

# Origins of radical thought in Latin America: a comparative study of José Martí, Juan B. Justo, and Ricardo Flores Magón

*Origens do pensamento radical na América Latina: um estudo comparativo entre José Martí, Juan B. Justo e Ricardo Flores Magón*

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## RESUMO

Este artigo condensa os resultados, no plano ideológico, de uma pesquisa que analisa, em uma perspectiva comparada, como nascem, evoluem e são frustrados três projetos de democratização radical na América Latina nos primórdios do Imperialismo. José Martí (1853-1895) em Cuba, Juan B. Justo (1865-1928) na Argentina e Ricardo Flores Magón (1874-1922) no México lideraram esforços intelectuais e políticos visando superar os constrangimentos à integração nacional legados pela origem colonial, expressando-se em um pensamento que fundamentou a atuação dos partidos por eles dirigidos. Nossa hipótese é que esses autores, partindo de premissas ideológicas e políticas distintas mas orientados por um desígnio democrático comum, sugeriram balizas que referenciavam a máxima consciência possível da militância radical no continente, naquele contexto.

Palavras-chave: América Latina; pensamento latino-americano; militância radical.

## ABSTRACT

This article summarizes the results, in the ideological sphere, of comparative research which analyzes the growth, evolution, and defeat of three projects of radical democratization in Latin America at the beginnings of Imperialism. José Martí (1853-1895) in Cuba, Juan B. Justo (1865-1928) in Argentina, and Ricardo Flores Magón (1874-1922) in Mexico led intellectual and political efforts aimed at overcoming the constraints inherited from colonial past that hindered national integration. This effort found expression in ideas on which the political parties they headed were built. Coming from different ideological and political premises, but referring to a common democratic purpose, our hypothesis is that these authors established a frame of reference for the maximum possible consciousness of radical activism in the continent during that period.

Keywords: Latin America; Latin American thought; radical militancy.

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This article condenses the results, in the ideological sphere, of research which analyzes, from a comparative perspective, how three projects of radical democratization in Latin America were conceived, evolved, and frustrated at the beginnings of imperialism.<sup>2</sup> José Martí (1853-1895) in Cuba, Juan B. Justo (1865-1928) in Argentina, and Ricardo Flores Magón (1874-1922) in México led intellectual and political efforts aimed at overcoming the constraints on national integration inherited from the colonial origin, a process which expressed thought on which the actions of the parties they led were based.

José Martí was the founder and leader of the Cuban Revolutionary Party, the organization responsible for renewing the Cuban war of independence in 1895, when the island was under Spanish rule. Imprisoned for the first time at the age of 16 accused of disloyalty, Martí had his penalty commuted to exile thanks to the efforts of his father, a Spanish soldier serving in Cuba. He lived in Spain, Mexico, Guatemala, and in Venezuela before establishing himself in New York in 1881, from where he wrote for various newspapers on the continent, in which he exercised diplomatic attributions for countries other than his own and conspired unceasingly until the launch of the revolutionary expedition in 1895, in which he lost his life. Living in the United States, Martí acquired a perception of the expansionism which presided the politics of his country, at the same time that he developed a cultural rejection of capitalism, polishing in a definitive form the idea which guided his militancy, consigned in a legacy of reputed literary value, covering poems, plays, letters, and a novel (Retamar, 2006).

The principal political and ideological leader of the Socialist Party in Argentina since its foundation until his death (1928), Juan B. Justo imprinted in an intransigent trajectory based on his principles the founding marks of socialism in this country. As a public figure he directed the organization which elected the first deputy and the first socialist senator in the Americas,<sup>3</sup> also personally holding various parliamentary posts. In addition to these actions in national politics, Justo was actively connected to the II Socialist International, participating as a delegate in the congresses in Copenhagen in 1910 and Berne and Amsterdam in 1919. In the intellectual sphere, the Argentine socialist was the author of the first translation of Karl Marx's *O Capital* into Castilian, published in 1898. In addition to various pamphlets he wrote, in the book *Teoría y Práctica de la Historia* (1909) he made a pioneering effort at the systematic analysis of the historic problems from a democratic perspective in Latin America (Cúneo, 1956).

Ricardo Flores Magón led the progressive radicalization of the Mexican Liberal Party after its refoundation in 1901, converting it into the principal

reference of intransigent opposition to the Porfirio Díaz dictatorship in Mexico, in power since 1876. Given the political repression he suffered, Flores Magón and his partisans went into exile in the United States in 1904, from where they indefatigably conspired to start the Mexican Revolution. Two attempts to unleash the armed struggle, in 1906 and 1908, were frustrated due to the intervention of the Mexican political police, who acted in collusion with the US authorities. When the revolution actually exploded in 1910, the *Magonistas* were incapable of leading it, but they enthusiastically encouraged the leading role of the peasants on the pages of *Regeneración*, a periodical which they edited for almost two decades. Persecuted on both sides of the border, Flores Magón died in 1922 in a US prison, probably murdered (Abad de Santillán, 1978).

