

Introduction to the Special Issue: Another Turn of the Screw Toward Hispanic and Lusophone Whiteness Studies

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“Al día siguiente vino del Oriente una gran canoa con 24 hombres, todos mancebos, muy ataviados y armados de arcos, flechas y escudos, de buena figura y no negros, sino más blancos que los otros que he visto en las Indias, de lindos gestos y hermosos cuerpos, con los cabellos cortados al uso de Castilla.”

(Cristóbal Colón, *La carta de Cristóbal Colón anunciando el descubrimiento del Nuevo Mundo*, 1493.)

“El blanco que se aísla, aísla al negro.
El negro que se aísla provoca aislarse al blanco.
En Cuba no hay temor a la guerra de razas.

Hombre es más que blanco,
más que mulato, más que negro.”

(Jose Martí, “Mi raza,” 1893.)

To date, extensive scholarly research exists in the field of Whiteness Studies. Stemming from, and overlapping with, some premises of Post-Colonial Studies, this new discipline soon found home in the American, British, Australian and South African academies to examine white racial formations. Thus, in its beginnings, scholars shifted their focus from scrutinizing minoritized ‘Others’ to examining how white hegemonic identities came to be placed in relation to concepts of normalcy, privilege and oppression. Although the Whiteness field may be grounded in ideas of pan-Africanist scholars like W.E.B. Du Bois, and anti-colonialist theorists like James Baldwin, Aimé Césaire, and Frantz Fanon, it is with Theodore W. Allen’s *White Supremacy in United States History* (1973) and *Class Struggle and the Origin of Racial Slavery: The Invention of the White Race* (1975), that the discipline allegedly begins to emerge.

Allen offered a definition of whiteness beyond phenotype and pigment in relation to religious and racial oppression in order to explain how the Irish, considered to be non-white Celts, became white during the United States’ Reconstruction Era (1865-1877). Consequently, Allen’s theory argues that the Irish “became white” in the elite’s interests to maintain their privileges. This conceptual white expansion, according to Allen, established a solid white middle class as a mechanism for social control, thereby preventing the Irish from joining forces with the African American and other non-white rebellions seeking freedom and equality. A similar process of assimilation into whiteness would also later occur with Italians in the nineteenth century and with Jews in the middle of the twentieth century. Accordingly, due to this ability of

whiteness to morph overtime, Allen essentially understood it as an oppressive ideological category.

Henceforth, the field has expanded incommensurably encompassing at least four stages. In the 1980s scholars showed interest in probing the centrality of whiteness in race relations. The discipline became tremendously multidisciplinary in the 1990s by incorporating commentators from Cultural Studies, Sociology, Anthropology, Psychology, and many other fields. During this second wave, scholars eminently explored the centrality of the white subject to convey its cultural invisibility or normalcy as a privilege, and racism in the public sphere.¹ In parallel, toward the end of the 1990s Richard Dyer published *White: Essays on Race and Culture* (1997), where he, examining their representation under the lens of Christianity, race, gender and colonialism, exposed the conception of whiteness purely as non-bodily ideals. Simultaneously, George Lipsitz's publication *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (1998) deconstructed racism as public (political) and private (social); it defined whiteness as a structural system that benefits and protects white interests. In the wake of a third period, scholars like Fyre Jacobson in *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (1998), began to conceive whiteness as a highly malleable category to explain the contingencies between political, cultural and social arenas.

