

Fourth World Peoples: Continuity, Philosophies, and Sources

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Abstract

This essay establishes a critical inspection of the notion of Fourth World as it pertains to its continuity in terms of historicity and cultural presence in the Americas. In doing so it argues that such a historicity is to be found first and foremost in prioritizing an until recently much neglected, account of Fourth World Peoples' sources of writings and cultural records. Recent exploration into these records has led to new critical ventures that open new dimensions in the narratives of intercultural encounter from the past five hundred years between America and Europe. A dimension that Brotherston surmises echoing the words of the early Mesoamerican historiographer, Chimalpahin in response to the European conquerors, "Who entered whose history?" Such inspection, the essay argues, allows us to historicize a narrative of social, economic, ecological and cultural diversity and richness that critically contributes to current modes of sustainability and models of production in late capitalist societies.

Keywords

Fourth World, American Indian, continuity, philosophy, history, writing, sources

The rigorous inspection of Fourth World Peoples' philosophies and writings in the past decades has opened new inquiries, not only in regards to Fourth World theory's own long history, but also in its relation to, and problematization of, the cultural logic of capitalism and late capitalism. Arguably one of the single most important arguments could be the notion of "Fourth World continuity," carried throughout most notably in the work of Gordon Brotherston. Critically pivotal in various respects, the notion of continuity arrests mysticism by prioritizing an understanding of forms of writing that allow a move into the past through a sense of history broader than that which nineteenth century Western empirical articulations sometimes offers, and in turn also arresting the discourse of pre-historicism so vulgarly attached to Fourth World Peoples' cultures. But more importantly, the question of "continuity" is beset by a historical dialectic. Thus, while allowing for this movement of the preterite through concrete sources of knowledge, the

concept is carrying an argument in regards to the present living and evolving Fourth World communities throughout the Americas. Within this dialectical articulation the idea of Fourth World continuity argues against the notion of "speaking for" a community, and embraces the fact that there is a source material through which a historical community can be understood, above all, through its own texts. There is no metaphysical movement in which existence predates essence, but rather a dialectic dimension of the theoretical and the political, the abstract and the practical as represented through lived experiences. If that formation allows us to penetrate the notion of continuity, articulating the notion of the Fourth World is in order to clarify its formation in relation to a broader but more specific historicity.

Conceptually, the notion of the Fourth World can be thought of as carrying a Gramscian articulation of both the organic and the epistemological. On the one hand its formation is genealogically traversed with a cosmological view that profoundly differs from its

methodological usage as a term that provides for an organizing principle. On the other, the definition of the Fourth World has to be taken as a signifier for Native America, established through arguments that affirm a profound philosophical tradition, a political coherence, a historical continuity, and most importantly through the authoritative literary sources that corroborate each of those aspects. This last formulation grounds the concept methodologically, thus allowing us to inspect the epistemological and ontological implications linked to the experiences of the Fourth World.

In order to approach an understanding of the Fourth World in these terms, one has to confront the logics that have shaped its articulations. The categories that have defined the term in many instances, while pointing towards different methods and analyses, all pertain to the notion that there is an operating world division structured by an analysis of what we consider real and imaginary. In this sense the most pervasive of these logics has linked its definition to geographical demarcations. Marxist thought initiates a historical use of the term Fourth World, drawing on an analysis of the organization of capital and its monopolistic tendencies in late capitalism, which also informed the contemporary discussion of imperialism. Nonetheless, recent inquiries have unearthed other histories of the term which may prove pertinent to its critical contribution.

The first two known uses of the term show a significant contrast in its concrete and metaphysical conceptualization. Thus, while an early use of the term appears in Hopi cosmogony to signify a transcendental and metaphysical plane of existence, after 1492 the hemispheric reshaping of world geography will fit the term into more material geographical articulations (Brotherston, 1992; Waters, 1963). After those two formations, it won't be until the twentieth

century when the term is reshaped. Suswap Chief George Manuel gives prominence to the concept following the appearance of his work, *The Fourth World: An Indian Reality*. Although his use retains the previous geographical use, throughout his work Manuel establishes geopolitical implications by alluding to a history of shared experiences among the indigenous communities of the world struggling for self-determination. In his narrative, Manuel also registers the language used to divide the world systematically according to a variety of empirical formulations that adhere to notions of economic development. This description of the Fourth World at times falls into generalities as it is often used to define any community that is marginalized economically and politically. These categories establish hierarchies according to different economic prescriptions, such as developed or underdeveloped countries, of which the most empirical and recent formulation is the notion of emergent markets. In contrast, another historical definition was articulated during the Cold War as a way to refer to the body of states positioned outside the aligned nations. In the past two decades, the use has been taken by the social sciences to refer to those communities, or states, that are not on equal technological footing with other so-called "advanced" nations. Alternatively, a case had been made that defines the Fourth World as a geo-strategic construct for Native America.