Our hypothesis is that these authors, starting with distinct ideological premises and policies though guided by a common democratic design, suggested the signposts which referenced the maximum possible conscience of radical militancy on the continent in that context. With the aim of reconstituting the fundamental assumptions which underlie the comparison, and afterwards to present the principal results in the ideological sphere, we have divided the text into two principal sections. In the first part, we examine the scenario in which the action of each militant was part, referring to their political protagonism in relation to the problematic of national formation, at the same time that we explain the bibliographic references which guided the initiated approximation, as well as interpretations about the specific dilemmas which inform this reading. In the second part, we proceed to comparisons of the authors based on distinct and advanced visions about national formation, fundamental ideological references for political actions of political parties which they respectively directed. Initially we will look at the specificity of the thoughts focused on, relating them to the historic formation in which they existed and the civilizing horizon which guided them, afterwards briefly commenting on their legacy. Afterwards, we will focus on the common foundation of the thoughts analyzed, expressed in an ideological non-differentiation observed in the relationship between nature and history, as well as the problematization of history as a totality.

## COMPARATIVE REFERENCES

Existing in the context of the diffusion of capitalist relations of production on the continent, José Martí in Cuba, Juan B. Justo in Argentina, and Ricardo Flores Magón in Mexico led pioneering political projects aimed at

subordinating capitalist development to the designs of national society. The influence which they on the commencement of the processes they wanted – the war of independence in Cuba, political reform in Argentina, and the Mexican Revolution – shows that their proposals were in tune with the contextual dilemmas. The defeat of the democratic ideal which they represented indicates the prevalence of structural constraints which hindered the consummation of the nation in Latin America in this historic context.

The relatively simultaneously flowering of these projects may have arisen from the economic and social transformation caused by the dynamization of the primary export sector in the context of the affirmation of monopolistic capital during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, which gave rise to the progressive establishment of the requirements for capitalist reproduction on the continent. From the social point of view, the spread of the mercantile model corresponded to an embryonic development of the sectors identified with the new order. Partially there was an incipient emergence of bourgeoisie likely to modify the relations of power and of the state, with the purpose of adapting them to the ongoing economic and social transformations. For these sectors, it thus became an opportunity to link capitalist modernization to a process of affirming bourgeois power. In other words, there emerged the historic possibility of a bourgeoisie revolution in Latin America (Fernandes, 1975a).

In opposition to the emergence of the bourgeoisie, changes in labor relations pointed to a new level of organization and popular demands, marked by the formation of parties generally in the principal urban concentrations, but capable of influencing national political events. Combining in different shades class based and nationalist demands, these organizations possessed, notwithstanding the particularities of each case, a common orientation: the democratization of the societies of which they were part. By projecting the social question in the political scene, these actors sought to give a democratic meaning to the process of social change, seeking in the integration of the population through labor the conditions for overcoming the colonial legacy and the affirmation of the nation. In other words, national formation was the common horizon of the political actions and thought of the three political leaders we studied (Sampaio Jr., 1999).

The problematic of national formation as an axis linking the authors presupposes an interpretation of the general lines of Latin American development which emphasizes the permanence of the colonial legacy. Our reading of the meaning of this historic movement is based on Caio Prado Jr.,<sup>4</sup> while the analysis of the diffusion of the relations of production in the continent is draws on

Florestan Fernandes, according to whom the progressive establishment of the requirements for capitalist reproduction generated contradictory impulses, in which tendencies for making the accumulation of capital more autonomous were restrained by the dual articulation between external dependency and social asymmetry. In the reading of the Brazilian sociologist, this is a process in which exogenous stimuli are connected to still incipient endogenous conditions for the development of the mercantile sphere, in which a context where the establishment of the dynamisms typical of capitalist society emerges as a necessary premise for the renovation of the economic ties of the continent with the center of capitalism. According to this vision, the economic expansion experimented in this scenario consecrated the disassociation between development and national integration, establishing the foundations for the affirmation of dependent capitalism.<sup>5</sup>

Starting from a common historic dilemma, we selected contrasting scenarios in the Latin American panorama, aiming to explore the potential of the comparative method: between a frankly neocolonial destiny (Cuba) and the situation of greater national integration (reformism in Argentina), the first social revolution of the century exploded (in Mexico), marking the extremes which marked out the history of the continent in the century that was opening. Marc Bloch summarized in the following words the comparative historic method:

