

(Post-) Colonial Archipelagos. Comparing the Legacies of Spanish Colonialism in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines, Burchardt, Hans-Jürgen and Johana Leinius, editors. University of Michigan Press, 2022, 366 pp. (Book Review)

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(Post-) Colonial Archipelagos. Comparing the Legacies of Spanish Colonialism in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines is an important contribution to postcolonial studies in general and to the colonial legacies of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines in particular. Edited by Jürgen Burchardt and Johana Leinius, this book is the outcome of the conference *Historical Legacies in Comparison: Cuba-Puerto Rico-Philippines. How Much History Can Post-Colonialism Endure?*, organized by Burchardt in March 2017 in Havana, Cuba. The collective spirit of the event, resulting from an intense dialogue between scholars from the Global South and the Global North, is translated into this book. It accounts for the deep interconnections and divergences in the trajectories of colonial legacies in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines.

The first part of the book, entitled “An Archipelagic View on (Post-) Colonial Legacies,” presents the theoretical-methodological proposal that articulates and brings together the subsequent contributions. In chapter 1, Johanna Leinius and Hans-Jürgen Burchardt describe the intrinsic link between these three countries, which were spaces for the application of Spanish and US colonial power. In this sense, they point to the absence of post-colonial studies that draw a historical comparison of the material, political, social, cultural, epistemic, and psychological continuities of colonialism in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines (5). As Leinius and Burchardt correctly observe, transregional comparisons have focused almost exclusively on Central and Latin America, with the main point of reference being the theoretical productions developed in Europe or the United States. This epistemological dependence is detrimental to an integral reading of a multidimensional and transregional phenomenon such as coloniality.

Both epistemological and methodological overcoming, the authors suggest, is possible based on an interdisciplinary framework containing both a synchronic and a diachronic perspective, which allows for the empirical analysis and systematic comparison of colonial legacies. In chapter 2, Johanna Leinius calls this analytical framework the “archipelagic perspective” (29). She looks for the points of connection between the cases analyzed, while at the same time exploring the tension between their differences and similarities. It is by comparing the diverse historical trajectories of the three countries that Leinius proposes to broaden

the postcolonial debate, by focusing on the plurality of voices and the “transformative connections between places and people” (30). Inspired by subaltern studies and the work of the modernity/coloniality group, the archipelagic perspective seeks to deconstruct Western-centric epistemological principles that do not allow for the questioning of Western historical grand narratives, which often deny the continuity of coloniality today.

The first part closes with the chapter by Josep M. Fradera, who exposes the local diversity in which the global dynamics of coloniality are manifested in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines. In doing so, he analyses one of the constituent phenomena in the emergence of the modern world-system: capitalism as an economic system. As Fradera points out, the agricultural production systems imposed by the Spanish empire in these three peripheral countries not only transformed them into dynamic and essential enclaves of agrarian capitalism (57), but also ensured colonial continuity even after the disintegration of the Spanish empire at the end of the 18th century. In this way, Fradera rescues one of the main contributions of the modernity/coloniality group: the analysis of the global pattern of colonial power cannot be made without considering one of its main pillars: the global economy that emerged because of the “discovery” of Abya Yala.

The second part of the book, “The Past and Present of the Political Economy and Authority in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines,” deepens the analytical dimension initiated by Fradera from a *longue durée* perspective. Thus, in chapter four, Antonio Santamaría García examines the three pillars that structure the relations of the Cuban colonial regime from the 18th century onwards: free trade, the maintenance of the slave trade, and the commerce shared between the island elite and the metropolitan elite (67). This last point made by Santamaría García is very interesting, as it demonstrates that the implementation and continuity of the colonial power structure involved an interweaving in which local elites played a fundamental role. This is continued in chapter five, where Jacqueline Laguardia Martínez gives an account of the ruptures and continuities of socio-economic structures in Cuba from the colonial period to the present day. As Anibal Quijano reminds us, coloniality entails a structural dependency where specific spaces and individuals are oppressed. Thus, Laguardia Martínez shows that, despite profound

changes in political, economic, and social dynamics, the revolutionary government, installed in 1959, was unable to break its economic dependence (especially with the USSR) and its role as an exporter of limited products.

Laguardia Martínez moves on to other turning points in Cuban political history: the 1980s with the disruption of socio-economic organization and migration, the tourism boom of the early 1990s, the economic and political reforms introduced by Raúl Castro in 2006, and the impact of the pandemic and the tightening of restrictions imposed by the Donald Trump administration. These moments in Cuban history exhibit the traces of Cuba's colonial legacy, a legacy that accounts for "the vicious circle that entraps the Cuban economy" (87). After this extensive review, Laguardia Martínez concludes that the challenge lies not only in overcoming this colonial legacy, but in achieving the economic well-being of the population in a context of social justice and equity.

