

The American Divergence, the Modern Western World and the Paradigmatisation of History

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THIS CHAPTER IS an invitation to rethink some narratives about the emergence of the modern Western world – restricted to Europe in the beginning and then expanded gradually to encompass the United States of America – and the ways in which this process has been explained through historical accounts at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is an attempt to return to a societal process that was left aside when what was happening in a ‘borderline’, liminal time and space became the status quo. More to the point, the focus here is on some aspects of what was regarded as America, the ‘New World’, before and after the modern ruptures that occurred in the liminal ‘age of revolutions’ (Wagner, 1994; Armitage and Subrahmanyam, 2010). It is argued that America went through a process of bifurcation, or divergence, of North and South, at exactly the point when certain historical events of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries started to be seen as inaugurating the modern times. In this process, many of the links which were used to make the New World as a whole a significant idea started to change in the early nineteenth century, became strongly separated out in the second half of this same century, to become irreconcilable after the first decades of the twentieth century.

America as a whole did make sense and had its significance expressed in the way in which the relation between the New and the Old world was conceived between the sixteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth. This was stronger for the closest ones – mainly Europe and Africa – and weaker for the distant – the so called ‘Asia’ – (Dussel, 2007). In the first section of this chapter, I explore the significance of the New World in a two-fold way: firstly, by exploring some philosophical

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approaches of the two centuries after the 'discovery' of the New World which reveal an aspect of this meaningful space. As one can see in the use of this term in the philosophical schema of John Locke, the qualitative distinction between the areas of America was not taken for granted since the appearance of the new continent on the world map. Secondly, later, with Alexander von Humboldt's travel writings of the beginning of the nineteenth century, it is argued that, despite the historical differences between the colonisation and the process of emancipation of different parts of the New World, America was still conceived as one whole continental area and did make sense as such; a space in which the main distinctions that were possible to identify were not based on cultural, developmental and linguistic terms but on physical ones (Humboldt, 2011, 1995).¹

It is argued here that what used to be understood as the New World went through a process of divergence during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and this divergence was appropriated by instituting different significant categories by the narratives of the enlargement of the modern Western world in the twentieth century. As a way to see how this divergence has been connected with the accounts about the historical emergence of the modern Western world, the second section of this chapter explores briefly some of historical transformations that have opened the door to the constitution of the new modern social imaginary in America. A general view of some aspects of the Thirteen British Colonies' struggle for independence and what became known as the 'American Revolution' with its notions of 'manifest destiny' and 'American exceptionalism' will be analysed in light of the other American revolutions of the period and its development. It is by putting the 'American Revolution' within the context of the other revolutions in the Americas in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – the San Domingo Revolution, above all, but also other 'Latin American struggles for independence' – and the divergence which was happening at the same time, that the argument about what I call *paradigmatisation* of (some) history/ies will be developed. It is argued here that one of the key elements in understanding what became regarded as the 'modern Western world' in the twentieth century is a process of separation of 'paradigmatic' historical events from 'secondary' ones. The consequences of this separation were appropriated into history and the interpretations of the modern world.² Strangely enough, key events which are also part of the process of making the 'new' come about were consigned to the margins of history.

Perspectives on the New World before the Divergence

It is possible to dispute the idea that 'John Locke was the first modern philosopher to discover the New World and to make its existence the major component of a political philosophy' (Lebovics, 1986: 567). To be sure, Locke was the first philosopher to make use of the idea of the New World as an historical demonstration of a state of nature, an idea that used to be appropriated only on a very abstract level. As Dussel (2007: 190) argues, however, talking about the emergence of a modern philosophy, one cannot disregard the fact that, before him, Descartes was a student of the Spanish Jesuits versed in the American context and the influence that it had exercised on the birth of modern thought.³ In fact, before Descartes, Montaigne was the first to challenge the Hellenistic philosophical world by using its perspective to analyse what was 'going', or common currency, after the New World appeared. Montaigne was sure that the philosophical conceptions and desires should be reoriented after this discovery (Pomer, 1996). Not only because another space, with its inhabitants, suddenly appeared but because, through the experience of getting to know what was going on in the New World, a better understanding of human existence would be possible. He explored the issue in a clear way in his *Of Cannibals*, published in 1580 (Montaigne, 1993:105). In this piece, reflecting upon some experiences that the world was going through after the discovery of the 'other world', Montaigne claimed that barbarism, a very important theme at that time, is everything that one is not accustomed to. He was, however, far away from any kind of moral relativism. By showing that Europeans have behaved in a manner that could also be regarded as barbarism,⁴ he wanted to show that the Tupinambás⁵ were not worse than the Europeans because they ate human bodies. Montaigne's point is that the rules of reason which people take to be universal about human action have their justifying roots in a specific context. Thus, in their specific contexts, Montaigne and Locke were making philosophical and moral claims based on the discovery of the New World and its relation to the Old World. Descartes, without making it explicit, could be seen as someone who was also reorienting modern philosophy bearing this experience in mind.⁶ This is just to introduce the point about how there was an entirely new world guiding some philosophical claims in the couple of centuries just after the discovery.

