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Laura Lomas. *Translating Empire: José Martí, Migrant Latino Subjects, and American Modernities.* New Americanists Series. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008. xvii + 379 pp. $89.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8223-4342-4; $24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8223-4325-7.

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Martí and the Empire That Parades Behind a Mask of Democracy

Michel Foucault pointed to the power of discourse to manufacture realities according to the desires of power. More concretely, in *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said described how Western civilization fabricates a discourse we know as "the Orient" while at the same time rending invisible the real, flesh and bone people, their thoughts, and ideas. From here, there is a very short distance to conceptualize a Chicanology that has the same function with respect to Latino/as. It is grounded on the Black Legend–a sixteenth-century discourse of anti-Spanish, anti-Catholic statements; later injected with scientific techniques and imperial ideologies,; and eventually, becoming an anti-Mexican and anti-Latino/a discourse that is evident today.[1]

In *Translating Empire*, Laura Lomas confirms that this practice is alive and well one hundred years after José Martí witnessed and critiqued this monstrous "imperial modernity" in the late nineteenth century. Lomas makes two principal claims in her book. One is that based on his experience in New York in the 1880s and 1890s (as a witness to an empire that after taking half of Mexico was about to break loose throughout Latin America and the world), Martí developed a modernist style that translated these events to Spanish-language readers. Lomas clearly defines this personage: "Martí as the prisoner, the deportee, and the migrant is the subject of my study, rather than the exile who loved Lincoln, the apostolic father of the Cuban nation, or the poet-politician who forged Latin American forms and identity" (p. 38). The second claim is that Martí's writings were extraordinarily prescient of contemporary theorizing of American studies, of modernism in the Americas, and of the genealogy of alternative American modalities.

For scholars who have been trying to define the precise workings of this subtle but effective hegemonic force that colonizes Latino/as, *Translating Empire* is truly a magnificent contribution to scholarship at many levels. Historically, it helps readers to understand, from a Latino/a perspective, the events that took place at the time that the United States was transforming from a democracy to an empire and the real cost in terms of human suffering to workers of Native, African, and Latino descent. In terms of literature, it provides a detailed comparative analysis of the writings of Martí, noting the nuances that have escaped many other readers and scholars. For example, Lomas discusses the amazing story of how he turned *America: A Review of Agriculture, Industry and Business* from a publication serving U.S. interests into one that served "the needs and interests of a Hispanophone-transamerican print community" (p. 86). These literary nuances have serious political repercussions in the United States as well as in Latin America. It is indeed shocking to see not only how prescient Martí is but also how little has changed in terms of these relations.

But most important, Lomas provides greater depth of understanding of how this hegemonic discourse works at its must subtle level. She, for example, examines the interplay between the visible and the invisible. Lomas notes that Spanish language critique of Latino stereotypes "has remained so marginal as to be practically invisible in U.S. American studies until recently." And she proposes a solution: "By provincializing the United States as a subculture within the Americas, the transla-

tions that are this book's subject stake a claim to define another American modernity beside that of the United States" (p. 2). Lomas expands this play between the visible and the invisible in chapter 2, "Latin American Postcolonial Theory," using such terms such "lucrative and impoverished invisibility" and relating them to Silviano Santiago's notion of "space-in-between," meaning the space occupied by Latino immigrants: neither-here-nor-there, or *nepantla* as the indigenous people called it. Lomas uses these conceptual tools to refute the claim that Martí overidentified with Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, and Helen Hunt Jackson. Lomas methodically and almost surgically deconstructs these claims by pointing out that Martí ultimately disagreed with them when he detected the complicity of these three U.S. American authors with the imperial project and with racism.

Prompted by a personal experience with the indirect exercise of U.S. military power, Lomas wrote this book with much love and scholarly care. This is evident in her careful annotation and nuances that painstakingly clarify exactly what she means, ensuring that the meaning is not misunderstood. It is also evident by the fact that almost one-fifth of the text is made up of endnotes that provide additional explanation or that lead to additional resources for further research. Lomas is commendably vigilant to acknowledge the people and events that have shaped her own interest on Martí's role in translating the U.S. empire for both a Latino and a U.S. American readership. For readers who are interested in this subject, it is easy to fall in love with this book, its intention, its clarity, and its exemplary scholarship.

This book is an example of resistance within the cracks, the interstices of power. On the one hand, it illustrates, at the capillary level, how an anti-hegemonic discourse was articulated from within the entrails of the monster. On the other hand, Lomas also shows the power of discourse to attempt to erase Martí's real intention, which was to critique the *prepotencia*, the abuse of U.S. governmental power to deny freedom to Cuba and to exercise hegemonic control over the rest of Latin America and the world. This erasure is done by portraying Martí as a sympathizer of the United States' efforts to form a Pan-American Union (with the United States as its head) and to annex Cuba and Puerto Rico. By translating Martí from Spanish back to English (what is known as *untranslation*), Lomas brings his words up front and center for us to recognize and appreciate them within a contemporary context of postcolonial struggles. Lomas's *untranslation* shares a similarity to Marti's "infiltrative translation" that "unmasks the imperial ambitions that the rhetoric of democracy and equality sometimes obscures from view" (p. 236). Thus, a translation is not just a translation but also a weapon to defend the rights of the oppressed; and this is also a theme that permeates the entire book.

From a critical perspective, while Lomas delves into questions of Martí's complex gender attitudes, she does not address the question of whether he was a cultural essentialist. She refers to a "revolutionary American tradition" that the United States would betray if they sided with the Cuban oligarchy; and also states that "Martí subtly criticizes the United States' turn away from its founding principles" (pp. 55, 214). These statements imply that there is a common set of principles for both Latin America and the United States. But the contrary also seems to be the case since there are "unbreachable cultural differences" between Cuba and the United States (p. 135).

Finally, while the postcolonial specialized language is a tool of our trade, it may be challenging to undergraduate students and laypeople. It is ironic that while Martí is the model for those who struggle for human dignity, our postcolonial academic discourse does not allow for our writing to be as accessible as his is.

Note

[1]. Francisco H. Vázquez, "Chicanology II: Law, Class Struggle, Power/Knowledge," in *Latino/a Thought: Culture, Politics, and Society*,2nd. ed. (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008), 83-112.

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