In my view the fourth stage regarding the study of Whiteness may have begun when Donald Trump announced his candidacy for U.S. President and, most definitively, he was elected. His election forces a revisiting of old-fashioned forms of racial discourses, in addition to the re-negotiating and re-articulating of racial identities, in a period of an apparent white backlash against the results of the post-WWII political push for a more inclusive and multicultural society and political correctness. In this sense, I contend that whiteness is again morphing, redefining its boundaries in trying to regain, to invigorate itself at the center of power relations. The Trump administration seems intent on neutralizing—when unable to eradicate—any domestic actors viewed as non-white agents who could change national dynamics, thus whitening the country implicitly through policies for which the wall on the Mexican border emerges as the symbol: these policies include the threat of deportation to millions (around 11.4 millions) unauthorized immigrants by ICE; the change of immigration policies as, for example, terminating chained-migration; suspending the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program (DACA); ending the Temporary Protected Status (TPS) of 250,000 Salvadorians; enacting a ban on travellers from six predominantly Muslim countries (Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen). In short, as CNN reported: “President Donald Trump expressed frustration behind closed doors with

people coming to the US from ‘shithole countries’” (Watkins and Phillip n/p). Those very same people his administration aims to “kick out of the country.”

However, if we are to recognize that a central tenet of Whiteness Studies entails a re-evaluation of History, and conduct a rereading of cultural products in racial terms to assess the effects of the structural paradigms of whiteness in contemporary societies, the following question arises: Can we fully understand the nature of white racial formation, its historical strategies and cultural forms of structural power in isolation? In *Re-Orienting Whiteness* (2009), Leigh Boucher, Jane Carey and Katherine Ellinghaus express their concern about how although “the narrowed national focus has not emerged as a prominent concern within existing critics of the field, we argue that it is in fact of central importance” (4). More so, these researchers continue to make their point about the existing contradictions in the field, as well as its current limitations, when they explain how

despite pretensions to an almost universal applicability, distinct U.S. academic debates, as well as specific political projects and *disavowals* (particularly of the settler-colonial underpinnings of the United States), silently orient the field. In many ways, debates about whiteness have primarily reflected a turf war over leadership in the field of labor history in the United States. The issues at stake are far too important to allow them to be subsumed within such parochial concerns. (4; Original emphasis)

Yet, though in retrospect, it is unsurprisingly that, after the end of the Cold War in 1989, many U.S. Marxist theorists sought shelter in the (not coincidental?) rise of Whiteness Studies during the 1990s to continue to theorize about class inequalities in the United States. In carrying out this methodological transition, American commentators validated Stuart Hall’s racial premise by sanctioning that “race is the modality in which class is lived, the medium which it is appropriated and fought through” (30). The greater flaw with the latter Marxist approach is not subsuming race within class, but rather doing so carelessly without establishing a transcultural relationality. This lack of relationality in the field makes it impossible to discern, for example, what is specific to American whiteness and what might be common features of other “whitenesses;” thus, undermining “pretensions to an almost universal applicability” while implicitly displacing to the margins any other nation’s racial dynamics and conceptions of what it means to be white across the globe.

Peter Kolchin highlighted the existing lack of relationality in the discipline. Kolchin specifically evaluated the “assumption—sometimes asserted and sometimes unspoken—that the racism they describe is uniquely American and that American whiteness can be understood in

isolation” (170-71).² Following this statement, it could be argued that the tendency of US commentators may have been to exclude from the dialogue other racial, political, and cultural practices regarding plausible conceptions of both race and whiteness. Taking Kolchin’s approach even further, since the field of Whiteness Studies has mostly engaged with conceptions of whiteness within Anglo-centred racial traditions and is thus written in English and concerned with the white presence in former British settler-nations, one could claim that the lack of relationality is indeed even greater than initially assumed.

More than a decade ago in *Postcolonial Whiteness* (2005), Alfred López voiced his concern in expressing that by accepting as normalcy this lack of cultural diversity, the discipline “would itself be guilty of uncritically privileging whitenesses that speak English, and even of reinforcing the grim fact of English as the world’s preeminent White language” (9). Unfortunately, with rare, punctual exceptions,³ there has been a lack of response to, and engagement with, this phenomenon in the field of Hispanic Studies, where most critical commentators still seem to be focusing their interests and efforts on examining subalterns’ identities and representations. While these studies are very important and successfully provide explanations, as to how minority groups are racialized and minoritized, I often find that they do not offer sufficient insight into the processes by which the structures of difference and the processes of legitimization operate and replicate in society.