Before proceeding, in our area what is comparison? Undoubtedly, it is the following: choosing in one or various different social environments, two or various phenomena which appear, at first sight, to present certain analogies between themselves, describing the curves of their evolution, find similarities and differences, and, as far as possible explain one and the other. Therefore, there are two necessary conditions for there to be, historically speaking, a comparison: a certain similarity between the facts observed – which is evident – and a certain dissimilarity between the environments where they occurred. (Bloch, 1998, p. 121)<sup>6</sup>

To establish the comparison, we will analyze exponents of radical thought in each context and their political expression substantiated on the action of the parties which they founded and led. Starting from contrasting theoretical premises and concrete realities, their projects reveal distinct visions of the nation and political strategies, whose similar outcome gives rise to the comparative analysis.

José Martí experienced in Cuba the overlapping of Spanish colonial domination and the economic penetration of US capital in a context in which the development of sugar mills resulted in social and economic contradictions which exploded in the Ten Years War (1869-1878). Ending in a military deadlock, the conflict precipitated the end of slavery (officially abolished in 1886) without resolving the dilemmas which provoked it. In these circumstances, the Cuban Revolutionary Party forged by Martí had as its principal challenge national emancipation, which was associated with a political strategy of Latin American unity as a manner of preventing the intervention of the United States in continental matters, which was announced. The designation of *Nuestra América* was based on a concept of modernity alternative to the Western one, valorizing autochthony as a condition to construct a diverse paradigm of social relations, based on equalitarian premises and of the integrating meaning which refused the class struggle as a constitutive element and which permitted the affirmation of a singular humanist ideal.

Argentina was connected, through agro-export activities, to the most dynamic part of the world economy, experiencing at the end of the nineteenth century an unequal process of growth, propelled by an immigration torrent which accelerated the urbanization of the country and exerting pressure to overcome the prevailing exclusivist patterns of politics. In this context, the Socialist Party, led by Juan B. Justo, focused its actions on the struggle to expand Argentinian democracy, which was translated into the fight against all forms of privilege, from the *latifúndio* to higher education restricted to the dominant strata. Although his interpretation of the historic movement had led to the eclipse of the national question, since he saw in the development of productive forces a path which could lead to the dilution of class antagonisms and between national states, the objective meaning of his actions was always aimed at the integration of the worker as a citizen. An active member of the Second International, Justo accompanied the debates and the current of contemporary European social criticism, his leadership reflected in the ideological plane the connections of the continent with the modernizing center of capitalism.

Mexico simultaneously experienced, under the despotic leadership of Porfirio Díaz, the pressures for national integration, given the permanent expansionist threat of the United States, and the consequences of capitalist development which worsened social tensions, especially in the countryside, where a long tradition of popular uprising subsisted. In this context, the Mexican Liberal Party, led by Ricardo Flores Magón, expressed the

convergence between the political slogans inherited from the Liberal Reform commanded by Benito Juárez in the middle of the nineteenth century, and the rising pressure for social democratization, in a program which advances the bases for a national democratic revolution, integrating in a coherent platform popular demands and nationalist proposals in the framework of capitalism. Notwithstanding the later ideological inflection of the *Magonistas*, it was this idea, fashioned in the 1905 liberal program, which guided the intransigent opposition in the final years of *Porfiriato* (1876-1910), serving as a fundamental reference for the party until the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution (1910).

The contrast between particular analyses which compose the exercise of comparative history demands a reading of the historic process in which each author existed, coherent with the interpretative framework of the proposed problematic. Specifically, the cases looked at in this paper assume a vision about the outcome of Cuban emancipation, the nature of political reform in Argentina, and the meaning of the Mexican revolution.

In the Cuban case, we understand that the frustration of emancipation was the result of a complex conjunction between the hesitations of the *Consejo de Gobierno* in endorsing the popular radicalization of the war, the complicity of the PRC delegate in exile with foreign intervention, and US aggressiveness. Ibrahim Hidalgo Paz's study meticulously reveals this articulation, complementing it with the pioneering work of Ramón de Armas (Paz, 2004; Armas, 2002). In relation to Argentina, we interpret the political reform enacted by the Saenz Peña Law in 1912 as an attempt to counter the growing social subversion, understanding the subsequent electoral triumph of radicalism under the leadership of Yrigoyen as a conservative alternative to the exhaustion of *criolla* politics. This reading is supported by David Rock's book (2001), which emphasizes the original conservative nature of Argentine radicalism. In the Mexican case, in the middle of a vast debate about the nature of the Mexican Revolution, for the effects of this paper it is enough to indicate that we are located in a field which emphasizes the truncated nature of the revolution, considering that the unquestionable changes in the state sphere were insufficient to overcome underdevelopment, indicating a defeat of the popular field in the process.<sup>7</sup> In particular, the confrontation between the *Maderistas* and *Magonistas*, shown in the pages of *Regeneración*, removes us from readings which praise the progressive role of the constitutionalist leader and subsequent governments (Herzog, 1997). Although he did not produce a synthesizing work, the books of Friedrich Katz about the Mexican nineteenth century and