John Locke, particularly with his *Second Treatise of Government* – which begins with the famous sentence 'In the beginning all the World

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was America.’ – is a key thinker in understanding the idea that America as a whole was the significant area that informed the relation between the Old and New Worlds up to the eighteenth century. Locke was a keen reader of travel literature in general but with a special interest in the travel narratives from people who had been to Asia and, above all, to the ‘new entire globe’ on the other side of the Atlantic. For Talbot (2010), travel books on America, in particular, were used by Locke in his attempt to see the current political situation which he was living through in the light of a broader context. Bearing in mind that the travel literature he had in his library was seen by him as ethnographic sources, it is remarkable that Locke used the expression ‘all the World’ in the opening sentence of his book. This is because it makes a strong affirmation about a supposed empirical equal point of departure that nonetheless underwent different societal and political developments. The ethnographic materials were used by him to compose a natural philosophy which was historically contextualised but which presupposes a point of departure that could be represented by what was going on in the New Atlantic World. The metaphor of the world as America in the beginning and his state of nature are an outcome of this procedure. Despite the variation observed in the social and institutional contexts and expressed in the narratives which Locke used to inform himself, America as a whole was what he saw.⁷

The argument about the divergence which started to divide the New World by the end of the eighteenth century does not presuppose that a whole unified historical area existed as something significant for the natives before. To assume that would be completely wrong. As Ribeiro (1971) points out, there are at least four different cultural matrices that are possible to find in the continent which were a product of the process of the encounter between the New and the Old Worlds. For each of these matrices, at least a general picture of what a shared area means could be formed. Certainly, the formation of a single big nation by the whole continent was an idealistic and artificial idea, shaped during the historical moment of the struggles for emancipation in America. The point that is worth emphasising here is that, during almost three centuries after the discovery of America, there was a whole space that oriented perspectives which were seen as representing the ‘new’ and by this process made possible its relation to the ‘old’. This remained the dominant view until the very end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, just before an internal divergence occurred in the area. The work of Alexander von Humboldt, as

expressed in his travels around the new continent at exactly this period, can help us show how this divergence began.

Humboldt left Europe (from La Coruña, Spain) for the new continent on 5 June 1799. He arrived in Cumaná on 16 July of the same year. He travelled to areas of what later became Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela and its Amazonian border with Brazil, Cuba and, at the end of his trip, just before going back to Europe in 1804, he went to Mexico and to Washington in the United States. Humboldt was mapping and making statistical calculations of the vast area of the new continent in more detail than anyone else before him. But, besides this, his novelty consists in his relating cartography and statistics to the human lives that he found in each place. His views of the 'new continent' were laid out in parallel to what he was observing in terms of political developments and human agency.⁸ For Fernando Ortiz, who wrote the introduction to the Cuban 1960 translation of his *Political Essay*, Humboldt was someone who not only recognised the importance of the whole western hemisphere for the world but a person who can also be regarded as one of the first 'historians of America', one who took its history in a positive direction. It can be said that 'while Humboldt's political philosophy was no doubt a product of Enlightenment thought, his views of the Americas as a natural and cultural space radically diverge from the dominant discourse about the New World as inferior to Europe' (Kutzinski and Ette, 2001: xiii). He sees there, as everywhere in the world, the bridges that connect the changeable with the unchangeable and with the work of people, thus forming a whole integrated cosmos.

Humboldt is also offering a work that expresses another important feature of this threshold time. In his writings it is possible to find aspirations of a way of seeing the world that had been losing strength in his time. According to Walls (2009), Humboldt was writing at a moment when literature and science were becoming increasingly separated. But he himself had made an effort to remain part of a romantic generation for which this separation was not important. Humboldt's solution to the problem of how to relate the phenomena of life, as dynamic entity, and inanimate nature, was 'to fuse scientific fact with poetic imagination' (Walls, 2009: 164), giving an integrated view of social and physical phenomena as constituting an entire integrated system. His work can be seen as continuing the romanticist ideals of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, that sought to understand the basic historical form of a phenomenon and combine it with the experience of a detached self (Taylor, 1997: 370). In this perspective it is by looking

at the particular that it is possible to see the general. This perspective, however, was about to become increasingly disregarded. As Walls puts it, 'before modernity could come into being it had to kill and dismember Humboldt's cosmos' (2009: xi).⁹ The experiences of leaving the Old World and exploring the New shaped his perspectives for life.