At this juncture, I would suggest that a greater analytical scope concentrating on several ‘types’ of white cultural paradigms (including Hispanic, Luso, and Latin American societies) is much needed for our understanding of historic racial dialectics, as well as the persisting racial effects on contemporary societies. Based on these premises, and in response to the enormous vacuum in Hispanic Studies regarding whiteness and Whiteness Studies regarding Hispanism (Peninsular, Latin American, Caribbean, U.S. Latino/a, Afro-Hispanic Studies), I reason the need for an emergence of a Hispanic, Lusophone Whiteness Studies field.

I am also prompted to say that the aforementioned field –in coalescence with other world white identities– is essential to enrich our comprehension of both contemporary racial signifying practices and white identity formation(s). I anticipate that the emergence of this interdisciplinary field will benefit a transcultural dialogue about whiteness exponentially, creating the basis for a better understanding of racial conceptualizations and societal dynamics within a larger context. The rise of such scrutiny of whiteness would be decidedly beneficial to the field: on the one hand, it would contribute to conceptualizing whiteness in relational terms, highly nurturing the fact that racial categories (as well as those of gender, class, political, social, and popular), imbued with different cultural traditions, are all interdependent; on the other hand, the

presence of a major relationality in the examination of whiteness will also acknowledge the constant exchange among different cultural practices regarding race, whiteness, and their historical processes. In Pamela Perry and Alexis Shotwell's words, by means of conducting a relational understanding of the world, we would strengthen the notion that

the social construction of race, class, gender, and sexual identities fundamentally happen through this relational process between the individual and 'society.' Understanding these social-institutional processes of subject formation and the ways power is implicated in them can lead to critical self and group reflection and deconstruction, and greater awareness of where one is situated within the complex matrix of power and hierarchy. (34-35)

Henceforth, a Hispanic/Luso-oriented contribution to the discipline will make it possible to better comprehend the racial dynamics in which our contemporary globalized world falls into place. Overall, the rise of these studies will help to better understand the racial dynamics of a highly interconnected world. What follows is an issue on Luso, Hispanic Whiteness Studies that includes seven essays that conceptualize and scrutinize whiteness in Latin America and Europe.

In "From Oppressive to Benign: A Comparative Latin American History of Whiteness in Brazil," Darién J. Davis provides a brief history of how Brazilian intellectuals transformed the oppressive whiteness associated with conquest and the colonial project to what he calls a "benign whiteness." Davis explains how Iberian colonizers created a caste system to maintain white supremacy even as society became more hybrid through so-called "miscegenation," syncretism and other forms of cultural mixing. In doing so the author explores how elite whites slowly built ideas, after independence, of nationhood privileging whiteness and offering limited incentives and opportunities to non-whites. Davis argues that after World War I, Brazilian cultural elites along with the bourgeois state, succeeded in promoting and institutionalizing notions of cultural hybridity as a unique cultural trait that bound all Brazilians together in a way distinct and superior to the notions found in the United States. The patriotic trope of hybridity masked the white privilege while benign whiteness helped to stymie cross-racial solidarity among non-white populations even as it continued to marginalize those populations. In the essay Davis demonstrates how white and almost white (a term that Darien borrows from Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil) helped propagate the idea of Brazilian benign whiteness, an ideology that continues to impact Latin Americans and Latin American migrants today.

