Discussions of Latin America’s coloniality and post-coloniality often come up against the question of colonialism’s universality. Scholars argue that in many ways Latin America does not fit into the typical framework of post-colonial critique, specifically the simplified binaries this field implicitly relies on and/or gives power to. On the other hand, some scholars argue that acknowledging the complexity of categories and power structures in Latin America does not preclude that these same binaries have had a profound effect on the development of colonial and post-colonial Latin America. Mario Roberto Morales argues along the lines of the former, namely that the field of post-colonial theory/subalternist studies does not make room for the complex reality of mestizaje. Cristina Rojas de Ferro and James Sanders in their arguments about liberalism, conservatism and alternative modernity in Latin America in many ways support Morales’ assertion that typical binaries between colonizer and colonized do not apply in Latin America. Jens Andermann’s critique of museums and exhibitionism, on the other hand, points out that elite criollo power in Brazil and Argentina co-opted a past of Otherness in order to construct a justified colonial present and future. For Andermann, although complex and sometimes invisible, the colonizer’s power, as articulated by post-colonial theory/subaltern studies, did makes itself unmistakably known in Latin America.

In this essay I will first outline the merit in connecting Morales, Rojas de Ferro and Sanders in order to understand the complexity with which Latin American coloniality developed and the insufficiency of simplified binaries. Then I will turn to Andermann and a more nuanced understanding of Morales, Sanders and Rojas de Ferro to argue that a violent and complex
colonial power structure nevertheless permeates many of these discussions and their material implications. I would like to note that I intentionally discuss discourses from Mexico, Colombia, Brazil and Argentina in this essay, not to assume that they can be homogenized into one history but to make a broader theoretical argument and show historical commonalities. I use these four texts because they cover a range of regions in Latin America, thus highlighting differences as well as common threads that are central to my argument. I specifically use Morales and Andermann because they point out similar historical phenomenon while making distinct arguments, a tension that is essential to the central intervention I make.

Morales argues that “this complex reality [namely that of mestizaje] demands that the analysis be located at the vortex of the articulation of the ethno- and sociocultural differences that make the conflictive intercultural dynamics of these subjects possible, and not in the extremes of those differences…”¹ Mestizaje best translates literally as “mixing” and refers not only to the biological mixing of races but especially religious and cultural mixing as well. For Morales, the phenomenon of mestizaje means that an analysis based on an oppositional binary does not work here. He points to two specific factors that characterize the nature of mestizaje in Latin America as significantly different from that in other colonized regions of the world.² First, Spain and Portugal themselves were intensely mestizaje, more so than other colonial powers, especially in the coexistence of Christianity, Islam and Judaism on the Iberian Peninsula. As such, they came to (what would be) Latin America with mestizaje

² Ibid.
dynamics already ingrained in their social and political networks. In addition, the mestizaje process consisted not only of the Europeanization of indigenous groups, as one might expect, but also included “a process of Americanization or Indianization of the European subject and culture, a mestizaje that flows from the subaltern toward the dominant group, be it forced or voluntary…” For Morales, the role of mestizaje in Latin America means that a simple binary between colonizer and colonized in the development of Latin American coloniality is not applicable.

Significant here is that Morales does not reject the existence of a (colonial) power hierarchy in Latin America. He acknowledges that criollos were elites at the top of the power structure and that they imposed colonial ideas on lower classes with social and political consequences in a variety of ways. However, Morales believes that, for the reasons I articulate above, the criollo experienced a kind of schizophrenia in relation to his social and political position because “the criollo is neither a colonizer nor a colonized, but at times he is both and tries to behave more as a colonizer than a colonized.” This schizophrenia was most visible in the tension between the public and private criollo self, where the public was defined by Europeanness and the private was defined by Indian-like mestizaje. The criollo, in this imagination, was (is) never just a colonizer but rather, just as significantly, also embodied (embodies) the deep psychological paralysis of the colonized. After offering a reading of post-colonial and subalternist