For the purposes of this chapter, however, Alexander von Humboldt was, above all, the first thinker to challenge the nineteenth-century view about what was going on in the new continent during that period by making a public call to use a more 'convenient, consistent and precise' nomenclature to designate the new nations that were forming in America (Humboldt, 2011: 209). He was talking about the process of calling by the name 'America' only a single space, the United States, and not the whole meaningful continent that had informed him and his predecessors. When he makes this claim of the dangers involved in the appropriation of the name America by a single country, it was not because of any conceptual over-refinement but because he was aware of what could happen in political, economic and epistemic terms in the relation between the free nations of the continent among themselves, as well as with the Old World.¹⁰

Thus, it is in the first half of the nineteenth century that, to describe the free nations of America, categories other than 'the United States' appeared. As a meaningful name for the agents inserted in its reality, 'Latin' America is a category that will appear in the middle of the nineteenth century.¹¹ As it is possible to see by the following examples, however, the divergence did not come as a straightforward reality for the subjects involved in the process. In 1828, the Venezuelan, Simón Rodríguez, who was one of the main leaders of the struggles for emancipation in Spanish America, felt comfortable in writing a book called *Las Sociedades Americanas* (The American Societies). He shows the advantages that *his* America – the New World – would have, in relation to Europe, in achieving the aim of becoming an enlightened society.¹² As will be explored in the following section, this very idea of 'experiencing novelty' is going to be appropriated by the narratives about the notion of 'American exceptionalism'. Justo Arosema, who was a statesman, lawyer, and writer from Panama, wrote a book in 1840, entitled *Apuntamientos para la Introducción a las Ciencias Morales Políticas por un Joven Americano* (Notes for the Introduction to Moral Political Science by a Young American) and in 1870 another book, *Estudios Constitucionales sobre los Gobiernos de América Latina* (Constitutional Studies about the Latin American Governments).¹³ To

show why we should denaturalise the idea of a smooth consolidation or evolution of the idea about America and Latin America, the example of Justo Arosema is even more illustrative than the previous one. Living in Panama, he saw himself as a young American and, from this perspective, able to talk about moral political science. Later on it did not make sense for him to talk about the whole continent as his own. In a short time, his space started being 'Latin America'; an inferior area that should devote itself to a continuous catching-up process.

Humboldt was concerned about the 'political' and 'cultural' consequences for the citizens of the other emancipated countries in America, if this imprecision remained (Kutzinski and Ette, 2011). That is why, it is argued in this chapter, Humboldt's idea indicates an aspect of the American divergence as well as the consolidation of at least two different meaningful worlds on the same continent. Therefore, to be living at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is not a simple external fact in a Humboldt biography. Humboldt met Simón Bolívar when he returned to Europe in 1804 and, during his travels to Latin America, he met other figures known for their attempts to liberate the continent. Indeed, during his stay in Villa de Cura, in Venezuela, he was hosted by a family whose members had been persecuted after the 1797 *Conspiración de Gual y España* (1797–99) in Caracas.¹⁴ By witnessing the revolutions that were taking place in America during that period, Humboldt indeed sees a difference between the United States, the only free (non-colonial) nation that he visited during his trip to America, and the other countries of Spanish America. 'When we reflect', he wrote, 'on the great political upheavals in the New World we note that Spanish Americans are in a less fortunate position than the inhabitants of the United States, who were more prepared for independence by constitutional liberty.' (Humboldt, 1995: 13)

Having seen what was happening in the new continent, Humboldt regards the 'American Constitution' and the 'Bill of Rights' as programmes that would make the British Thirteenth Colonies' independence considerably easier to maintain compared to other liberated American countries. He believed that this formal arrangement was probably the only one which could protect against abuses of power people of different races living together. The advantage that the United States had in relation to other countries in America was based on the affirmation of its formal constitutional principles but not on the advancement and application of them. For Humboldt, the persistence of slavery, as well as the imperial era that the United States went

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through after the beginning of the nineteenth century, with the internal wars of expansion, were incompatible with such principles. Therefore, he did not write anything approaching an argument in favour of the 'take-over' and dominance by the United States – at that point far less than half its current size – in relation to the rest of the continent. As Walls (2009: 180) has shown, the historical sources of the problem were the same in 'both Americas'¹⁵ and the way out of it would be the concretisation of the spirit of liberty everywhere in the region.