The second essay, "The Integration of the White into the Community of Color, or How the Europeans Became Brazilian in the Twentieth Century," also deals with the Brazilian experience regarding whiteness. In it, Luisa Farah Schwartzman bases her premises on the fact

that the Studies of immigrant integration in Europe and North America generally assume that immigrants are less white and considered less “modern” than the nationals of the countries where they arrive. Farah Schwartzman’s purpose here is to examine what happens when we apply the idea of “immigrant integration” to European immigrants who arrived in Brazil at the end of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. She argues that these immigrants and their descendants have faced a contradiction between integrating into a national “imagined community,” constructed as “mixed-race,” and participating in local, national and global projects of white “modernity.” The paper explores how this contradiction was historically constructed in Brazil, how some Brazilians of European descent resolved it, and how we can think of the relationship between race, modernity, nationhood and immigrant integration from a more global perspective.

While Davis and Farah Schwartzman’s essays contain studies of whiteness in Latin America, including the Caribbean, and Brazil, five other contributions examine conceptions of whiteness that are grounded in European soil. Daniel Herrera Cepero offers a study of the Andalusian poet Federico García Lorca regarding his chromatic uses of blackness and whiteness to nurture his poetry. The author argues that the philosophy of Frederick Nietzsche influenced Lorca at an early age thereby becoming one of his references in seeking a profound Dionysian truth whose antithesis is in the Apollonian whiteness. According to Herrera Cepero, Lorca’s quest for this profound Dionysian truth entailed, in the aesthetic level, the unmasking of the 1920s dehumanized art through the blackness/whiteness paradigm. To prove it, Lorca’s work shows an obsession with Andalusian *cante jondo* as well as with African American music and dance, which resulted in his poetic representation of gypsies and blacks in the acclaimed *Romancero gitano* and *Poeta en Nueva York*, respectively.

Anchored in the same period of the 1920s, Eva Woods Peiró shifts our focus from poetry to film in order to reconsider how Spanish film culture celebrated both aspirations of technological power and the enjoyment of or anxiety around technology. Specifically, her essay “Whiteness as Air-mindedness: Juan de la Cierva (1923-1925), Film and the Airplane” explores how Spanish cinema historicized a set of propaganda films between 1923 and 1925 about Juan de la Cierva’s invention, the *Autogiro*, a machine that fused the airplane with the helicopter. According to Woods Peiró, these short hybrid media artefacts—a coalescence of documentary, *actualité* and advertisement—promoted de la Cierva’s invention while also drawing upon and furthering ideas about whiteness and its intimate, if not generative, connection with technology. Balancing theoretical frameworks provided by Paul Virilio and Friedrich Kittler with Richard Dyer and Judy Wajcman’s arguments about the raced and gendered construction of technology,

the author argues that these cinematic objects, which entertained cinemagoers and served military interests, were deeply saturated in the discourse of whiteness. The implicit assumptions of this race rhetoric, built into the material specificity of the airplane, were the control of the Spanish and European-identified race over this conquest of the air and the maintenance of the white viewer-driver-pilot.

Also, through cinema, in “Spain is (not so) Different: Whitening Spain through Late Francoist Comedy,” Martin Repinecz reasons that another effort to articulate Spain’s whiteness, besides the white gypsy narrative of popular musical cinema from the 1920s-1950s, (See Woods Peiró, 2012), can be found in the popular cinema of late Francoism. The popular comedy cinema of this period (roughly 1960-1975), known as *comedia sexy*, *comedia celtibérica*, or simply *landismo*, aimed to shift the international perception of Spain away from racialized stereotypes of the nation’s Africanness in order to move it closer to a white European identity. Troubled by the reputation of Francoism as anachronistic in a context of global decolonization, U.S. civil rights, and rapid social and economic change within Spain, the regime used the popular cinema industry, which was closely aligned with it ideologically, to portray Spain as upwardly mobile on a geopolitical hierarchy that was imagined as a black/white racial paradigm. Specifically, by intertwining the *macho ibérico / sueca* narrative trope with racist caricatures of blacks, this cinema aimed to accentuate Spain’s upward geopolitical and racial mobility by contrasting it with the fixity of racial others, while simultaneously retaining a deracialized, commodifiable “difference” as a competitive advantage on the world stage.

