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Among this book’s several accomplishments, readers cannot help but praise Jeffrey Herlihy-Mera’s courage in writing a well-researched and passionate manuscript that touches a raw nerve in the academic fields of humanities and social sciences. *Decolonizing American Spanish: Eurocentrism and Foreignness in the Imperial Ecosystem* reveals the ingrained colonial structures that persist in the university system, particularly in Spanish departments. Since this book begins as a case study, one is inclined to suggest that a more appropriate title could have been “Decolonizing the Current Hegemonic Model of Ph.D. Programs in Spanish Offered by US Institutions.” However, throughout the book’s five chapters, Herlihy-Mera exposes the pedagogical, political, economic, and neuro-linguistic implications that a Eurocentric perspective in Spanish curricula creates within and beyond the classroom setting. Such a colonizing perspective reinforces a US national imaginary where Latinx culture is constructed as foreign or “other.”

Following a “decolonial approach,” the book clearly states its locus of enunciation, the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez, whose Department of Spanish, although located in a highly populated Spanish-speaking region, occupies a lower-tier position according to hegemonic academic standards. Herlihy-Mera highlights this contradiction to debunk the neoliberal discourse that praises competitiveness among higher education institutions but ultimately positions the same “perceived elite institutions” as the winners. According to *Decolonizing American Spanish*, it is misleading to say that the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez’s low-ranking position and insufficient funding are related to unsatisfactory academic performance. On the contrary, the book suggests that it is the logical outcome of a Eurocentric academic system that overserves the languages and cultures of Spain and disregards local and hybrid manifestations of Spanish languages. As a result, Spanish is taught in the US as a foreign language.

*Decolonizing American Spanish* makes a strong case for recognizing the contact, intonations, emotions, and multiple traditions and sensibilities of other American Spanish(es) that are spoken and that inform the daily life of millions in the United States outside of Puerto Rico. In particular, the book studies US southwestern linguistic and cultural communities, whom US Spanish departments fail by not including them in the curriculum, contributing to their invisibility and stigmatization, and reproducing the image of Spanish as a foreign language. The national/transnational framework is rooted in a Eurocentric perspective that essentializes linguistic “purity.” Rather than focusing on a “cultural geography” that mystifies the dominance of Spain, Herlihy-Mera proposes a view that relies on localized epistemes (Castro-Klaren) and delinking strategies (Mignolo). As a consequence, Spanish would be recognized as a “domestic (not foreign)” language, and its role would be understood as one of the “constituent components of belonging and agency” (7).

Although engaging with a broader discussion on decolonizing politics and anti-imperialistic praxis, *Decolonizing American Spanish* has a reformist perspective toward academic institutions rather than a revolutionary one. This book is not calling for the abolishment of US academic institutions (which might have been paradoxical given that it is printed by a university press and follows all protocols of academic writing) but for a reevaluation of the distribution of higher education’s resources. Next to the denouncement of an academic system that marginalizes the Spanish spoken locally in the USA, the book establishes several negotiation strategies to use tools and resources already available in the university system (both financial and institutional) to foster democratization of the field. Herlihy-Mera explains that the decolonization of Spanish departments “would not have to disrupt existing structures, as the institutional scaffolding could remain largely intact (that is, degree programs, classes, activities, and knowledge-production in the traditional university) while shifting toward a localized epistemological paradigm” (58).

Chapter 1, “After Hispanic Studies,” is a powerful indictment of the top-tier Spanish Departments in the US. The book offers a detailed quantitative survey of the doctorate level since, following the hierarchical scaffolding in academia, a doctoral degree provides the credentials necessary to participate in academia and oversee the work of teachers at lower levels. Here Herlihy-Mera offers a clear and straightforward thesis, an open secret among faculty and students nationwide: Spain is overrepresented in Spanish departments. This European country represents 47% of faculty research interests in the top 25 perceived elite institutions, reaching three-quarters (66%) in some specific cases (Chicago, Columbia, the University of Colorado at Boulder, the University of Virginia, and Vanderbilt). This tendency continues in Flagship Institutions in the Southern Border States (39%), schools (of 5000+ students) with over 50% Latinx enrollment (37%), and the top 10 largest US universities by enrollment (46%). These numbers offer a detailed portrait of bias and distortions rooted in colonial power relations. If one were to follow a strict demographic standard, Spain would represent only 10% of the research area, in accordance with the actual number of Spanish speakers worldwide.

On the other hand, the countries that represent 90% of the Spanish speakers (subsumed and uniformized in the category “Latin America”) are clearly underrepresented, if not openly ignored. Part of the issue at hand is naming these academic departments “Hispanic Studies,” which aligns with an Imperialist ecosystem that posits Spain as a center radiating its cultural traits to the periphery of Latin American countries. Herlihy-Mera convincingly explains that, despite the wordiness surrounding diversity and inclusion issues, Spanish departments don’t follow the representation criteria. Instead, they are anchored in a colonial mentality that regards European Spanish as the standard for prestige and cultural capital. The consequence of the mystification of European Spanish is the era-
sure of the Spanish spoken locally in the USA, particularly the vari-
eties spoken in the areas surrounding higher education institutions. Since there is a considerable gap between the Spanish spoken in local communities and the Spanish taught and researched in classrooms, this language has the status of a foreign one in the USA.