As soon as Humboldt came back to Europe, he started working on his American findings. From 1804 almost to the end of his life in 1859, he worked on the natural and social history, trying to understand how the dynamic of life is related to inanimate nature. America, as the new continent, played a central role in his work from the beginning to the very end. America was part of a societal transformative process in which the horizons of freedom, liberalisation, and new forms of government legitimacy were driving action, in a context marked by strong patterns of racial inequality, misrecognition of the other, non-European subjects, and traditional and new forms of oppression.¹⁶ These processes were reconfiguring the continent in itself and in its relation to the Old World. From Humboldt's perspective, new bridges were being built between pre-existing worlds. Formal political liberty – mainly for white, 'middle-class' men – and open access to new continental markets, which used to be controlled by colonial powers, were elements of a phenomenon that Humboldt saw as part of the historical developments found in the New World. An understanding of these historical paths allows us to see how the process of divergence occurred.

The American Divergence in the Age of Revolutions

The Thirteen British Colonies of America declared their independence from Great Britain on 4 July 1776, after a year of battle. Their representatives signed the 'Declaration of Independence' guided by the formal principles of equality between all men, inalienable rights – such as life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness – as well as the right to rebel in the case of a 'long train of abuses and usurpations' carried out by despotic government. Because the British Crown did not accept this, the process continued (1775–83) and became known by the paradigmatic term 'The American Revolution', as given it by Thomas Jefferson (Nash, 2007). The area encompassed by this process of independence was much less than a quarter of what is now the United States. The 'Declaration

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of Independence' functioned as formal political framework up to the proclamation of the Constitution of the United States in 1787 and the Bill of Rights in 1789. Despite some resemblance in the main aspects of the political agenda present in the 'Declaration of Independence' document, the US Constitution and Bill of Rights were much more influenced by the Constitution of Virginia (1776). That document differs from traditional constitutions mainly because it was based on the idea of 'constituency power' as a new principle of governmental legitimacy.

Despite the long-term effect of what has come to be called the 'American Revolution' on the making of the modern world, as in Palmer's (1959) account, its immediate impact should not be overestimated (Wagner, 2001; Nash, 2010). More specifically, its impact on Europe was felt in areas where connections were already established with the United States as part of an existing colonial world. Actually, for Nash (2010: 2–3), the wars of independence in other countries of the Americas, 'considered as an overthrow of colonial masters, would have much more influence – though haltingly – than the "American Revolution", an internal struggle to remake America along very different lines than had previously existed'.¹⁷ The struggles for independence in America shared the same principle of the creation of modern forms of individual and collective autonomy, with variations in the way that it was pursued (Nash, 2007; Wagner, 2012). In the part of the world that became known as 'Latin America', the self-government project was inspired by republican and liberal principles mainly after the first decades of the nineteenth century.¹⁸ It is, indeed, important to remark that, from the very beginning, slavery was prohibited in some Latin American constitutions as, for example, in Bolivia in 1826. In those countries where slavery was not prohibited after the first constitution, it was abolished and prohibited, in general, earlier than in the United States. Slavery is a key aspect in thinking about this process of divergence within America and its relation to what became referred to as paradigmatic developments in modern world narratives.

To understand this relation, it is, first of all, worth looking at the British Thirteen Colonies' Revolution in the light of the San Domingo Revolution of 1791–1804. Both revolutions represented important ruptures that brought about what is understood by modernity in this chapter. Compared to the San Domingo Revolution, however, it could be said that the 'American' Revolution represented a continuity that came to be regarded as important. The argument put forward here

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could be laid out in Sahlins's (1985) terms when he claims that any social transformation is a form of structural reproduction. In this case, the revolution outside Europe, which came to be regarded as a 'paradigm' in the accounts about the birth of modernity, was the one in which the ruptures brought about were more able to sustain some continuity for the people who had something to lose in the event of radical change. The so called 'American Revolution' was a white, bourgeois, 'middle-class' revolution which relied on black and poor people to sustain it. The same elite who promoted the revolution, however, became the immediate beneficiaries of it (Hodgson, 2009: 32).¹⁹ This rupture could represent a strong new political agenda but with a continuity of economic and epistemic (societal) order, in contrast to the San Domingo Revolution.²⁰ The latter revolution represented a change so radical that it simply did not suit the current historical context.

In that historical context, independent Haiti found it difficult to be accepted as such for a long time, and it was not the only one in this struggle to have a black independent republic recognised. Liberia, which was the second self-governing black nation to become based in constitutional law, had, as happened with Haiti, a long way to go before it was recognised as an economic and political nation, by the United States government in particular. As Wesley (1917: 376) shows, European states were a little faster than the United States in granting recognition to Haiti. This was also the case for Liberia. Haiti remained diplomatically isolated and suffered many attempts, over a prolonged period, to have its ideology silenced by its northern neighbour (Dunkel, 2004).