In this last respect, the Fourth World is predicated by an articulation of hemispheric coherence and continuity that is corroborated politically and through a rigorous methodology stemming from, and allowing for, the reading and understanding of indigenous sources. As theoretical and historiographical arguments regarding the Fourth World find a basis in studies that privilege these sources, a more complex horizon of organized understanding

and praxis has been ascertained. A corpus of recent works on Amerindian literatures has posed theoretical and practical challenges to different fields of study. As Brotherston and Sá remark in opposition to the stance taken by the 1992 philosophy congress in Argentina, which continues to assert a history of denial of indigenous philosophy, the story in these texts “place different emphases on such notions as the feat of imagining and conceiving reality in the first place—the ‘authorship’ of creation, as it were: the plurality of creation and the catastrophic endings of previous world ages; the articulation of time, with astronomical precision and over vast spans; the evolution and metamorphosis of life forms; the relationship between humans and other species; and, cumulatively, the achievement of agriculture” (2002, pp. 2-3). This particular research affirms a coherence and continuity in the Fourth World that broadens current analysis of Latin America in light of the contribution of Amerindian communities to their places, and to the world in both the politics of culture, and the culture of politics. One that is “in many ways a blueprint for modern notions of ecology” (Brotherston and Sá, 2002, p. 3).

These formations find further pre-Columbian continuities throughout the Latin American territories in ways that not only question “Old World” authorities, but also echo through the intellectual history of Europe. Key to the understanding of these continuities and their formations are examples of what Brotherston and Sá have termed “classic” texts of the Americas. Through the diverse textual examples one is able to trace geo-cultural demarcations of major civilizations, and understand the deeper foundational contributions to American philosophical and cultural history, and its profound reflective, representative, and expressive implications. Major regions such as Mesoamerica, with its complex pictographic and alphabetic

textual traditions found in codices and such sites as Monte Alban, and Tiahuanaco, with the knotted scripts called *quipu*, find continuities with surrounding narratives such as the *Diné bahane* in the territory known as Anasazi in the Southwest of the United States, the rainforest narratives of the Carib, such as the *Watunna*, and the Huinkulche narrative of the Mapuche, among many other extant examples. As these key narratives demonstrate, a geographical map follows a complex recording of both genesis and history that not only pre-dates the European experience in the Americas, but also expound on the complex relations of both the Americas and the broader world’s cultural and intellectual history. Further inquiry on the significance to both literary traditions and culture in specific and broad contexts may be found in a long tradition of studies established by indigenous scholars, and continued by indigenous and non-indigenous researchers. Crucial to this history is the work of such native historians as Chimalpahin, Guaman Poma, and Ixtlilxochitl, among others whose work of inquiry and preservation established the road for new schools, traditions, and intellectuals, such as Nowotny, Kossler, León-Portilla, Reyes, Rowe, Abercrombie, Sá, and arguably the most rigorous of inquiries, that are found in the work of Brotherston.

In order to reach more comprehensive political and cultural analyses of Latin America, it seems important to underscore how political coherence is asserted by such events as the *First Gathering of Indigenous Peoples of the Americas* in Ecuador. Quito’s gathering underlined the deeper historical horizon claimed in records of memory and chronology that spans millennia (Brotherston, 1992). The significance of this continuity and coherence appears even more crucial when considering the political impact movements such as the Aymara in Bolivia and the Mayas in Chiapas, Mexico have had in current political

history. An understanding of the forms of organizations and claims taken by these movements is only enriched by a deeper comprehension of the textual resources found throughout the Amerindian Fourth World. Through these sources foundational continuities are provided to the organizing principles, as is demonstrated by the Declaration of Quito and the declarations of the Lacandon jungle. If these appear as declarations of justice, they also contain an accumulation of histories and philosophies that define the struggle and the claims of the people of the Fourth World. These are inextricably bound to pre-Columbian sources, as well as to American traditions and evolutions in their philosophy that have continued after the conquest. Of equal importance, nonetheless, is to ascertain a critical analysis of the totality of reality in order to move politically in relation to capital's hegemony and domain. It is in this respect that the questions posed by the philosophies of the Fourth World must meet on equal footing with the critique of political economy, and the philosophy of praxis expounded on by Gramsci. Current events in the experience of Chiapas, and particularly the experience of Bolivia, where capital is redrawing its hegemony over the democratic forces in play by the Aymara, make this philosophical gathering a necessary experience (Beverly, 2011; Petras & Veltmeyer, 2009). Equal footing means that the historical continuity of Fourth World Peoples' philosophies and praxis has to be understood with rigor, and with intellectual severity. That rigor has to account for the fact that centuries of intellectual neglect towards those philosophies must be redressed.