the interpretative work underlying his studies, which deal with the revolutionary period, constitute important references for this.<sup>8</sup>

Supported by the cited works, we understand that the projects focused on in this study expressed different paths to national democratization which shared a frustrated destiny: Cuban independence was blocked by the intervention of the United States, in collusion with members of the PRC itself; the expansion of Argentine democracy was confined to the political dimension, in which the triumph of radicalism after the election of Yrigoyen consecrated itself as a socially conservative alternative; in Mexico, successive governments were overthrown in the middle of almost a decade of civil war, the result of persistent efforts to counter the social range of the revolution that had been unleashed. Taken together, these experiences revealed the defeat of three attempts to reconcile development and national integration within the framework of capitalism on the continent, suggesting structural restraints for the formation of the nation following a bourgeois path in the referred historic contexts.

By looking at the thought and action of the selected militants, our proposal was not to respond to the reasons for this historical outcome, nor to point out errors in the practices or ideas. We began with the premise that the authors analyzed constituted exponents of radical politics and thought in their own contexts, the expression of the critical consciousness possible in the historic totality in which they existed (Lukács, 2003). From this perspective, the limits and contradictions which the analysis shows refer to the general determinations which the comparative exercise itself can help to explain. In consonance with this proposal, the investigation of each case was guided by the following question: what is the vision of the nation underlying the political idea of the author? The comparative exercise, in turn, was guided by the following questions: what are the common ideological constraints from the point of view of national formation? What does the diversity of thought and strategy reveal about the problematic at that time? Finally, we consider the ideological legacy of the authors from the point of view of the future maturation of the problematic in question.

## COMPARISONS: VISIONS OF FORMATION

The contrast between the formations of the different authors reveals projects which share a similar political orientation and ideological substrata, referenced in the Latin American historical movement of which they were part, and whose specificity is related to the national expression of the dilemma they



experienced. Confronting the militants with the impact of Imperialism on realities marked by the colonial legacy, the singular nature of the American formation imposed on them the challenge of discerning between the common aspects and the particularities of national development in relation to the civilizing model of the central countries, in circumstances in which subjective and objective factors hindered this differentiation. Starting from this common ideological level, the specificity of the context, the socioeconomic formation, and the intellectual references shape contrasting approaches of the problem, in which the particular angle adopted by each author had a repercussion on the universality of their thought and the later incidence of their legacy.

#### a) Specificity: origins of radical thought

##### 1. *Morphology of formation*

The political projects focused on here were concerned with national formation in the framework of a class alliance founded on integration of the population as a group through labor. Starting from distinct realities marked by the persistence of the colonial legacy, the singularity of the incorporation of each country in the flows of global market under Imperialism conditioned the political strategy and would mark the angle of reflection of each author. Avid readers who lived abroad, whether voluntarily or not, the three militants started from an endogenous political tradition which conjugated with sources of universal thought to prepare projects of radical democratization referenced in a reading of the meaning of world history.

José Martí merges the Cuban philosophical tradition with a Christian background and the transcendentalist philosophy of Emerson to construct political thought with an ethical expression founded on autochthony, projecting in *Nuestra América* the design of an modernity alternative to the Western one. The awareness of Cuban vulnerability directed Matian reflection towards a greater totality, inserting the Antillean struggle in the dilemma of Latin America in light of Imperialism. The opportunity to base Cuban and continental unity on circumstances of precarious economic and political nexus moved his reflection to the cultural sphere, where the Cuban thinker sought the roots of an identity projected in a humanist utopia with universal content.

Juan B. Justo combines aspects of *Sarmentino* thought with a solid knowledge of European socialism to weave a reading of history with an evolutionary matrix and a scientific pretension, source of a political project which aimed to limber the Argentine wagon to the locomotive of Western history, heading

towards socialist achievement. The illusion of progress in Argentina in which he lived induced him to bet on technological and economic development as a process aimed at diluting class antagonism and promoting the integration of nations under the aegis of free cooperation. In circumstances in which economic growth operated rapid transformations in the country, social democratization appeared as a consequence of a rational process of integration in the global economy and progressive popular political participation.