What Buck-Morss (2000) has shown about such silence in relation to blacks, in general, and black slaves in particular, in the history of the struggle for freedom, especially during the Enlightenment, is something that could be examined in the light of a discussion about the modern world involving the problem of, what I call, the *paradigmatisation* of history. For her, the Haitian Revolution represented the fact that the spirit of liberty

...could be catching, crossing the line not only between races but between slaves and freemen, [and this] was precisely what made it possible to argue, without reverting to an abstract ontology of nature, that the desire for freedom was truly universal, an event of world history and, indeed, the paradigm-breaking example. (Buck-Morss 2000: 845–6)

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If this account, based on the statement by Rainsford (1805) that the Haitian Revolution represented the 'true' cause and manifestation of the 'spirit of liberty', is not completely wrong, why is this process not regarded as, at least, equally important in all the accounts about the birth of the modern world given by human sciences narratives? It could be because of the rule of modern constitutional law, based on the principle of universal rights. This answer is not satisfactory, however, because, indeed, the Haitian Constitution of 1801, written in a spirit of loyalty towards the French Republic,²¹ was the first one to contain the powerful idea of equality between men and its connection to citizenship.

An historical event can help us understand the transition that took place during this moment of colonial emancipation as well as the new order that was established among the nations of the New World and its relation to the Old World. In 1826, Simón Bolívar was the principal organiser of a congress in Panama for the newly independent states in America – as well as others not yet independent. Under the umbrella idea of 'the integration of peoples', Bolívar (2007) aimed to construct some practical bridges to facilitate the project of an American League – one great nation to encompass the whole continent. His wish was that it would prove possible to form 'in America the greatest nation of the world, less for its size but for its freedom and glory' (Bolívar, 2007). The agenda for the meeting also included the issue of the recognition of Haiti and the matter of European interference in the region. The United States was among the countries invited for this congress in Panama but the US representatives arrived late owing to the internal discussions that had taken place at home. As Wesley (1917: 373) has pointed out,

The southern point of view ... was that disaster awaited the Southern States, if the United States should send delegates to a congress in which Haitian representatives would sit, and which would consider the separation of Cuba and Puerto Rico from Spain and the cessation of slavery.

This point of view met with support in the public sphere; United States newspapers of that time highlighted the same issue. The main reason why the government sent its delegates to the congress was because President Adams saw this as an opportunity to realise his aim of expanding commercial power over as much of America as possible.

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He did not have any particular desire to become part of an American League (Wesley, 1917). This event and time could be seen as a crucial, central moment in thinking about the American divergence, not only because of the position adopted by the United States but also because it happened at this decisive moment when the countries of the continent were aiming for different objectives.

As mentioned above, the United States sent a delegate to the Panama congress because of its expansionist projects. These were embodied in the notion of a 'manifest destiny', a belief that stems from the idea of the hand of Providence shaping the fate of the 'American Republic' into a mission to spread its free course and development 'over the whole continent'. As Pratt (1927: 795) shows, the origin of the idea of 'manifest destiny' and its appearance in the public sphere for the first time in 1845 served as a 'convenient statement of the philosophy of territorial expansion' of that period. The Thirteen Colonies' expansion to the west and to the north and south of the continent had, as its ideological foundation and justification, the search for facts and narratives that could corroborate this ideology. By looking at the changing configurations of the map of the United States during the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, it is possible to see how this expansion materialised in practical terms. The doctrine of 'manifest destiny' was appropriated and transformed by the idea of 'American exceptionalism' in the twentieth century. Together those notions became one of the main manifestations of 'American' nationalism (Weinberg, 1968). Through what Hodgson (2009) regards as an 'ideological' way to build an historical narrative, 'exceptional America' has been taken to be not only the richest and most powerful state in the world but also, indeed, as politically superior to all others.

Martin Seymour Lipset, a US political sociologist who has written extensively on comparative democracy in the modern world, has argued in favour of a qualitative difference between 'America' and the other democratic countries of the world. In his last major work, he defends the relevance of the idea of 'American exceptionalism' and tries to account for it by tracing it back to the historical roots of the independence movement and the rise a universal democratic ideal.²² He believed that, since the end of the eighteenth century, the 'American creed' is based on the ideas of liberty, egalitarianism, individualism, populism and laissez-faire. For him, 'these values reflect the absence of feudal structures, monarchies and aristocracies. As a new society, the country lacked the emphasis on social hierarchy and status differ-