4 Ibid.
5 Morales, “Peripheral Modernity and Differential Mestizaje,” 496.
6 Ibid.
theorists like Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak, Morales concludes that what he terms the postcolonial-subalternist-apparatus cannot adequately account for the strong influence that such differences within Latin America and within Spain and Portugal had on colonialism.\textsuperscript{7}

James Sanders’ essay “The Vanguard of the Atlantic World: Contesting Modernity in Nineteenth-Century Latin America” begins with the intervention that the origins and spread of modernity in the mid-1800s came not only from Europe towards the Americas but rather spread also from the Americas toward Europe. Sanders makes this claim by describing the emergence of an alternative modernity, liberal republicanism, in Mexico and Colombia. Liberal republicanism, argues Sanders, came from within Latin America and emerged as a dominant discourse for a few decades in the mid-1800s.\textsuperscript{8} Although couched in the linguistic tradition of Europe – rights, liberty, and the dichotomy between civilized and barbaric – this republicanism nevertheless broke from European modernity that was developing at this time. This alternative modernity was “inherently political,” and more focused on questions of morality and rights for the greatest number of people than economic rights and prosperity.\textsuperscript{9} Significantly, to provide evidence for his argument, Sanders looks at quotidian media sources that would have been available to a wide range of people, particularly those of lower classes and those who were illiterate. Newspapers (which were often read aloud) especially contained numerous

\textsuperscript{7} Morales, “Peripheral Modernity and Differential Mestizaje,” 480.


\textsuperscript{9} Sanders, “The Vanguard of the Atlantic World,” 105, 111, 112.
examples of a discourse supporting republicanism as well as intentional opposition to Europe. Citing several examples, Sanders claims that “republican modernity in the Americas was thus contrasted with European backwardness: slavery, aristocracy, and monarchy.” Although such rhetoric still relies on a (European) binary opposition, it nevertheless articulates a unique imagination of political and social organization among both upper and lower classes in Mexico and Colombia. These were clearly not ideas imposed only from the top down by European or European-like colonizers but rather a complex formation of notions connected to, but also distinct from, colonial European ideas about modernity. The connection to Morales’ argument is clear: rather than a simple binary between the all-powerful (over discourse and political or social organization) colonizer and the powerless (to influence discourse and political or social organization) colonized, the relationship is much more complex. In both cases, the authors argue that a unique space between colonizer and colonized emerged in Latin America to produce mestizaje identity and a discourse of alternative modernity.

Cristina Rojas de Ferro in her essay “The ‘will to civilization’ and its encounter with laissez-faire” likewise discusses the tensions that emerged between unique Latin American discourses and those of Europe. She points out that contradictory tendencies emerged in the mid-1800s in Colombia, ideologies that were wrestling with the place of laissez-faire and morality in Colombian political and economic systems. Rojas de Ferro says that “the debate on the freedom of slaves was raised in the context of the relations of property,” drawing a direct connection to the tension between property rights and human

\[10\] Sanders, “The Vanguard of the Atlantic World,” 111.
rights that is so familiar under the framework of liberalism.¹¹ Liberals at this time, however, used the language of morality to argue against the institution of slavery. A fervent liberal argued that “laissez-faire signified a rule of conduct which ‘allows robbery, allows oppression, allows the wolf to eat the lambs’” and another thinker maintained that “morality was the precondition for liberty.”¹² This focus on morality aligns with the alternative modernity outlined by Sanders. Other more conservative thinkers, while agreeing that a certain kind of morality was necessary, did not believe that there was “need for a government to accomplish the civilizing task.”¹³ Alongside such opinions were those closely aligned to what we would consider present-day liberalism, namely a focus on ‘interests’ and ‘big companies.’¹⁴ And finally, artisans often “voiced their resistance to laissez-faire principles,” albeit while still arguing for “civilization,” significant at a historical moment often assumed to be dominated by (elite) political economists.¹⁵ Rojas de Ferro cites several examples that portray the artisan voice.¹⁶ Again, language stemming from a European tradition dominated these discussions: liberty, civility versus barbarism, and laissez-faire, for


¹⁶ Ibid.
example. However, at this historical moment, it seems that morality, as opposed to pure economics, was an important question. Indeed, a wide variety of perspectives held their own within the discourse, those clearly pre-capitalist and liberal as well as those more antithetical to what would eventually develop into capitalism and (neo)liberalism. Perhaps even more importantly, a range of social classes was involved in the discourse about how Colombia should organize itself politically, socially and economically. Rojas de Ferro, likes Morales and Sanders, implicitly argues that an array of unique discourses – some indeed contesting European and colonizing discourses – developed from within Latin America.