Ricardo Flores Magón started from the ideological legacy of nineteenth century Mexican liberalism to progressively incorporate the social question in the liberal agenda, producing a political idea oriented towards national integration as a step towards future utopias. In circumstances in which *Porfirista* modernization accentuated social contradictions and political repression blocked contestation within the order, the *Magonistas* widened the content of the notion of liberty to include its economic dimension, reflected in a discourse increasingly informed by the language of class struggle. Repression in exile and contact with the US workers movement expanded *Magonista* class consciousness, giving it an internationalist perspective made explicit during the Mexican Revolution.

Establishing a contrast between the angles from which authors assessed national problems, we can note that the concreteness of the threat to Cuban sovereignty made Martí more sensitive to the cultural dimension of the American dilemma, in a context of precarious economic and political unity; in Argentina the possibilities of integration allowed by economic growth gave rise to a political focus of social democratization based on a faith in the development of Western civilization; in Mexico, the country with the greatest tradition of popular uprisings on the continent, pressure on traditional forms of life and intolerance towards political demands explained the social conditions of the modernization that was underway. In summary, in the ideological sphere national problems were primarily expressed through culture in Martí; politics in Justo; and social contradictions in Magón. Observed together the range of their concerns composes a morphology of cultural, political, and social themes which inform reflection about the dilemmas of the continent, connected in the economic sphere through later efforts referring to the problematic of national formation.

## 2. *Civilizing Horizon*

Produced in the period before the consolidation of the Third International, the ideological sources of the projects analyzed, when contrasted, indicate some

eclecticism, especially in relation to the search for theoretical references, which at times contradiction each other. Martí was inspired by a transcendentalist philosophy and the tradition of national thought with a Christian root, while Justo and Magón, who matured politically some years later, found support in materialistic European current and in the endogenous antic-clerical political legacy. Moreover, while the core of Martian policy was autochthony and the Mexican liberal claimed the communist potential of the native legacy, the Argentine socialist identifies the aborigine with barbarism, preaching unrestricted adherence to the values of Western civilization. Justo's contempt for American civilizing potential contrasts with Magón's defense of Mexico during the revolution and Martí's faith in the humanistic potential of American culture. Justo's posture was based on the lack of a critical perception of Imperialism, a fundamental political concern of the Cuban and Mexican leaders.

The civilizing ideal functioned as an assumption in the reading of the historic moment underlying the projects focused on. While the precipitous reference to autochthony projects its own original civilizing horizon in Martí, faith in the West points to a historic pattern of development to be achieved by Argentine socialism. In the case of Magón, the primacy of politics ceded terrain to theology only when the military defeat of the liberals resulted in a gamble on revolutionary spontaneity. The diverse utopian horizon of the projects expressed their civilizing reference at the same time that it shows evidence of the plurality of the ideological matrices which inspired them: *Nuestra América* as a proposal of an alternative modernity in Martí, free cooperation in socialism in Just, and a federation of free producers in Magón.

From the point of view of ideological temperament, the intellectual effort which underlies Justo's reflection is translated into ideological inflexibility, contrasting with the contextual permeability of Flores Magón, in which thought was visibly subordinated to demands in practice. In Martí, an open spirit joined eclectic influences to produce a dense original reflection, since, once matured, he sustained a political task obstinate about the cause. The relationship which the various thinkers had with historical materialism illuminates, from another angle, its intellectual verve. While Martí rejected socialism as a doctrine referenced in an exogenous reality, Justo fervently defended its validity for Argentine circumstances, but also refused the dialectic method, a posture coherent with the reformist practice he adopted. Magón gave the problem of theoretical adhesion a wide berth, although he demonstrated political sympathy for Marx, like the others.

### 3. *Legacy*

Like they drew on endogenous traditions of thought, the political and ideological legacy of the authors analyzed fertilized future activism in their countries and in some cases it was projected throughout the rest of the continent. Although the vitality of this inheritance was associated with historic developments which escaped the direct influence of the protagonists, it is possible to highlight connections which provide evidence of their precursory role for radical thought and political currents in Latin America, emphasizing the renewable nature of these trajectories, given the native references which inspired them. Addressing specific contexts and submitted to various intellectual influences, the particular angle through which they approach the dilemmas of their time differentiated the later repercussion of their legacy.