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ences characteristic of post-feudal and monarchical cultures' (Lipset, 1996: 19). For exactly the same reasons, as was shown above, Rodríguez (1840) maintained that America, as a whole, would carry out an important role in the modern world by making possible the creation of societies led by Enlightenment principles, in a context where the task is not to reform institutions but to create them anew. Another feature that Lipset attributes to 'American exceptionalism' is the absence of 'socialism' in the development of 'American' modernity.²³ This alone, however, cannot explain the so-called 'exceptionalism' of the US trajectory: firstly, because the absence of socialism can be seen in many parts of 'America' and, secondly, because the empirical observation of socialist experience in the modern world, in view of the lack of a shared political agenda, cannot easily be taken as an explanatory variable. To conclude this discussion, one of the consequences of following this kind of interpretation about 'American exceptionalism' is that it 'minimises the contributions of the other nations and cultures to the rule of law and to the evolution of political democracy' (Hodgson, 2009: 10). This is one instance of a more general problem that can be seen in terms of the sort of interpretation about the modern world that we arrive at if we insist on following analyses which take for granted categories that disregard how societal processes have been happening through the course of history.

Final Words on the *Paradigmatisation* of History in Modern Narratives

In his major work *Sources of the Self*, Charles Taylor tries to investigate the sources of modern identity. The book contains a substantial study of how transformations at different moments within modernity, or before, have shaped our understanding of what a 'self' is; in particular, transformations that have occurred in Europe, with the exception of specific processes in the United States at the end of the eighteenth century, that reshaped the conception of the modern self. In Taylor's view, the United States was affected by, and, at the same time, contributed to, the fundamental transformation of Enlightenment and Romantic notions, a process that lies at the core of his explanation of the modern self. For him, only a few educated people in 'America' and Europe were deeply affected by such processes. Taylor believes that, since 1800, modern history has been the history of a slow and continuous dissemination – from inside (Europe

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and America) to outside, from top (highly educated middle class) to bottom – of the Romantic sensibility and enlightened way of thinking about the world, a dissemination reaching towards new nations and classes (Taylor, 1997: 504). He cites a Thomas Jefferson discourse about the United States Declaration of Independence to illustrate his point that, in the contemporary world, ‘everybody’ would agree that the slow and non-timed process of awakening of the people through enlightened knowledge is essential to the attainment of freedom and self-governance.

In a completely different direction, Michael Mann (1993) does something ‘methodologically’ similar in building a historical sociological theory of the modern state by investigating what he calls the ‘long nineteenth century’. Again, the only non-European state which appears to occupy a decisive role, according to his approach, is ‘America’. In Mann’s view, the ‘American Revolution’ was responsible, on its own, for instituting, indeed for the ‘institutionalisation’ of, a liberal federal capitalism during this time. The success of the United States in the consolidation of its modern state in the two centuries after the revolution is due to the development of liberal infrastructural powers that enabled the mobilisation of resources to develop it. Mann (2006) indeed believes that the failure of Latin American states in comparison to ‘central’ modern states is due to their incapacity, on the one hand, to build a strong infrastructure that could guarantee the consolidation of a modern state and, on the other, to institutionalise social conflicts. The problem here is not the comparison itself. When we read Mann’s work carefully it is possible to see that he bases his comparison on things that are ‘taken for granted’ in historical accounts, on things that remains unchangeable. It seems, first of all, as if Palmer’s (1959) account of democratic revolutions covered all aspects of what was taking place at the turning point of this age; it seems more and more as if the United States has always been ‘America’, that its ‘exceptionalism’ is true in sociological and historical terms, and that its ‘real’ development is due to the uniqueness of its historical trajectory. The other side to this history, Latin America and the Caribbean, is just, and has always been, its opposite.

The list of similar approaches is quite long and it also encompasses the main literature on modernity by Latin American authors. One of the best examples is what has become a classic account of the state in the region. The Chilean, Claudio Véliz, with his *The Centralistic Tradition in Latin America* (1984), makes the claim that,

not having gone through an 'industrial' and 'political' revolution, the Latin American states remain within the same secular tradition that was developed there during the colonial period. For him, different from what has happened in United States, the development of the state in Latin America was achieved through the work of a private aristocratic elite. What is curious, though, is that he does not develop any historical discussion about the United States. He simply takes it for granted that the democratic ideals which form part of the narratives about that country were made concrete and enshrined in its political institutions from the very beginning. Véliz (1984) seems to be quite sure that the colonial rupture which took place in Latin America did not break with the previous political tradition; 'our northern neighbour' found its way of making its rupture and constructing a modern liberal state but Latin America remained attached to the centralism inherited from Spain and Portugal. In different ways, critiques based on historical sociological approaches about modern institutions in Latin America follow the same approach of being guided by what has become the status quo of narratives about the modern world and the place that Latin America occupies in them – as it is possible to see in the works of Larraín Ibañez (1996), Centeno (2002) and Domingues (2008).