Chapter 2, “Vetting the Decolonial Turn,” fleshes out the “de-
colonial” theoretical framework employed by the book. Herlihy-
Mera roots the book’s institutional goal in a move toward a decol-
onizing pluriverse that implies a movement from one world (with many independent and competing worldviews) to localized and autonomous epistemologies, which indeed articulate a plural framework not limited by colonialism. The author calls this ontological turn “cognitive localism” (73). For instance, “Spain” and “Latin America” are modern/colonial structures that limit the understanding of local experiences, cultural objects, and knowledge.

As an example of the practical consequences of this colonizing perspective, the last section of chapter 2 deals with professional-
ization issues at the doctorate level and offers some of the book’s most potent pages. The author debunks the “exceptionalism myth” of top-ranked institutions that defend their privileges. Following Herlihy-Mera’s discussion of localized epistemological paradigms, higher education institutions located near areas with the most Spanish speakers should lead the rankings. On the same note, another impactful section of the book is the critique of the MLA’s promotion of alt-ac jobs. The author suggests an analogy with for-
mer US President Donald Trump’s immigration policies. Instead of fostering a democratization of the field, the current alt-ac jobs alternative promotes the departure of lower-tier scholars from the academy. In other words, alt-ac jobs justify current “best practices” instead of proposing a solution to hiring discrimination.

Chapter 3, titled “Multilingual Cognition and Ethno-Lingual Relativity,” focuses on the linguistic and neurological dimensions of the issue at hand. It quotes several studies in cognitive linguistics to question the assumption that languages are discrete identities in the mind of a multilingual speaker. Interestingly, although the theo-
retical framework is linguistic-based, the examples are from literary studies, including the poet William Carlos Williams and the novelist and short-story writer Ernest Hemingway. The quality of this chap-
ter’s arguments is mixed. On the one hand, despite laudable archival work, the analysis of Hemingway as a bilingual writer ignores the issues of cultural appropriation from a white US author claiming a Cuban identity. On the other hand, the following section of this chapter offers a remarkable foregrounding of the term “Latinx,” which is a conflictive word in US Spanish-speaking communities. Using the aforementioned discussion of neurology and linguistics in multilingual speakers, Herlihy-Mera explains that the “x” in “Latinx” is meant to be disruptive in Spanish and English because it departs from the monolingual perspective. Such an “x” is the point where these two languages collide.

Chapter 4, “Spain,” is a provocation and a practical example of the “decolonial turn” that the book has foregrounded in the previ-
ous pages. Following Gabilondo’s perspective on decentering Ibe-
rian Studies, Herlihy-Mera proposes an understanding of Spain as a region of Latin America. What distinguished the Spanish region of Latin America is not its location within Europe (and European epistemologies) but the heavy influence of Islamic and Arabic cul-
tures. Herlihy-Mera’s writing style is consistent with his theoretical perspective, given that it uses Islamic and Christian calendars to refer to historical events. The sections dedicated to Cervantes and the Camino de Santiago provide excellent debunking of the myth of a Christian Iberia, in which Muslim and Arabic cultures are foreign. Interestingly, this chapter mirrors the book’s broader argument since the foreignization of Arabic in Spain follows a similar colonial pattern to that of the foreignization of Spanish in the USA.

Finally, the last chapter, “On the Puertoricanization of US Higher Education,” redirects the discussion to higher education institutions in the USA. This chapter is predominantly a testimony that clearly situates the angle from which criticism of US Hispanic departments is being made. In other words, it is a truthful critique that may only be possible because of the marginal and marginal-
ized position of the University of Puerto Rico-Mayagüez. This insti-
tution’s faculty and students have adopted a bilingual framework that contrasts sharply with the monolingual English framework pre-
dominant in the USA. The book’s conclusion, written under the ex-
ceptional circumstance of the COVID-19 Pandemic, delves into the marginalization of Puerto Rican academic institutions by focusing on the grant system.

The conclusion resumes the critiques against the (trans)na-
tional framework by separating the book’s theoretical framework from hybrid approaches (such as Bhabha’s postcolonial theory) since such approaches still place English at the center and estab-
lish discrete linguistic identities. The book’s final goal is to recognize that Spanish is spoken locally, and this situational anchoring con-
structs epistemologies and affectivities that bear witness to their cultural expressions accordingly. On the other hand, this movement against the “foreignization” of Spanish does not imply a “domes-
tication” in the sense of making it easy to understand and control. Instead, it recognizes that the Spanish language is a present living experience in the US. Along the lines of John Guillory’s studies on canon formation, Decolonizing the American Spanish proposes that what is taught is less a question of representation of social groups than a question of the distribution of financial and “cultural capital” in higher education institutions, which perpetuates uneven access to resources and colonial hierarchies.

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