immaturity, he argued that Latin America developed what he termed a new spirituality, an organic form of expression in which its present intellectuals were very engaged:

freed from the dogmas of the Catholic Church, these young men. . . have inherited intact the tradition, the spirit, the energy which, in far different form, created Christian Europe. They believe in man, not as an economic factor, but as the creator of his destiny; . . . They believe that the holiness in man must be

---

<sup>8</sup> Italics in original.

expressed through the harmonious interplay of individual, social, aesthetic, and political forms. (Frank 583)

This was a capacity Frank thought was lost to U.S. intellectuals but on the basis of which he inscribed his utopia for a “new world”. Latin American intellectuals, having been born in the shade of U.S. might, could not afford being indifferent to U.S. hegemony. In line with a tradition of anti-imperialist critique in which Martí surely stood out, they alone could provide the U.S. with what U.S.-bred intellectuals, numb to capitalism, remained silent about: a critique of that highlighted the evils of capitalism, including the dangers of self-damage: “They have what we need: the clear consciousness of the universal menace, which is the uncontrolled dictatorship of economic forces” (586), as well as alternatives to this economic regime: “the strong devotion to the American tradition of a true new world” (586).

Only the organic form of feeling and acting that Frank located in Latin American cultures should give back to human beings their authenticity as individuals, freeing them from their slavish condition to materialism. Frank criticized the centrality of the capitalist market in people’s lives and its leading mode, consumerism, as emptying them of spirituality and authenticity as human beings. The Latin American intelligentsia still in the making, still striving to achieve leadership of action, as he put it, were however already “mov[ing] in the ideal and will of establishing in the American hemisphere a world where man may at last be master and where he may create an order based on the needs of his own spirit, rather than on the blind forces of material production: a world that shall be new in more than name” (584). Hope, for Frank, therefore rested on what he called the “American intelligentsia,” the creators of new forms of knowledge about the Americas that would generate the conditions for a cultural rebirth. They alone could build up the vision of the “new world”

that would save the Americas from drowning in shallow capitalism. Only their critique and their cultural sustenance could instill life in the otherwise merely organic body nurtured by capitalism.

The “new world” metaphor offers a paradigm involving mutual knowledge and interdependence among diverse American nations; it is notwithstanding less exclusive than Martí’s ideal of a “Nuestra America”, for Frank allowed the U.S. in. The reason was Frank’s awareness that in what concerned spirituality, the U.S. was far from being able to rule or influence whichever nation. The U.S., to Frank’s mind, needed to gain knowledge of Latin American differences to revitalize its own culture, in line with Bourne’s view of immigrant integration. There is actually not much difference between what Frank captured in Latin American spirituality and Bourne’s sense of creativity in the immigrants’ differences.

## **Conclusion**

In the four critiques I have briefly sketched out, the transnational was used to contest and present alternatives to U.S. hegemony in the Americas. Martí, Bourne, Bolton, and Frank all sought to make sense of diversity in terms of power relations, from racial difference to immigration, prejudice, and economic and political discrimination in unequal North/South relations. I believe these intellectuals, each of them certainly conditioned by different historical contexts but all with the colonial and imperial shades looming large in the horizon, envisioned different social, cultural, and political affiliations in relation to the national formation. They were ultimately searching for new articulations of the national-international-transnational dynamics towards a more inclusive understanding of Americanness. It is from within that reflection that the transnational emerges as a source of knowledge on the basis of which new hemispheric interactions

can begin, and that is where I see that their concepts of *mestizaje*, diaspora, the borderlands, and the transnational can reinvigorate current debates on transnationalism.

## Works cited

- Bolton, H. "The Epic of Greater America." Ed. John Francis Banon. *Bolton and the Spanish Borderlands*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964, 301-332. Print.
- Bourne, R. "Trans-National America." Ed. O. Hansen. *Randolph Bourne. The Radical Will. Selected Writings 1911-1918*. Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1977, 248-264. Print.
- Fishkin, S. F. "Crossroads of Culture: The Transnational Turn in American Studies – Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, November 12, 2004." *American Quarterly* 57.1 (March 2005): 17-57. Print.
- Frank, W. "What is Hispano America to Us?" *Scribner's Magazine* LXXXVII.6 (June 1930): 579-586. Retrieved from <http://www.unz.org/Pub/Scribners-1930jun-00579?View=PDF> on November 30<sup>th</sup> 2015.
- Martí, J. "Our America." *Selected Writings*. New York: Penguin, 2002, 288-296. Print.
- Mignolo, W. "The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference." Eds. M. Moraña, E. Dussel, & C.A. Jáuregui. *Coloniality at Large. Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008, 225-258. Print.
- Porter, C. "What We Know That We Don't Know: Remapping American Literary Studies." *American Literary History* 6.3 (1994): 467-526. Print.
- Radway, J. "What's in a Name? Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, 20 November, 1998." *American Quarterly* 51.1 (1999): 1-32. Print.
- Shukla, S. & Tinsman, H. "Introduction: Across the Americas." *Imagining Our Americas: Toward a Transnational Frame*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007, 1-33. Print.