The first theoretical study of the Mesoamerican codices, undertaken by Karl Nowotny, did not appear until 1961. This fact is symptomatic of the historical denial and dispossession, not only of territories, but also of access to the imagination and philosophy behind native resources. An important inquiry posed by recent studies, particularly Brotherston's *Book of the Fourth*

World: Reading the Native Americas Through Their Literature, is how an understanding of these sources enriches our understanding and our methods behind the historical conversation with colonialism, postcolonialism, empire, and even European cultural and social history. As George Manuel suggests, once the Fourth World enters the historical consciousness of the globe, it arguably beacons the most dramatic history of transculturation ever witnessed, carrying within constitutive forces that shape the post-Columbian world in all its manifestations. The project undertaken by Brotherston and Sá goes beyond Manuel's argument, by mapping the specific history of the intellectual traditions of the Fourth World as they inform other intellectual traditions, particularly that of Europe.

Drawing a cartographical configuration within the tradition of the Babylonians' *mappa mundi*, which is inherited by Medieval Europe from the Romans, the seminal work of Gordon Brotherston, *The Book of the Fourth World* points to a geographical "identity analogous" to the other three worlds (p. 9, 82). Geographical and historical coherences are continuously corroborated through extensive political legacies that predate Americas' inclusion on western cartography and have continued until today. This kind of transnational collaboration, which again predates modern formations, is central to postcolonial historicization of transnationalism and to a deeper understanding of colonial and postcolonial histories. Among its various contributions, Brotherston's work makes two key contributions. First, to challenge the inherited linguistic privileging of the script as espoused in Derrida's *Grammatology* and Levi-Strauss's structuralist framework; and second, to illustrate through the literary sources of the peoples of Native America, and in their own right, a coherence and continuity of the Fourth World far beyond that expounded by any other critic (Brotherston, 1992, pp. 42-45). A fundamental consequence of the method

behind the latter is exposing a methodological decoding that opens what had been a limited access to a corpus of literature, now coherently and continuously structured in a way that redraws the roadmap we have used to navigate transatlantic history, and Amerindian imaginaries and philosophies. At this juncture, of utmost importance within this contribution is the recognition of the authority and self-referentiality of these Amerindian texts, a recognition that allows for an understanding of their methodology within their own right and reflectivity.

Understanding the sources of historical accounts recorded through both verbal and visual languages in the Americas has led not only to fundamental questions of epistemological difference, but also to the clarification of various traditions that have impeded the kinds of transcultural understandings that Anglo and Latin American studies must excavate. Among these traditions is the science and social science discourses of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which, confounded by the difference and the claims of American Indian societies, generated a transcontinental reactionary impoverishment of cultural history and historiography by crystallizing the peoples of the Americas within the perpetual motion of natural history. This reduction led to a homogenous reading of American Indian traditions, both political and intellectual, that robs historical agency and political strategy. As Stephen Conn demonstrates in *History's Shadow*, this exclusion from human history has impressed in the consciousness of societies an imaginary of static peoples who exist “with a past, but without a history” (2004, p. 21). This imaginary, in Conn’s view, has affected European and Euro-American scientific and social scientific methodologies. In this respect postcolonial studies, to the extent that it concerns the subjective and objective formations of structural and imaginary constructs of colonialism and empire, must inquire into the construction of an Amerindian imaginary and its

philosophical inquiry. For Latin American studies, this inquiry demands an expanded roster of sources within its horizon of study, particularly American Indian ones, as well as an expansion of methodological frameworks for understanding genre, reading practices, and modes of recording memory and chronology. Brotherston’s suggestion that Fourth World Peoples texts contain a “self-definition or ontology [which] corroborates political self-determination” facilitates a discussion on transcultural phenomena (1992). In this process, it is possible to trace different hermeneutical formations crisscrossing into what Brotherston calls an American palimpsest, one that unsettles the exceptional position provided to script and to the authorities of “Old World” Classical and Biblical sources, and contains not only American formations, but also European ones.

This new horizon of investigation provides another venue in which to challenge the implied ownership by dominant societies over fundamental historical formations, such as modernity. The Fourth World provides a contribution to the understanding of structures of subjectivity pertaining to thinking and feeling that allow for deeper and more thorough inquiries sought within the dialectics of the subjective and objective at play in Marxist thought, and which inform traditions such as Cultural Studies. In the context of global formations as they relate to the Americas, the United States has inherited a privileged position as a new steward over the ownership of intellectual production, particularly the legacy of protectorate of specific economic and cultural structures that are not always congruent with the formative experiences that shape the coalesced modernities that are lived.