At this point in my essay I have focused on the heterogeneity of voices and discourses coming from various classes within different regions of Latin America, resisting the idea that a simple monolithic discourse or political structure was colonially imposed from the top down, as (according to Morales at least) some post-colonial/subalternist studies frameworks might argue. Now I turn to the introduction and second chapter of Jens Andermann’s of *The Optic of the State: Visuality and Power in Argentina and Brazil* to complicate this perspective that has seemingly set itself in opposition to post-colonial critique of mid-nineteenth century Latin America. Andermann focuses on exhibits and museums in Brazil and Argentina during this period, explaining how indigenous peoples and cultures were captured in museum displays and scenes at various exhibitions. He points out that these exhibits were not only for the colonizing eye to see, but also that their very construction was an exercise of colonizing and nation-building power:

The interior [of Argentina, where scientists searched for artifacts] is a great reservoir of material, living and dead, which needs to be ‘rummaged through’ to come upon the most striking pieces, stones and bones to which the
museum has already allocated the empty slots they will eventually come to fill. Their destination is clear prior to their discovery.  

Ethnography justified and explained certain differences, particularly, but not coincidentally, those between white Europeans (at one end of the spectrum) and indigenous people (at the other end of the spectrum). Andermann maintains that “the aim of ethnography…[was] not to understand cultural difference but to illustrate it, as difference is merely a form of noncoevalness, a backwardness in time.” Both quotes illustrate the importance of time as a colonial force operating in the movement between imagined indigenous spaces and the imagined spaces of Latin American elites (in this case, the museum). Ethnography developed as a science in order to find pieces of evidence from an indigenous past that would fit within a narrative already created by elites, namely that the current project of nation-building justified colonialism as a break from a backwards and primitive past. Indeed, “as ghosts…Indians once more set free the moving bodies the exhibition had reduced to eternal poses and to the self-sameness of racial types,” invoking racialized bodies as a tool in constructing the immobilized past of indigenous peoples. Andermann describes in detail the variety of ways in which specific visual representations of various peoples within Latin America were displayed in connection to the new idea of a nation-state. Thus, he claims, “Brazil…could

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18 Andermann, The Optic of the State, 68.
19 Andermann, The Optic of the State, 75.
20 Ibid.
become modern only to the extent that it was dreaming its own antiquity.” Brazil’s constructed past was essential to its modern present and future.

Andermann does not explore the category of mestizaje the way Morales might want him to. Yet neither does he fall into a trap of simplified oppositional binaries. Key to his argument is that the indigenous Otherness of the past was transformed and incorporated into the nation-building project of the colonizer, where colonizers blurred the line between what is now part of a colonized visibility versus a colonizer’s visibility. As such, this historical narrative as well as the presence of indigenous peoples who still existed in Brazil and Argentina (indeed, those who came from within Latin America) had great influence on the political, social and economic development of the region. Incorporation of difference into the happenings of colonial and post-colonial Latin America parallels the argument that Morales, Sanders and Rojas de Ferro present; however, Andermann, seemingly fully aware of the complexity within these dynamics, points out the ways in which the power of the colonizer used such difference for his own violent purposes.