My contribution to the volume, entitled “From Impurity of Thought Toward the Glocalization of Whiteness in Spain,” is structured in three parts. Firstly, the introduction—by no means intended to be exhaustive but to provide a concise survey—aims to help to visualize the trajectory of Spain’s racial rhetoric in relation to whiteness, and its European counterparts’ historical processes of racialization, thus offering an explanation to the acute lack of studies regarding Spanish whiteness. Altogether, the introduction suggests how Italian humanism, central and northern Protestantism, the French Africanization rhetoric of Spanish Whiteness, as much as Spain’s colonial legacy, all contributed to largely shaped an ambiguous conception of Spanishness that has often been held off-whiteness. The latter review will lead us to a study that revisits the cultural, symbolical transformation following the *Transición Española* through *Amanece, que no es poco* (1988) to examine how Spain disregarded notions of *mestizaje* in this period, beginning to bound up Spanish whiteness with European multiculturalism, as much as with a long-imagined, Western modernity. The analysis demonstrates how Spain—regardless of the new multicultural ideals—instrumentalized Ngé Ndomo’s blackness merely as an ideological means to

raise awareness of social distance in the Spanish white racial formation. Specifically, the essay proves how Spanish film continued to replicate colonial tropes using blackness in order to redefine Spain's white national identity, while silencing the black subaltern voice by subsuming the experience of blackness into the cultural practices of whiteness. The essay also shows how this film strengthened the problematization of the presence of blackness regarding national identity coding hierarchical structures that established patterns of racial behavior that privileged the centrality and subjectivity of whiteness. To conclude, I link the study to the present day's racial conceptions, assuming that, in a culturally globalized world, Spain may have decisively integrated into a *relatively* homogeneous, glocal sensibility of whiteness.

While all the above contributions deal with historic discourses and cinematic representations of whiteness in Spain, in the last included essay Kathleen Honora Connolly provides a study of Spanish television with regards to "Masculinity, Whiteness, and Eastern Migrants in Spanish Prime Time." She specifically analyses representations of whiteness and its imbrication with masculinity and the construction of Eastern European migrants in the Spanish TV drama *Mar de plástico* (2015). The essay explores how the violent, white masculinity of the protagonist, Héctor Aguirre, frames him as a protector of the weak and victimized, and the type of man who can resolve the many problems plaguing Spanish society. By contrast, she contends, the whiteness of Eastern European migrants is portrayed as insidious and threatening to the safety and social structure of the community. Honora Connolly's main argument is that both engagements with whiteness stem from feelings of uncertainty and anger in broader Spanish society with entrenched economic and class hierarchies, as well as a reaction to changing demographics and new influxes of immigrants. Moreover, she establishes that the innovative aspects of the show are: a desire to create a well-produced, cinematic experience as well as to engage with socially relevant topics, unfortunately, are unproductive because the narrative falls back on stereotyped portrayals of immigrants and a hegemonic, warrior-hero masculinity.

Overall, this issue offers a thorough and comprehensive interdisciplinary study of whiteness including a fair range of aesthetic forms, periods and traditions. We, the guest editor and contributors of this special issue on Hispanic and Luso Whiteness Studies, wish to express our gratitude to *Transmodernity* for supporting and fostering this incipient discussion. We hope that it will become an intense, enriching, interdisciplinary scholarly dialogue, one that will contribute to the rethinking of how the structures of difference and the processes of legitimization operate and replicate in contemporary societies and towards a revealing of white structures in the context of Lusophone countries and global Hispanism.

Notes

1 See, for example, Toni Morrison's acclaimed essay *Playing in the Dark* (1992).

2 See Eric Kaufmann and David Roediger debate on the suitability, or not, regarding the applicability of US paradigms in other national contexts found in *Ethnicities* "Whiteness—Too Blunt an Instrument? A Reply to David Roediger" and "A Reply to Eric Kaufmann", respectively.

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