One of Anthony Hall’s salient points in *The American Empire and the Fourth World: A Bowl With One Spoon*, illustrates how histories of contact between Indigenous and Euro-American communities contributed to the formation of one of capitalism’s critical documents, in many ways

also a foundational document for postcolonial societies. According to Hall, the *Declaration of Independence* beacons the economics of neocolonialism, and with it, a continuity of the project of colonization of the Americas. In its wake, it left the need to contend with a complex tradition that simultaneously opened new structures and forms of liberation, as it also renovated, continued, and initiated new structures of domination. Anthony Hall's argument regarding the United States also opens a way to establish a historical continuity between economics and imperialism, as "capitalism found its most efficient engine of expansion in the polity associated with the Declaration of Independence" (2005, p. 6). The most radical shift is the new realm for property relations and for the radical reorganization of capital on a global scale that is strengthened with this new manifestation. To a great extent, the "United States concentrated and distilled the expansive corporate culture it inherited from Europe", and opened a global space for new forms of property organizations and divisions of labor that ignited the dynamo of a global economic system at the core of the critical issues pertaining to both the Fourth World and lines of inquiry such as cultural studies, and colonial and postcolonial studies. (2005, p. 6).

In its effort to understand the political structures of domination that are exercised from classic and modern forms of empire against American territories, the Fourth World provides foundational and continuous sources of knowledge and history. Hall's interrogations of U.S. relations with indigenous liberation movements and confederacy movements in 1812 fuel an important discussion regarding the development of subsequent national politics by the U.S. towards other countries, particularly in its consequent doctrinal elaboration as redacted by James Monroe in 1823, and used extensively throughout the Americas into the twenty-first century. In addition, Hall points to the historiographical

"weakness" of not recognizing "the nature of 'so-called' Indian Affairs as a precedent-setting continuum of relations establishing underlying paradigms and patterns of broader complexes and relationships between colonizers and colonized" (2005, p. xxiv). A second weakness underlined by Hall is "the failure to situate the American Revolution" in the proper context of modern empire relations (2005, p. xxiv).

In its hemispheric configuration, political and intellectual tendencies in the Fourth World share with various traditions inherited from Marxist thought the preoccupation of understanding the subjective and objective exchange of forces that continue to result in profound injustices and continue to threaten the rights to self-determination, economic and otherwise. Postcolonial Latin America, for example, establishes methodologies and tendencies that are bound to different loyalties and interests, and that demand new approaches for examination. At times, these tendencies adopted reductive national representations, as exemplified in the Arielista tradition, that impoverished political liberation agendas and promoted historiographical and anthropological practices in the modes discussed by Conn. Another tendency, however, claims a different position, particularly regarding Fourth World Peoples sources. In the Caribbean, for example, Eugenio María de Hostos, refused to yield to the myth of extermination, while José Martí claimed at different moments that the study of the Mesoamerican *códices* should be a scholarly requirement for anyone interested in the Americas. José Lezama Lima introduces his essays on "La expresión americana" with a brief reading of the Boturini *código*, one of the surviving pre-Columbian sources studied and preserved by Carlos Sigüenza y Góngora, already suggesting other ways of reading the languages of the Americas. As mentioned above, Native scholars have a historical tradition of their own, one that transmigrates between scholarly traditions, of

which Chamalpahín, the sixteenth century historiographer, and Luis Reyes, the twentieth century scholar, stand as examples. Brotherston's work expounds Nowotny's theoretical tradition to indicate how a general historiography and theoretics of the literatures of the Americas is prefigured in its literature, thereby shifting our imaginary of Latin American postcolonialities and Amerindian colonialities. This scholarly tradition has sought to illustrate the complexity and permeability of human understanding within these literatures, affirming in its wake strategy and agency, while asserting links to political memory and historical continuity.

The Fourth World reaches an hemispheric articulation through the specificity of its examination, determining forms of authority, coherence, continuity, and memory that have driven a critical wedge into the fundamental organization of capital as it relates to labor, ecology, and property. Our current difficulty in confronting many of the questions posed by Fourth World Peoples is symptomatic of the impoverishment of imagination, philosophy, and methodology that coloniality effected. Such systematic impoverishment also indicates that there has also been an understanding by the dominant, regarding radical tendencies and manifestations of the politics and philosophies that the Fourth World asserts. As the Fourth World's continuity, coherence, and forms of authority establish a history, not a mythology, that has proven politically effective in defying modes of reification, commodification, and the organization of capital, it then provides a critical and radical instrument for transformation that inheres in the subjective formation which traditions of thought invested in political and economic injustice seek to divest. As the intellectual tradition in Brotherston, Sá, and Hall demonstrate, critical in this process is the methodological grounding of the term Fourth World in order to demonstrate its epistemological efficacy to map its intellectual history within other traditions, in turn weaken-

ing the impoverishment of dominant intellectual paradigms that close out foundational and pivotal philosophical inquiries.

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