

Response to Antonio Darder and Rodolfo D. Torres

THE INSEPARABILITY OF RACE, CLASS, AND GENDER IN LATINO STUDIES

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Darder and Torres point to a “post-disciplinary approach” to teaching and research. They are calling for interdisciplinary work that moves beyond the confines of traditional knowledge construction within the disciplines. They are also providing the seeds for a critical counterpoint to social sciences increasingly dominated in their view by the exigencies of capital, a domination that takes many forms.¹ In this context, Darder and Torres argue that Latino scholars need to strike a critical posture towards what CP Snow described as the separation of the “two cultures:” science and the humanities. This separation has been structured, specifically in response to the needs of capital. Latino Studies needs to recommit itself to economic democracy, social justice, and pedagogies that challenge inequality.

There is much to agree with here in methodologically broad terms. The question is whether Latino Studies should turn to a methodology that centers class analysis.

In calling for a rethinking of the aim, method, and epistemological and political commitments of the social sciences, Darder and Torres resonate with *Open the Social Sciences* (Commission on the restructuring of the Social Sciences, 1996), the evaluation made by the scholars commissioned by the Gulbenkian Foundation. Max Weber defined a mode of sociological inquiry that valorized the detached, objective observer at a crucial moment, as he sought to build the institutional and epistemological foundations for an autonomous mode of social inquiry — free of undue influence by external forces, especially the state. The Commission members honor that critical intervention. Echoing what the Commission members termed the

1 We would also mention in passing our concern with the tendency by Darder and Torres to frame civic involvement primarily in terms of policy initiatives.

Broad-based policy-minded approaches to interpreting research data are usually in our experience posed as recommendations that will assist in managing people, especially poor



people and people of color. We echo and support their call for social action and initiatives that will lead to social justice but would like to expand it beyond the impulse to formulate policy with more emphasis on grass roots organizing and popular education as more radical democratic alternatives (see Lugones, 2003).

“re-enchantment of the world,” Darder and Torres wish to go further, establishing a critical analysis of the relation of the knower to her object of knowledge — something left largely residual in Weber’s analysis. They also wish to make room for voices, positions, worldviews and methods, traditionally marginalized by Western social science. A re-enchantment of the world hopes to capture a terrain for social inquiry where knowers are located, where they may entertain different understandings of social reality and their own insertion into it, and where those different points are manifest in method, rhetoric, logic, and variable understandings of space and time.

In our estimation, Latino Studies has contributed strongly to this re-enchantment in ways not recognized by Darder and Torres. Their main critique of Latino Studies is what they see as an absence of class analysis. Instead, we would argue that a significant vein of Latino Studies understands colonialism and capitalism as tightly tied historically and conceptually. Capitalism as the system of production of Western modernity was born out of the conquest and colonization of the Americas. Anibal Quijano’s analysis of the relation between capitalism, colonization, and racialization could be an important addition to Latino/a Studies. He argues that “the racial axis has a colonial origin and character ‘that’ has proven to be more durable and stable than the colonialism in whose matrix it was established.” The colonial model of power codified “the differences between conquerors and conquered in the idea of ‘race,’ a supposedly different biological structure that placed some in a natural situation of inferiority to the others” (Quijano, 2000: 533). Race became a central element in the organization of a structure of control of labor, its resources and products. This new structure articulated all previous structures of control of labor, slavery, serfdom, small independent commodity production and reciprocity, around and upon the basis of capital and the world market (535). These forms of control of labor (535) configured a new global model of labor control, capitalism. The idea of race was a way of granting legitimacy to the relations of domination imposed by the conquest (534). In the course of the worldwide expansion of colonial domination on the part of the same dominant race (or, from the 18th century onwards, Europeans) the same criteria of social classification were imposed on all of the world population (536).

Feminist Latino/a Studies scholars understand that as colonization racialized production, it also gendered it and organized sexuality in perverse heterosexual terms. As monocultural plantation agriculture systematically controlled the labor of our ancestors, Africans and Amerindians, it is clear that the systematic rape of slave women was crucial. That rape stands imprinted in our labor and reproductive history. We can also see the tie of race and gender with capitalism in the history of punishment in the US. Punishment as a system to reform criminals was conceived neither with women of any color in mind nor to reform men of color, but for the reform of white men only. The convict lease system, punishment for profit — the chain gang — was the punishment designed for

men of color. This is the ancestor of the prison industrial complex, a system that from its origins, ties race and gender inextricably to capitalism as the cheapest labor within the US (Davis, 2000).

In these analyses, we cannot think of class as conceptually separable from race and gender given the history of labor control. Much of contemporary Latino/a Studies has thought of oppressions as intermeshed in such a way that one can not ask which oppression is more fundamental. Darder and Torres acknowledge the interconnection of class, race, and gender. However, they tend to think of class as conceptually separable from race and gender and as more fundamental. While discussing racialized inequality, their text suggests that the racializing processes are epiphenomenal to the economic inequality originated by capital.

The emphasis on colonization in Latino Studies has also provided us with rich recoveries of memory, histories of continued resistance that cannot be told solely in terms of class resistance, or in terms that do not consider the legacies of Amerindian and African knowledges. Chicano/a and Puerto Rican Studies have accessed these resistant knowledges to create a sense of ourselves as historical subjects, not exhausted by intermeshed oppressions. To think of this work as lacking a class analysis misses its point. An analysis of class that understands it as both raced and gendered, stands in the background of this work. However, the logic of capitalism is a logic of Western oppression of Latinos/as. It is not useful when we are trying to conceive of a sense of possibilities. Marxism is one analysis that sees our possibilities solely in terms of resistance to capitalist exploitation without any consideration of race or gender or the organization of sexuality. As we emphasize colonization, we see the continued production of ourselves as beings fit for exploitation, the historical production of our races, genders, and sexualities crucial to its specificities.

The question is both how we come to conceive of ourselves as different from the recipe that brought us here, as Bernice Johnson Reagon (1998) puts it, and how we become protagonists of our own liberation in the land of unfreedom. It is here that work in Latino/a Studies has made its most important contribution by accessing alternative cultural/conceptual systems to those of European modernity. Although there is much left to be done indeed in our re-conceiving of the house of knowledge, this re-conception should not go back to an analysis that centers class as more fundamental and separable from gender, race, or the organization of sexuality.

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