An analogous situation for Puerto Rico is described by Emilio Pantojas-García in chapter six, where he begins by characterizing the country as "a Latin American nation inhabiting a postcolonial colony 'enjoying' the 'advantages' of post-World War II colonialism" (96). The colonial socio-economic configuration, Pantojas-García notes, manifests itself in an absent ruling class, a weak local business elite and a political class dependent on economic subsidies. Like the Cuban case, Puerto Rico's integration into the global economy was based on the monoculture agricultural export model and slavery. In chapter seven, Argeo Quiñones and Ian Sedarizary continue and deepen this analysis, focusing on the institutional structure on which Puerto Rico's development model is based. A very significant point highlighted by the authors is the role of the local ruling classes in the continuity and reproduction of colonial structures of inequality, a situation that can be observed with great clarity in the subsequent annexation of Puerto Rico by the United States. Thus, the country's current socio-economic crisis is accurately identified as the result of a model in which "gains are privatized and costs are socialized for the benefit of local and foreign extractive elites" (123). Finally, Pantojas-García calls for overcoming class analyses based exclusively on Puerto Rico's colonial status, which overshadows the decisive role of local governments, the "parasitic" local private sector (122), local economic elites and intermediaries in the continuity of colonial power relations.

In chapter 8, Alvin A. Camba and Maria Isabel B. Aguilar turn to the Philippines, analyzing its precolonial social structures. These are described as a flexible and egalitarian communal pyramid, where social hierarchies were systematized and standardized by Spanish colonialism. As in the previous chapters, the authors draw attention to the functionality of local actors positioned at the top of the preexisting hierarchies in the establishment, consolidation, and reproduction of colonial social relations. The Philippine case,

correctly pointed out by the authors, exhibits one of the primary attributes of coloniality: its functioning through a multiplicity of interconnected networks. The geographical particularities of the islands, which configured decentralized political entities, demanded a non-centralized government that controlled the various autonomous entities that made up the country. Throughout the chapter, the authors analyze the changes in inter-population dynamics between the 16th and 19th centuries, with events such as the impact of Chinese migration and the integration of the Philippines into the British economy in the 19th century. Finally, they conclude that, although the Philippine case was unique among Spanish colonies, today it still suffers the consequences of the colonial legacy: a stratified and unequal society where the only beneficiaries of the servile model of commodity exports are the local elite.

This part ends with chapter 9, where Teresa Melgar analyses the continuities and changes in contemporary Philippine economic policy based on a key question: "Who has access to the state, and under what conditions are they able to wield institutional power?" (142) To answer this question, Melgar provides an overview of the changing Philippine economy, which has experienced stability in the industrial sector since the 1970s, growth in the service sector since the 1990s, and a steady decline in agriculture's contribution to gross domestic product since 2019. Despite typical fluctuations, the Philippine economy maintains a stable constant: a small local elite that controls productive agricultural land, mineral resources, and real estate. Melgar points out that based on this control, they established a management of political clientelism that historically guaranteed them access to key positions of political and economic power. This intertwining of political and economic power, instituted by Spanish colonial rule and later continued by US colonial rule, gave rise to a hereditary political lineage that enquired a select group of individuals into power. However, this elite must contend with a highly politicized civil society, which presents itself as the engine of change in a profoundly unequal and inequitable society.

Javiher Gutiérrez Forte and Janet Iglesias Cruz begin our transition to Cuba in chapter 10, analyzing how many of the characteristics of formal colonialism, such as segregation, racism, sexism, poverty, and despotism, still operate today. By accounting for the geopolitical importance of Cuba in the Spanish colonial framework, the authors show the correlation between the savage exploitation of the island's resources and the increase in the slave population. This shows the need to investigate the historical conjunctures of a given place beyond local factors, analyzing them in terms of their positioning in the modern colonial world-system. Thus, the control of the Atlantic trading system and the need for its excessive exploitation by the Spanish empire had as a corollary the exponential increase in

slavery. Next, Gutiérrez Forte and Iglesias Cruz give an account of the rise of the Creole elite around the 16th century and the formation of the first large landholdings based on livestock exploitation. Showing the fruitfulness of the comparative approach of the archipelagic perspective, these authors underline the central role of the first latifundia families, the clerical elite, the colonial bureaucracy and, especially, the endogamic dynamics between these actors, in the establishment of the hierarchies of difference inherent to coloniality. As the authors point out at the end of the chapter, the colonial legacy fostered the development of a colonial ideology that persists in Cuban society.