I return to themes from the beginning of the essay to put Morales and Andermann in conversation with each other. Morales’ argument about mestizaje does not preclude the possibility that Andermann also makes an important intervention. Both focus on the incorporation of difference into the political, economic and social system set up in the mid-1800s in Latin America. Morales sees such incorporation of difference into the very premise of the system as positive in some ways; it contests conventional colonizer/colonized binaries because biological and ideological mixing were so significant. Andermann, on the other hand, critically points out that while such incorporation of difference was fundamentally necessary for

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21 Andermann, *The Optic of the State*, 77.
the developments that were happening at the time, this incorporation was also colonizing and violent. The process of mestizaje was indeed violent in a way that Morales does not explicitly acknowledge. While “Americanization” of European/criollo elites occurred on some levels in terms of customs and beliefs, the racial mixing that Morales emphasizes, and the result of which was and is mestizaje, was largely only possible through racialized rape and domination of non-white women. There exists a parallel between the (male) colonial gaze and scientific power over the indigenous object (body) in the museum and the ghost of the male colonial gaze and gendered power over indigenous and mixed women (bodies) within mestizaje. Both constitute the premise of the argument that these respective authors make about the role of diversity and difference in their read of Latin American coloniality. Putting these arguments in tandem highlights that despite the criollo’s schizophrenic position, he still enjoyed many concrete material advantages over lower classes in the racial hierarchy, gendered supremacy being a particularly poignant and disturbing example of their very real, physical consequences. Another example, relating to Andermann’s work, would be the actual physical destruction of indigenous communities and peoples, which made possible their position in a past historical moment and subsequent inclusion into the colonial project of the nation-state. The body in both these cases, that of mestizaje women and that of indigenous peoples put on display in museums, becomes the site of a colonial move into a modern or post-colonial future while simultaneously representing the ghosts of colonial violence that brought them there.

Now I turn to drawing a connection between these material effects and the more theoretical, discursive differences discussed earlier. With regard to language, I might note first that in some ways Morales himself falls into the trap of oppositional binaries by positing a theory of mestizaje as an alternative to
post-colonial theory/subalternist studies understandings of Latin American coloniality. Indeed, his read of post-colonial theory and subalternist studies as a field (that in reality are two very heterogeneous fields) seems unfair because these critiques very much engage with the deconstruction of binaries and question the very premise of representing an Other at all. Regardless, language as both a product and a construct of a colonial framework is significant here, which is why I now return again to Morales, Sanders and Rojas de Ferro. As mentioned previously, all three authors give credence to the influence of the European linguistic tradition even within their arguments about the unique and alternative modes of thinking and structuring society that came out of Latin America. Morales does so more implicitly through his use of a term produced between colonizer and colonized (mestizaje), while Sanders and Rojas de Ferro are clear in their references to European categories related to modernity. The fact that all these authors consciously operate to some degree within the conceptual framework of European modernity raises two important points. First, while of course not relying on a simple binary between colonizer and colonized, alternative ways of thinking and true differences within Latin America nevertheless had strong ties to colonialism and European modernity. And second, there is a direct connection between the physical domination of indigenous Latin America mentioned above and the European linguistic tradition. In other words, the inheritance of a colonial European framework is significant precisely because it exposes not only the ideological but also the physical violence contained in the only categories with which we can talk about coloniality and post-coloniality in Latin America. The two cannot be separated from one another. Mestizaje as a concept cannot be understood independent from the structure of colonialism precisely because its linguistic position between Europe’s binary of colonizer and colonized contains the violent ghost of racialized and gendered domination in Latin America.
Any reconception of the framework for understanding Latin American post-coloniality must actively acknowledge and reckon with this ghost.

In using Morales’ piece as a bookend for this essay, I do not wish to set myself in opposition to his argument. I concur that the criollo in mid-nineteenth century Latin America occupied a schizophrenic position and that mestizaje as both an analytical tool and identity category is legitimate and important. Connecting Morales to Sanders and Rojas de Ferro has proven useful for exploring the complexity of identities, discourses and structures that developed within and in connection to Latin America itself, not just Europe, all of which necessarily complicates the binary between colonizer and colonized. Rather than contest Morales, I have intended to show that there lies a ghost – or rather, multiple ghosts – within his claim about Latin America’s ability to depart from more typical post-colonial theory and subalternist studies interventions. The real, material violence – to which those closer to the colonized end of the spectrum were subjected and from which those closer to the colonizer end of the spectrum benefited – cannot be ignored. It is this historical reality (as well as its contemporary implications, not discussed in this essay) that makes moving beyond Europe’s colonial legacy so difficult.
Bibliography


