

# ON MESTIZO THOUGHT

Hugo Neira

*Del pensar mestizo*, (*On Mestizo Thought*) by Hugo Neira\* (Abancay, 1936), is a compilation of several works on the thinking of Peruvian *intelligentsia* at the beginning of the twentieth century: González Prada, Riva-Agüero, Mariátegui, García Calderón, Belaunde, Porras, Haya de la Torre and Basadre. The following text is drawn from the introduction.

**D***el pensar mestizo* is not a text written to explain mestizos or their thought. If readers find the title intriguing, then it was well chosen. [...] Neither is it a book on lexical hybridity, like in Guaman Poma's works or in Gamaliel Churata's formidable book *El pez de oro* (The Golden Fish). Perhaps my goal is more modest. What I'm really suggesting is that the hybridity in this collection of essays lies not in language but rather in ideas. It is therefore a conceptual work. And if that be the case, what does it even mean?

I worked on these texts like some kind of intellectual nomad. True, as a researcher, as a professor, but in the end, the comings and goings are not what counts, but rather not leaving any important subjects behind, like a suitcase forgotten on a train station bench. When you add the cultural allegiances with which we live, it becomes a double-edged sword. And this is the first point I would like to summarily explore. The second is how this intellectual condition, this mental imbalance common to researchers, paradoxically allows for a special outlook, which Ortega explained as «the melancholic privileges of the outsider.» I am by no means arguing that there is no choice besides self-imposed exile, but rather inviting the reader to carefully examine the concept that a great thinker and sociologist, Norbert Elias, has called the work of «distanciation.» The third point is inevitable, as it deals with a couple of concepts which I myself invented. True, Montaigne wrote often in praise of *dépaysement*, of traveling, banishing oneself, leaving. Exile, foreignness also mean, according to the dictionaries, to lose one's balance, to lose one's way. The idea itself is quite fertile: someone who absent-mindedly loses his way, who loses track of the path he was on, may very well find a better one. It is an old idea, that the gates of knowledge open to he who leaves, and as it seems almost «Hebraic», has no other meaning. The process of leaving is full of risk and opportunity. Undoubtedly, reaching the horizon, discovering other countries, other worlds [...]

What happens when a «critical intellectual» (but is this not a redundant term?) is displaced, not only in geographic terms, but that this mobility in and of itself gives him a new way to formulate ideas? Is there an intellectual advantage to exile? Not the exile of



Manuel González Prada (1844-1918).

nations or bodies, but rather that of University Departments. In Pensons Ailleurs, Nicole Lapiere discusses this idea in reference to those who cross interdisciplinary borders. There are exemplary cases, such as that of Lévi-Strauss, who arranged and classified Anthropological materials using a mind trained in philosophy. [...]

The subject is intriguing. What is lucidity? From what source flow originality, dissidence, and scientific, philosophical and political heresy? In our time there is a passionate explanation, a theory of original man as outsider, and I refer to the work of two researchers. In 1944 the phenomenologist Alfred Schultz returned to the theme of the strange or outsider in a different cultural community...»As he does not share all the basic suppositions of the «relatively natural world view», the outsider is able to question almost everything that seems unquestionable to the native of

the incorporating culture» Schultz also signals the «outsider's greater level of objective perceptivity when faced with behaviors and habits that are unquestionable for the native of the community. And, as paradoxical as it may seem, this condition of being outside (but not completely) permits him to develop a sharp sensitivity towards the incoherence or incongruity of the others' cultural schematic. «The outsider is therefore capable of discerning, «says Schultz, «the appearance of a crisis that threatens the very basis of he *relatively natural conception of the world*, whereas these symptoms are unseen by other members of the endogroup, used to trusting the continuity of their traditional way of life.» I have taken this reference to the work of Alfred Schultz from the excellent work of the Mexican researcher Gil Villegas, who in turn was inspired by the cases of Lucács, Simmel, and Ortega. [...]

These texts are excerpted from a chapter called «Anticipations.» The title is no exaggeration. In fact, the analysis of *Caserian Populism*, which dates from 1969, when I was a young researcher at the Institute for the Study of Political Science in Paris, and published in the *Revue Française de Sciences* was directly in conflict with French contemporary notions of Latin American political case studies, such as the Peronist, Brazilian Getulist, and Peruvian Aprista movements. Is this not the very point of research? New categories of analysis, a different reading, other meanings (only visible if you have a different way of questioning reality) I would like to point out the importance of anticipation in this work. When everyone was betting on the transformation of Latin American political life either by Cuban backed guerilla movements or representative democracy, I argued that what would happen would in fact be the simultaneously increasing relevance of the masses and strongman leadership. At the time, in Peru, there was just Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre, founder of the Apra party, to speak of. Abimael Guzman, Alberto Fujimori, Alejandro Toledo, and Ollanta Humala had yet to appear on the public scene, and a humbled, wiser Alan García was even further away. And on the Latin American scene, neither Evo Morales, Lula, nor Hugo Chávez. For partisans of American style analysis, today it is indeed easy to prove the obvious. The skill is in anticipating a sort of unchanging variable in public life. That of strongmen, whether ferocious or astute, and the emerging masses. [...]

I use the lens of my background as a political scientist to ponder the great questions that concern all of humanity. They are indeed few. What is freedom? What is the state? What can be known? What can be hoped for? What direction can we modestly hope to take? The author, with what he has left of existence. You, the reader, with all that is still needed to create a nation. ●

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\* Peruvian essayist honored at Weimar by an international jury as one of the six greatest essayists in the Spanish language. Since 2006 he has been director of the National Library of Peru.

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