

Editorial

Latin America looks back on a long history of its global interdependencies, and of course this did not begin when European navigators seeking the treasures of Asia landed on the coasts of the Caribbean and the southern part of the American double continent and reported their “discoveries” after returning home. Latin America became the early target of Portuguese and Spanish colonization efforts, and it became the vanguard of decolonization. It seems paradoxical, then, that global history has been able to develop only little of its appeal for historians in the region, which can be observed elsewhere. It is met with greater reserve than in many other regions because it is suspected of perpetuating the paradigm of the superiority of the Global North and legitimizing it in a new way, that is, of standing in the way of the emancipation aspirations of Latin American intellectuals rather than being useful to them. Academic imperialism meets with the greatest possible sensitivity, especially in the American South, and is resolutely rejected, not least because Latin American historiographies have learned to defend themselves against the enormous intellectual power and organizational might of their colleagues in the North.

A second reason surely lies in the particularly complex development of territorialization and nationalization in the various societies of Latin America. Indigenous forms of empire-building were destroyed, leaving behind impressive ruins of ancient centres of power and trade routes, are remembered collectively accordingly, but were then brutally overwritten by early modern colonialism. The second overhaul was then carried out by the Creole elites at the turn from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century, who were able to secure leadership in the struggles for emancipation against Spain and Portugal and to take up the ideas of the territorial nation-state, which were simultaneously being impinged upon from Europe and northern Europe, in order to gain permanent control over the resources of Latin American societies. This model promised to solve two problems simultaneously: positioning in a global context characterized by a growing division of labour, and the integration of the indigenous population, without which the victory during the Independencia would not have been possible. But it could not be a simple imitation of a successful pattern elsewhere, because it was necessary to take into account the organizational forms of the numerically far superior (rural) population and to deal with a highly specialized monoculture in the export regions stemming from colonialism,

which rather had to be deepened in order to generate the necessary revenues that would allow those who profited from it to build statehood and urbanity.

The design of public spaces with architecture and infrastructure, which the contributions in this issue report on the basis of new research results, served the simultaneous fulfilment of both goals, which were recognizably in tension with each other. In the later nineteenth century, the redesign of cities led to a new search for inspiration in former colonial metropolises and combined with the observation of a municipal revolution in Western and Central Europe. Cities in Latin America were stylized as centres of modernity and progress and contrasted with rural areas, which were associated with backwardness and the need to be civilized. The subsequent waves of immigration from Europe were seen as an instrument of this civilizing mission, and at the same time a discourse of demarcation from the powerful neighbour to the north developed, which simultaneously triggered fascination and the desire for originality in one's own social arrangement. This brought into play the second guiding paradigm that defines this thematic issue. By presenting itself as a pioneer of "development", Latin America was able to build bridges to other zones of decolonization and supported the construction of a "Third World" that foregrounded the similarity of fate of the formerly colonized, but at the same time laid claim to assistance in catching up with the backwardness that had occurred.

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