From the end of the eighteenth century to the early nineteenth, revolutions, reforms and emancipatory movements took place all around the world. Without forgetting that the nationalist movements of the nineteenth century play a central role in this history, the aim of the present discussion about the American case has been to pay more attention to how those ideas have been incorporated into interpretations of the modern world. This is not meant to discount the exhaustive list of studies about individual national trajectories that have played a decisive role in the shaping of the modern world but to consider the extent to which such interpretations are versatile and general enough to be able to accommodate other trajectories that are part of the same societal process. I am not advocating the perspective put forward by Bayly (2004) whose account of the birth of the modern world does not place importance on the 'American' Revolution and its affirmation of constitutional rights for modern discourses and practices. The point that is being made here is a very simple one: to understand modernity, a broader historical perspective, which pays attention to events that have been hidden, should be welcomed; by doing so, more attention can be given to a denaturalised conception of the world. In this account, what has been 'silenced' so far, yet plays

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a central role in the development of the modern world, cannot be disregarded. Historical processes that bring about social transformation always leave room for the construction of partial narratives. That should not be a problematic consequence of the analytical task. But the question is, how is it possible to rescue what has been put aside when a societal phenomenon cannot be understood without a revision of the partial narratives that we have been used to accepting? I do believe that it is not possible to understand the dilemmas of the contemporary modern world without critically rethinking the societal processes that were discarded at the turning points, at the 'edges', of modern history.

Notes

1. The use of the word 'Americas', in the plural, in Humboldt's writings appears to designate the northern and southern hemispheres of the continent.
2. One of the main ideas about the constitution of the modern world which forms a background to this paper is to see the constitution of this process as a 'de-centred' phenomenon (Mota, 2012a). In this way, it may be possible to avoid the analytical ideas of 'inauthentic' modernities or a 'catching-up' process.
3. Descartes studied logic in *La Flèche* (France) with the Jesuits who travelled to the Americas. For Dussel, indeed, it is not possible fully to understand the meaning of the idea of *cogito, ergo sum* without bearing this in mind.
4. The references that Montaigne had in mind were the French civil wars.
5. Montaigne based his ideas on a 'tale' that he heard from someone who had lived for a long time with the Tupinambás, an indigenous population in what later became Brazil.
6. In this chapter, I cannot develop an analysis of the School of Salamanca or the School of Coimbra, partly for reasons of space but also because the idea is not to offer an exhaustive interpretation of the significance of the New World for the philosophical discourse of the period after the discovery. I have deliberately decided to stay with authors whose concerns were not informed by what was 'going', or common currency, in the relation between the New and the Old worlds.
7. Locke explored the books about travellers who had been to the North – for example, Gabriel Sagard who lived for a while with the Huron in the Great Lakes region – and to the South – such as Garcilaso de la Vega's *Le Commentaire Royale Ou L'histoire Des Yncas De Peru* (1633) and Jean de Léry's *Navigatio in Brasiliam* (1590). The list with Locke's travellers' books is long and demonstrates his interest in narratives about almost everywhere in the world (see Talbot's list on pp. 315–16; Talbot, 2010).
8. There is a disagreement about the interpretation offered by Marie Louise Pratt in her *Imperial Eyes* (Pratt, 2008). For her, the work of Alexander von Humboldt on South America – a distinction that she made despite Humboldt's insistence on describing the area he travelled to by the term 'New Continent' – was a clear attempt to portray an image of an area in which human beings played a secondary

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role in this scenario marked by an abundant tropical life in a natural zone. Pratt's book is an extraordinary work; I very much agree with most of her analysis, especially with the general point that travel literature served as a way in which to make the imperial order meaningful to Europeans. But, when it comes to the discussion of the 'reinvention of America' through Humboldt's work, she focuses on his less political writings. She doesn't explore his *Political Essay* or *Kosmos* which it is necessary to do if one is to make the argument she wants to develop.

