

Alfredo Bosi (trans. Robert P. Newcomb) (2015) *Brazil and the Dialectic of Colonization*. University of Illinois Press: Urbana-Champaign, 392 pp. (ISBN 978-0-252-03930-0).

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In 2015, University of Illinois Press published *Brazil and the Dialectic of Colonization*, by Alfredo Bosi. The author is a professor at Universidade de São Paulo (USP), in Brazil. During his career he has published many books we consider major contributions to Literary Studies and Humanities. Among them are three reflections on Machado de Assis (*Machado de Assis: O enigma do olhar*, 1999; *Machado de Assis*, 2002; *Brás Cubas em três versões*, 2006). We might also mention some of the most important of Alfredo Bosi's works: *História concisa da literatura brasileira* (1970) is one of the most respected volumes on Brazilian literary historiography; *O ser e o tempo da poesia* (1977) discusses poetry and philosophy; *Reflexões sobre a arte* (1985) is an essay on aesthetics. Recent books, such as *Literatura e resistência* (2002) and *Ideologia e contraideologia* (2010), are characterized by a political view against authoritarianism and repression. *Dialética da colonização* (1992), in many ways, can be considered a synthesis of these lines of thought developed by the author across several decades.

Brazilian colonial history is a challenging academic field. Portuguese colonization was predatory, violent and damaging. Since the 1930s, intellectuals developed reflections on colonization and its legacy drawing on critical perspectives. Those reflections contributed to understandings of historical problems, such as slavery in the nineteenth century and conservative modernization in the twentieth century. In *Raízes do Brasil*, by Sérgio Buarque de Hollanda (1936), and *Mudanças sociais no Brasil*, by

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Florestan Fernandes (1975), among other books, we find critical interpretations of the colonial process.

Alfredo Bosi turns “dialectic of colonization” into an object of interdisciplinary study. Natives were attacked, controlled and destroyed during colonization. European religious and political values, and economic interests, constituted guiding references to Portuguese decisions and actions. Across three centuries, colonization imposed those values and interests. What happens when natives are exposed to those values? Over time, children were born inside the complexity of the colonial system. Which social and cultural references defined the lives of these generations? How can a cultural life come from continuous antagonism? A “dialectic of colonization” would be a historical process in which social conflicts attribute form and meaning to specific cultural experiences. Can something come from this damaging process? What kind of synthesis can those conflicts generate?

Translated also into Spanish by Ediciones Salamanca in 2005, *Brazil and the Dialectic of Colonization* develops an interpretation of colonization and its legacy. Among its ten chapters, six are focused on literary studies. In chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5, Bosi analyzes texts from the colonial period. José de Alencar is studied in chapter 6; Castro Alves and Lima Barreto are discussed in chapter 8. In all of these chapters, Bosi refers to historical and social topics. His methodological approach includes giving visibility to collective conflicts, and demonstrating how formal and thematic elements are related to those conflicts. Indians and slaves are described as groups targeted by violence, dehumanization and exclusion.

The work is excellently translated into English by Robert Patrick Newcomb, Associate Professor of Luso-Brazilian Studies at the University of California. If we compare the original to the translation, we find how Newcomb managed to respect

Alfredo Bosi's style. The English version is very clear and fluent; it was carefully constructed in every detail.

Contemporary readers might be particularly interested in the chapters on history and politics, chapters 7 and 9, respectively. Bosi discusses the concept of *liberalism* in chapter 7, confronting how liberalism can exist in a context of slavery. The author talks about *two liberalisms*, showing a split inside the concrete manifestations of the concept itself. A conceptual discussion turns to a critical interpretation of Brazilian history. This is a part of the book where the *dialectic* of colonization is clearly articulated to a social antagonism: this dialectic does not generate any balanced synthesis.

Because of its conceptual accuracy, which is rigorously expressed by Newcomb's translation, chapter 7 is relevant to current discussions on Brazilian economic and political crisis. Recent transformations in the country are related to different uses of public space – and also of the word “liberal” – by politicians, intellectuals and journalists. The controversies and confusion around these ideas are directly connected to the impact of political problems expressed by social movements and recent political manifestations in the streets. What kind of liberalism can be defended in a context of violence, inequality and social exclusion, in which ideas like “Escola sem partido” are proposed by members of government, and many social rights are being destroyed? In this English translation of the book, pages 182-187 are highly recommended as a reference to compare the past to the present on these matters.

For those who study Brazilian culture, chapter 10, Brazilian Culture and Brazilian Cultures, can be very useful. This chapter was originally written between 1979-1980, and was first published in 1981. There have been many changes in cultural production from 1981-2016, and considering this gap is important. The chapter is constructed as a pedagogical and systematic resource: it presents erudite culture, popular culture and mass culture, and, after that, it examines cultural production resulting from crossing

these categories. Bosi had, when he wrote this chapter, a firm system of criteria to define cultural value. In the present, however, it would be difficult to provide a systematic perspective as such. Popular culture, as described by Bosi, was attacked by mass media at the time he wrote the essay. This attack extended across the years, through capitalist exploitation and the dissemination of electronic communication. Reading again this chapter today, comparing the past to the present, we come to reflect on a restless cultural environment we must today evaluate. It is very clear how important it is to discuss the challenges academic researchers are facing today, when they need, in open debate and in public space, to define criteria to attribute cultural value to a song, a book or a film.

Brazil and the Dialectic of Colonization is a very important book, written by one of the most respected intellectuals in Brazil. This translation comes at a good time, when critical thinking is an academic priority.