By simultaneously confronting Spanish colonialism and US expansionism, Martí projected the Cuban formation within the framework of the Latin American dilemma under Imperialism. The frustration of the emancipation process in that context perpetuated the force of its national ideal, inspiring successive generations of militants on the island. Recognized by Fidel Castro as the intellectual author of the attack on Moncada barracks in 1953, Martí was a fundamental reference for the triumphant Cuban Revolution in 1959, from the constitution of the *Movimiento 26 de Julio* to the present day.

The critical scope of Juan B. Justo's reflection is limited by the strength of the myth of economic growth in contemporary Argentina, which, fed by faith in the development of global productive forces, obscured the nexus between Imperialism and the class struggle model, leading to an eclipse of the nation as a historic problem. The scientific pretension of Argentine socialism blunted his reflection, imposing a certain rigidity on it and thus making it impermeable to the development of the national and international scenario. Nevertheless, the intellectual stature and pioneering political role of Justo established the foundational mark of one of the strongest socialist traditions on the continent.

In turn, the permeability of the influxes of the social struggle marked the evolution of Ricardo Flores Magón's ideas, showing at the same time its strength and weaknesses: the Mexican leader was capable of a penetrating reading of the context which had radicalized, but the political responses he drafted were marked by an absence of mediations which resulted in an inadequate addressing of the problem of centralization of power, core of the vulnerability of the popular field in the revolution. Notwithstanding the history of integrating their image in a version of history affirmed by the

post-revolutionary state, the *Magonista* legacy is claimed until the present by political actors identified with the sectors defeated in the Mexican Revolution – such as EZLN (*Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional*) –, transcending the sphere of anarchist circles. In its immediate circumstances, *Magonism* directly influenced Augusto Cesar Sandino (1895-1934) during his time in Mexico in the 1920s, having been incorporated as a fundamental reference for his thought, along with theosophy (Hodges, 1987).

Among the authors analyzed in this paper, the transcendent projection of the legacy of José Martí certainly involves a detailing of the singularity of his thought. Although the triumph of the 1959 Cuban revolution provided a supplementary stimulus of the publicizing of his work, it is the originality and the density of the themes covered which form the foundations of his current relevance. By returning to autochthony as a necessary counterpoint to a critique of the Western civilizing model, Martí sought in the colonial past the starting point for reflection about continental identity, a factor which led him to a pioneering valorization of the political and humanistic potential of the formation of Latin America. The centrality of the colonial legacy actually differentiated him from the other authors focused on here; but it is the radical elevation of the civilizing status of American culture which made his reflections something quite original in the continental context. By combining, with the particular spirituality which informed his militant commitment, the demand for autochthony as a path to sovereignty in the framework of an innovative civilizing horizon in relation to Imperialism, Martí joined a range of central themes for radical Latin American politics in the century that was beginning: autochthony and civilization, Anti-Imperialism and continental unity, humanism and anti-capitalism, mysticism and revolution. Considering the breadth of his scope and the depth of his reflection, it is possible to identify points of contact, whether direct or not, with a diversity of ideological and political currents in the democratic field, which justifies his place as a central reference for Latin American thought since then (Hart, 1978).<sup>9</sup>

## b) Common Foundations: ideological indifference

### 1. *Human nature and history*

The common ideological foundation of the thinkers analyzed is the humanistic premise that the meaning of history is the achievement of a human nature, which points to a convergence between nature and history. In Martí, the meaning of history is the affirmation of *hombre natural* (natural man), in

an approach in which the historic process and the individuation of the subject appear intertwined. In Justo, the formulation of a biological foundation of history evidences an analytical non-dissociation which will result in the perception of a contradiction between capitalism and nature. In Magón, the confluence between human nature and liberty was the axis of a second vision in which tyranny and afterwards private property obstructed at the same time the achievement of man and the evolution of history.

In this way the notion of the *hombre natural*, the biological foundation of history, and economic liberty connected for each author an interpretation of history to a concept of man, a movement which provided a relative naturalization of history at the expenses of politics. This breach was evidence when Martí revealed a belief of a spiritual type in the virtue of history to the detriment of their objective contradictions; Justo absolutizes reason, replacing class conditions with humanistic universals; Magón made historical and social processes immediate, idealizing the potential for revolutionary spontaneity.

From the political point of view, the convergence between human nature and the meaning of history deflated the problem of ideology, connecting political action primordially to human nature and not to class interests. From this perspective, the path to militant awareness passed through a reconnection with human nature obstructed by a situation of oppression: a task that was fundamentally ethical in Martí, pedagogical in Justo, and 'enlightened' in Magón. In the three cases, the reference used to understand the process of the formation of the actor responsible for social transformation is not the dynamism of the class struggle, but universal humanism. Thus, the formation of critical consciousness is understood as a process of natural and immediate harmony with humans. The challenge for emancipation is thus to unblock the connection of the social actor with human nature, liberating the course of historic evolution, or respectively: make feasible the natural flow of human essence in Martí, the elementary organic achievement in Justo and the exercise of liberty and solidarity in Magón. Coherently, the social unity of the emancipatory process is the individual in Martí and Magón. Although Justo uses social classes as categories, the dilution of all the antagonism operated by his humanism leads to the opposite of individuality, which is man as a species.