This last point is taken up in chapter 11 by Jenny Morín Nenoff, who examines in depth the relationship between racial and social inequality. As one of the main taxonomic devices of social hierarchization, the concept of “race” forms a crucial part of the morbid cultural legacy of colonialism in Cuba. As Nenoff points out, racist culture and racial stereotypes are so deeply rooted in the collective imagination of the Cuban population (185) that not even the revolutionary government, which legally prohibited discrimination based on skin color or race in its 1976 Constitution, was able to promote a profound cultural discussion on these racial imaginaries of coloniality. Introducing ethno-historical and socio-economic factors, the author points out that the changes introduced throughout the 20th century in favor of equal opportunities did not translate into “racial equity” (189) because they did not consider that the problems of racial difference and territorial inequality should have a particular focus. This became visible in the policies introduced to deal with the economic collapse of the early 1990s and which involved the liberalization of the economy. Following pre-existing territorial, ethnic and gender differences, this resulted in social re-stratification and new differences based on the international mobility of individuals, with black and mestizo populations at an extreme disadvantage. As Nenoff points out towards the end, this makes visible the profound problems caused by structural racism in Cuban society and the need to address them.

In chapter 12, Milagros Denis-Rosario discusses the continuities of colonial legacy and hierarchization in Puerto Rico. For this, the author analyses the painting *Plaza del Quinto Centenario* by the Afro-Puerto Rican artist Ramón Bulerín, as he offers “means for examining the discourse of Hispanic nationality elites constructed as a mechanism to impose and perpetuate their ethnic and racial hegemony while excluding African elements” (202). Reviewing 19th-century colonial dynamics and Creole class participation, Denis-Rosario traces the emergence of local political parties that either supported or opposed the new colonial regime imposed by the United States, which exacerbated pre-existing colonial structures. These structures materialized in the urban spaces portrayed in Bulerín’s painting, which are

transformed into permanent reminders of hierarchies based on class, gender, or race. It is during this period, the author points out, that the definition of national identity became a divisive issue. Faced with the loss of their former privileges, the landowning elite sought to reassert their Spanish heritage. In contrast, intellectuals sought to romanticize the Taino people and folklorize Africans. In this debate, the government, like other Latin American countries in the early 20th century, imposed a patriotic discourse that institutionalized the relationship between Spain and Puerto Rico. This “national identity race” (219) helps us to think about one of the dimensions of the colonial legacy: the perpetuation of socio-economic inequality.

The management of this inequality in the reproduction of the colonial regime in Puerto Rico is explored by Miguel Rivera-Quiñones in chapter 13. He argues that one of the particularities of the US colonial regime was the incorporation of local sectors to guarantee its political dominance. He suggests, in turn, that the local popular support received was a result of the conditions offered by the Spanish colonial legacy. The working class and the large, poverty-stricken population were incorporated into the US colonial project through political patronage and economic transfers. These, along with a focus on maximizing profits for transnational corporations, ensured US imperial authority. This perpetuated social asymmetries and economic inequality, which Rivera-Quiñones suggests were normalized through migration and consumerism.

In chapter 14, María Dolores Elizalde analyses the different political and economic regimes imposed on the Philippines by the Spanish Empire. Throughout her contribution, the author unpacks the complex dynamics of social relations imposed by colonization, where it is necessary to consider processes of collaboration and conflict with the local population and the impact of external influences resulting from the geopolitical positioning of the Philippines within the colonial world-modern system. After more than three centuries of Spanish rule, the heavy colonial legacy translates into the persistence of dynastic and hereditary local political-economic elites that oppress the rest of the population. At the same time, there is a wide inequality in the quality of life of urban and rural populations. These diasporas, the author continues, are also observable in the consolidation of a mixed-race society, the growing influence of the Chinese population and the persistence of the conception of Muslims as a differential population sector. The confluence and articulation of these elements gave rise to a “country with an Asian makeup, but in which influences from Europe and the Americas” (254). Thus, Elizalde concludes, a Filipino society has taken shape that struggles against the colonial legacies of successive colonial administrations in defense of its own identity.

The third part concludes with Cristina Cielo’s chapter

in which she examines the influence of colonial legacies in shaping the political and economic power that underpins social inequities in the Philippines. Inscribed “into the nation’s landscapes and into its peoples’ subjectivities” (259), these inequities, Cielo argues, are defined, and legitimized by a cultural politics deeply rooted in an economic system historically dependent on successive colonial regimes. According to the author, the persistence of these inequities results from the articulation of three elements: the global positioning of Filipino labor, the privatization of basic services, and the weakening of subaltern political cultures. Through a detailed analysis of contemporary political history, Cielo demonstrates how economic configurations of power and control are rooted in Spanish colonial rule. The latter’s dominance over land gave rise to agrarian elite structures that led to the establishment of inequalities among the rural population and subsequently to movements of migration to urban spaces and the consequent differential and unplanned development of these spaces. Moving on to Philippine history, the author also considers the role played by other economically dominant groups, such as Chinese businessmen, in the liberalization of the post-colonial political economy. The return of democracy after the kleptocratic dictatorship of Ferdinand Emmanuel Marcos promised an exponential increase in employment opportunities, equitable distribution of power, and investment in health, education, and social mobility. However, as Cielo demonstrates, the Philippines still has the highest rates of inequality in Southeast Asia. Despite this, the author closes her contribution with the hope that this kind of collective and transnational comparative analysis will allow us to locate “the contingencies of historically reinforced structures of power and open possibilities for widening their rifts” (274).