9. Taylor (1997) and Walls (2009) have different conceptions of the temporality of the modern world. Taylor works with a perspective that goes back to romanticism and the Enlightenment, where he locates the emergence of the modern self. Walls focuses on the main ruptures at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in talking about the emergence of modernity.
10. In his 1826 *Political Essay on the Island of Cuba* it is possible to find the clearest affirmation of this point in Humboldt's writings. As he writes: 'To avoid fastidious circumlocutions, I continue in this study to designate the countries inhabited by Spanish-Americans by the name of Spanish-America, despite the political changes that the colonies have undergone. I call the United States – without adding North America – the country of Anglo-Americans, although other United States have formed in South America. It is awkward to speak of peoples who play such an important role on the world scene, but who lack collective names. The word 'American' may no longer be applied exclusively to citizens of the United States of North America, and it would be desirable if this nomenclature for the independent nations of the New Continent could be fixed in a way that would be at once convenient, consistent, and precise' (Humboldt, 2011: 209).
11. There are two main interpretations about the origin of the name 'Latin America'. One emphasises its French origin and points to Michael Chevalier as one of the first to use this name to designate the countries of the American continent which have a Latin Romance language as official state language. The literature that emphasises the local appearance of the term goes back to the Colombian, José María Torres Caicedo, with his poem 'Las Dos Americas' (The Two Americas). According to this view, it became consolidated later, with Carlos Calvo's two volumes on the 'Latin-America States' (1864).
12. In this book, he proclaimed public instruction – or general education – as the means to make societies embrace Enlightenment ideals. Rodríguez was focusing on America, but his proposal is a not-so-provincial one. He argues that the only way to build an enlightened society is by comparing different 'realities' or points of view and seeing how they are trying to solve their problems of societal integration (Mota, 2012b). He himself compared America to Europe in relation to this issue and said that the way out for America should be a creative one because it was clear that Europe had not solved the societal integration problem and could not be taken as an example.
13. Justo Arosema was concerned about how to guarantee that people would be protected against non-legitimate forms of government. He became widely recognised as an author who was focusing on how to develop societal integration without a demand for the pre-constitution of a supranational government.
14. It was the first organised revolutionary attempt in Spanish America aiming to establish a republican government based on the equality of its inhabitants without distinction of race or colour. Nevertheless, as with the Tupac Amaru

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- revolt (1780–82) in Bolivia, this revolt was brutally suppressed by the Spanish Crown in the space of no more than two years.
15. It is puzzling to read Walls (2009) on Humboldt. She, a US American, talks about America in Humboldt's writings as if it were the United States. There is no passage in her book where it is possible to identify any sort of problematisation of the idea of America. The use of the expression 'both Americas' in her book is not exactly what Humboldt meant – a continent geographically divided into two hemispheres, north and south.
 16. For more about this point see Fuster and Rosich in this volume.
 17. Nash's (2007, 2010) analysis is based on the societal impact that the revolutions had in terms of the mobilisation of different social groups (such as indigenous groups and peasants). For him, the struggles for independence in other countries in America did not share the language of universal rights; from their very beginning they were marked by a plurality of world perspectives, each one with its own particular goals but sharing the same emancipatory spirit.
 18. The liberal–republican matrix was present in the Constitutions of 'Gran Colombia' (1821), 'Nueva Granada' (1830 and 1832), Venezuela (1830), Peru (1823 and 1828), Argentina (1826), Chile (1828) and Uruguay (1830). Only in Bolivia and Peru's constitution of 1826 the so-called 'Bolivarian' (Simón Bolívar's political project) model was adopted but very shortly replaced by the liberal–republican one.
 19. Nash (2007) shows how blacks, the poor and women were involved in the 'American Revolution'. The author also shows that these groups did not become direct beneficiaries of this process for independence. For Nash, the explanation for this lies in the fact that they had insufficient political influence at the internal main front of this battle for freedom.
 20. In the beginning, in what was then San Domingo, Toussant did not pursue colonial emancipation. He saw the black, free San Domingo as part of the French Republic. After his deportation and death in France, his successor as the main leader of the revolution, Dessalines, pursued and achieved the colonial independence of Haiti in 1804. One of the signal gestures chosen to render this change more significant was the abolishment of the 'colonial name', San Domingo, and the reinstatement of the aboriginal one, Haiti (Wesley, 1917; James, 1980).
 21. The first Haitian Constitution to proclaim independence from France is dated 1804. In this document, the abolition of slavery and the principle of equality for all people, irrespective of racial origin, goes hand in hand with the end of the colonial association with France.
 22. The historical and comparative perspective is part of Lipset's argument. Probably more important than that, however, is his personal view on the fact he is trying to explain. In relation to the debates around 'American exceptionalism', he says that: '... however one comes to this debate, there can be little question that the hand of providence has been on a nation which finds a Washington, a Lincoln, or a Roosevelt when it needs him. When I write the above sentence, I believe that I draw scholarly conclusions, although I will confess that I write also as a proud American.' (Lipset, 1996: 14).
 23. Indeed, Alexis de Tocqueville, who for Lipset is the first foreigner to highlight this qualitative distinctiveness of 'America', foresaw a possibility for the emergence of a 'bipolar world,' with US/America and Russia on either pole. For Tocqueville

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(1948: 434), however, the basis for this bipolarity would not be the emergence of individualist or collectivist forms of economic production and societal organization; rather, it would come about because both countries were claiming a continent-wide territory and developing a strong industrial capacity.

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