Ultimately the convergence between nature and history is expressed by the authors as a tendency to accept phenomena in their apparent evidence, as well as in a political propensity to conceive social and historic processes as immediate. Consequently, none of the authors operated a penetrating critique of the contradictions of capitalism, saw either the state or the revolutionary

transition as a political problem. If we assume that the mediation between history and nature, in the totalising plane of the mode of production, is done by the economy, this ideological trait is related to the incipient development of capitalist relations of production in the societies analysed, which inhibited the differentiation of the economic sphere, limiting the evidence of the problems raised through the affirmation of capitalism. In this context, the ideological matrix which shapes the authors' thought is revealed to be the opposite of the praxis accepted by historic materialism, which understands history as an enlightened process of the dual transformation of the relations of production of man with the environment, which forges their own nature (Vázquez, 2007).

## *2. Formation and totality*

In addition to the limits imposed by incipient capitalist development, the nature of the problem of formation implied a supplementary ideological obstacle to the perception of the specificity of Latin America, since the thought of the authors was part of a historic process of differentiation with the colonial past, when the colony still formed a unit with the metropole, and the consummation of the nation, with relative political, cultural, and economic autonomy. A retrospective perspective suggests a progressive evidencing of the political, cultural, social, and economic dimensions of the national question. In the wars of independence unleashed during the crisis of the old colonial system, sovereignty was perceived above all as a political problem which involved a cultural dimension when Bolívar defended institutions that were suited to the continental reality. The need to consummate national unity highlighted a cultural dimension of the problem during the nineteenth century, to the extent that the construction of nationalities gave rise to the affirmation of cultural and historic references, convergent with the process of consolidating the national state.<sup>10</sup>

The authors analyzed in this paper were located in the transition between a political and cultural perception of continental specificity and the understanding of the social and economic dynamisms which shaped its own reality, in which the aspiration for sovereignty and national integration were opposed to the movement of Imperialism. In this context, projects for the radical democratization of American societies bloomed, but the non-differentiation of the economic sphere, added to the contradictory nature of the problematic of formation, inhibited the comprehension of the nexus between the spheres of existence and its relationship with international capital. Consequently, economic self-determination was not perceived as a fundamental dimension of the problem of national integration, and the formation of the nation emerged

as a political question (associated with sovereignty in Martí, electoral democracy in Justo, and the establishment of political liberties in Magón), cultural (related respectively to autochthony, the democratization of teaching, the separation between Church and state, and the claim of the indigenous legacy), and social (integration of the population through labor). Nevertheless, the reading which the authors constructed of capitalism and the perception of Imperialism would influence the ideology underlying their national projects, determining how the problem of control over the rate and the time of social innovation would be focused on.

By basing his criticism on humanistic assumptions referring to the cultural particularity of historic processes, Martí established the grounds to glimpse Latin America as a totality, at the same time that he dissociated the rejection of a sociability marked by the class struggle from the socio-economic dynamisms of capitalist reproduction. Thus, his acute perception of US expansionism as an expression of Imperialism led him to defend continental unity as a condition to establish the self-referred civilizing model, without immediately problematizing capitalism as a mode of production.

Although it guided his interpretation of history towards overcoming capitalism, Juan B. Justo did not observe fundamental contradictions imposing pressure for a revolutionary road, rather to the contrary, he bet on the prevalence of political and economic dynamisms conducive to the gradual establishment of free cooperation. In Martí's antipodes, the Argentine socialist combined a critique of the privilege inherent to capitalist classification with an enthusiastic vision of the civilizing potential associated with the development of the productive forces, an operation which led him to identify American progress with the dilution of its historical specificity given the irresistible movement of the propagation of a superior culture. From this perspective, self-determination was not problematized, eluding the critical perception of Imperialism and the nation as a problem.

Flores Magón wove together a perception of the social contradictions of capitalism to an awareness of various aspects of Mexican subordination to the United States in a national integration project based on the connection between democratization and sovereignty. The implacable political persecution he suffered increased his sensitivity to the Mexican model of class struggle, at the same time that it provoked the immediate finding of international class solidarity in both poles of social conflict, a process which resulted in a progressive radicalization of his ideas. Despite observing the risks presented to Mexican sovereignty by Yankee expansionism, his critique did not deal with



the mechanisms of Imperialism which reinforced the nexus between dependency and asymmetry. During the revolution, it would direct his denunciation basically in the sense of preventing a US military invasion, while the socio-economic dimension of self-determination was pulverized in the utopia of free association.