The fourth and final part, entitled “The (Post-) Colonial Legacies of Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Philippines: A Comparative View,” offers a comprehensive comparative synthesis. In chapter 16, Michael Zeuske analyses the trajectories of one of the structural pillars on which Spanish colonialism was based: “the legacies of slavery” (285). Focusing on the historical debates that took place after the abolition of slavery, Zeuske takes up the work of historian Alejandro de la Fuente and characterizes the period between 1902 and 1920 as a “racial democracy” (296) in which, despite the theoretical equality established among the population, systematic racism against black populations continued. Thus, even though, in institutional spheres, in official public culture and in the bureaucracy of everyday life, a “transracial patriotism” (296) was promoted, in concrete reality, according to the author, a second-class citizenship was constituted, functional to the silencing of colonial history and slavery.

In chapter 17, Jochen Kemner analyses the correlation between certain forms of employment and

ethno-racial status. Continuing the arguments of the previous chapter, Kemner determines precisely how colonialism imposed a hierarchization of labor in which the European elite and their descendants monopolized the apex of the colonial pyramid through the possession and control of land and slave or low-paid labor power. This veritable caste system was underpinned by two of the main taxonomic devices of coloniality: gender and race. Over time, this system configured a series of social inclusions and exclusions that implied the possession of a certain social status. After a thorough historical analysis, Zeuske argues that the hierarchical regime and social privileges imposed during Spanish colonialism were transferred, and thus explain today’s high levels of economic inequality. Moreover, the availability and control of material, financial and human resources remain distinctive and exclusive to a certain sector of the population, while the most precarious jobs are performed by mostly non-white individuals. In the end, Kemner concludes, this shows that the means used to guarantee social exclusivity during colonial rule are still functional today.

In the last chapter, Hans-Jürgen Burchardt offers a synthesis of the preceding chapters and elaborates a series of theoretical and methodological suggestions for future research. He correctly explains how the interdisciplinary and transregional perspective made it possible to analyze the trajectories of colonial legacies in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines, identifying patterns of similarities and divergences between them. A substantial part of the chapter is devoted to outlining two dimensions of colonial legacies: economic policy and the hierarchization of difference. In all three cases, Burchardt identifies similarities resulting from the colonial matrix of power. In terms of economic policy, the Spanish regime imposed a monocultural agricultural production and primary resource export model on the three countries, which, after the change to US rule, was largely reinforced. Regarding the hierarchization of difference, Burchardt points out that, despite the processes of transculturation and the policies of racial equality promoted by the different governments, there was never a major change in the racist social structure. In this way, the extractivist economic systems, monocultural agriculture and slave regimes imposed at the beginning of the Spanish colonial regime are translated today into countries shaped by selective racism, widespread social inequality, corruption, nepotism, caudillismo, authoritarianism, repression, limited or non-existent upward social mobility and a homogenous elite made up of dynastic families. These results, Burchardt emphasizes, show the importance of family conditions for the development of post-colonial societies. In this sense, he proposes a materialist turn in postcolonial studies that allows for a break with “the monoculture of modern science” (349).

This book demonstrated how, regardless of location,

coloniality established a global matrix of control through a series of material and discursive devices. Thus, in these three insular spaces, the intertwining of economic policy and the hierarchization of difference established a pyramidal structure of power in which a particular elite was perpetuated at the apex. Far from establishing a discouraging panorama, the pluriversity of voices contained in this collective volume make it clear that the reversal of these perennial injustices and the establishment of a world that contains a heterogeneity of worlds is only possible through a collective, solidarity-based, transatlantic, and intersectional project.

Author's Biography

Diego Ballesterio holds a PhD in Anthropologist from the National University of La Plata (Argentina). He has been a fellow in Argentina and Germany where he has conducted scientific research in collections and archives of various museums and institutions. Since 2017, Dr. Ballesterio has been a guest lecturer at the Department of Anthropology of the Americas (University of Bonn) and a member of the interdisciplinary research group AmazonAndes. He is currently researching the decolonial history of anthropological knowledge in South America, provenance research and the development of a counter/anticolonial perspective on anthropological practices.