In the three cases focused on, a relative non-differentiation of the spheres of existence marked the conditions of production of thought, limiting the possibilities of political analysis of the economic sphere which would allow the connection of national problems to the movement of international capital as a totality. As a result the focus of these authors oscillated between Latin American specificity in the sphere of Western history and their common denominator, global capitalist development: Martí highlights the cultural singularity of the continent; Justo accentuates the tendency towards global economic integration; Magón denounced class contradictions in Mexico and the United States. This overlapping between the common and specific is an indication of a simultaneous process of connection and differentiation of capitalism in its dependent modality in Latin America at that period.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Part of a historic movement of affirming bourgeois power in the framework of the problematic of national formation, the political projects analyzed in this paper reveal different ways popular pressure for radical democratization was expressed in Latin America at the beginnings of Imperialism. The identification of a common denominator, which justified the comparison, does not annul the notable differences observed, at multiple levels, through the contrast created there. In the ideological sphere, Martí's thought revealed a density which singularized him, not only in relation to the other authors analyzed, but in the actual history of Latin America thought. From the political point of view, underlying the reformism of Justo can be observed a suspicion of the autonomy of the working class which distanced him from Martí and Magón, whose political strategies were objectively supported by popular protagonism, without the electoral mediation which subjected the Argentine organization to cooption. Notwithstanding the contrast between the revolutionary militancy of Martí and Magón with the moderate reformism of Justo, we see the Socialist Party as the principal political expression linked to the interest of Argentine workers in that historic moment.

For our purposes, the discrepancies between these different expressions of radical politics related to a common historic movement have enriched the scope of this research, by suggesting a framework of ideological and political references which informed the origins of thought and radical activism on the continent in this context. In the sphere of thought, we can observe a convergence between human nature and history underlying the authors' ideas, suggestive of a non-differentiation of the spheres of existence which blocked the understanding of relations between the particular and the universal in the framework of a historic totality. Seen from another angle, the approximation between Martí, Justo, and Magón reveals a morphology of cultural, political, and social themes which would inform later reflection on the dilemmas of the continent, linked through the economic sphere as a totality of thought prepared by Cepal and the tradition linked to historic materialism. As a whole, the comparative analysis of the cases focused on suggested the historic landmarks which referenced, in the terms of Lukács, the maximum conscience possible in the field of democratic militancy in the historic totality of which they were a part.

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## NOTES

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<sup>2</sup> In this paper we refer to Imperialism as a stage of capitalism, characterized by the affirmation of monopolistic capital according to the pioneering analyses of HOBSON, 1983; HILFERDING, 1985; LÊNIN, 2000; BUKHARIN, 1984.

<sup>3</sup> Respectively, Alfredo Palacios in 1904 and Enrique del Valle Iberlucea in 1913.

<sup>4</sup> PRADO JR., 1966. See also: PRADO JR., 2000; 2001.

<sup>5</sup> FERNANDES, 1975a. Other developments of the same question can be found in: FERNANDES, 1975b; 1968; 1981.

<sup>6</sup> A discussion about the relevance of this approach for Latin America can be found in: PRADO, 2005.

<sup>7</sup> See in relation to this: GILLY, 1981. For a summary of the debate about the nature of the revolution, consult: KNIGHT, 1989.

<sup>8</sup> See: KATZ, 1990a; 1990b, Vol. 1; 1991; 1982; 1998.

<sup>9</sup> We can cite two examples of direct influence: combining love as a mobile revolutionary with a stoic posture of overcoming oneself and giving oneself up to the cause, Che Guevara recognizes the points of contact of his militant ethics with, from whom he adopts a phrase, which in his understanding, summarizes the spirit of the revolutionaries: "Every true man must feel on his cheek the blow given to the cheek of any man" (GUEVARA, 1978, p. 74). The questions about the existence of a Latin American philosophy, as an aspect of the greater problem of the possibility of a Latin American culture in dependent capitalism, stimulated in an incisive form based on the work of Leopoldo Zea, used José Martí as an immediate reference. ZEA, 1957; 1995a.

<sup>10</sup> In relation to the progressive differentiation of political, cultural, social, and economic spheres of a historic process which provided evidence of the specificity of Latin American formation, consult: RETAMAR, 2005; PINEDO, 2010; ZEA, 1976; 1995b.

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