

ABOUT THE SPANISH AND INDIAN CULTURES IN THE NEW SPAIN DURING THE XV AND XVI CENTURIES

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Forewords

Between June 4 and July 14 of 1995, I participated in a Summer Institute sponsored by *The Community College Humanities Association* and funded by the *National Endowment for the Humanities*. This summer institute, **Center and Periphery in New Spain: 16th and 17th Century Spanish and Indigenous Cultures in Mexico and New Mexico** (CPNS-95) went from July 4th to the 25th. The Institute met at the Universidad Sor Juana in Mexico City and later, between June 26th and July 14th, at the University of New Mexico. The Institute gathered 25 college and university professors together from all over the United States.

The Institute's objectives were to provide, "the opportunity to study with a dozen internationally known scholars in the field of Pre-Columbian, Spanish and Mexican Southwestern history and culture."¹ The CPNS-95 "[drew] participants into the emerging national dialogue on the interpretation of the events and documents associated with the voyages of Columbus and the subsequent "encounters" [my emphasis] of the European, African, and indigenous peoples in the Americas." (Ibid.) According to the organizers, "the goals of the Institute [were] to enable participating faculty to develop new competencies in the burgeoning interdisciplinary scholarship on the subject of the "encounter" and its key texts, and to enable them to bring a richer understanding of the diverse cultural realities of the period of the New World encounters to their teaching, curriculum development and scholarship." Finally, "the intellectual premise of the Institute [was] that Pre-Columbia/European encounters have been decisive in generating the subsequent identity and character of civilizations and cultures in the Americas, and serve as paradigms for the dynamics of "encountering the other," [emphasis in the text] case studies for the ongoing encounters and interactions of cultures and subcultures in the Americas and elsewhere in the world." (Ibid.).

In this work I will discuss some concerns about the analytical interpretations of the various subjects covered during this Summer Institute in regard to the Americas. My view is that some of the studies and corresponding theoretical, methodological and conceptual approaches used to explain the origins of the Americas, which predominates within U.S. academia are inappropriate tools. As a consequence, most of the conclusions are neocolonial in nature, display naivete and are inconsistent, because their formulations are ethnocentric. The results are lamentable and mainly at the political level. Through the application of these types of conceptual and analytical parameters possibilities to achieve a global understanding of Latin America or to propose local alternative solutions and models for the development of the region are limited. Current studies of Latin America and the Caribbean are dominated by, distorted and biased interpretations of the past, that are disconnected from the present, and distort our bearings on the future.

By analyzing some pedagogical materials used during the CPNS-95 to facilitate our “cultural encounter” in the Americas, I will discuss some of my concerns about the topics that were studied in this Summer Institute. Among other concerns I intend to discuss some of the theoretical, methodological, historical, sociological, and political inconsistencies in the program. Purely empirical, functionalist, neoliberal and neopositivist interpretations of the Americas are not necessarily the most appropriate analytical categories to give an account for the complex realities in the region that explain its historical incorporation into the international order. As a matter of establishing an urgently needed dialog about this and other issues in the Americas it is first necessary to reformulate our theoretical and methodological tools to give account of what really happened to people who have lived on the continent.

THE THEORY

What is a social analysis? This broad question involves a variety of theoretical and methodological problems, which are very difficult to resolve, due to a lack of systematic and organized explanations. This fact, among others, is one of the weaknesses in most political theories. For this reason, historical and political analyses began to proliferate rapidly in Latin America since the 1960s. Three factors can explain the accelerated development in political, historical and socio-economic studies from the region.

The first factor is a historical one: the Cuban Revolution and its aftermath. As a result, a period of rapid revolutionary movements was followed by the emergence of military states to halt the advances of popular movements and the replication of revolutionary transformations similar to Cuba. In this context economic, political and social studies flourished in the region providing accounts of the events affecting South America and later, Central America.

The second factor was the incorporation of Marxism and its acceptance as an academic discipline in Latin American universities during this period. As a result, Marxism became an important instrument of analyses in various disciplines and academic programs that influenced the professional formation of several generations. Most significantly, Marxism became intimately linked to the notion of social change instead of a purely academic theoretical analytical approach. In this context, studies of the Americas from the past to the in regard to the future of Latin America utilized Marxism as the main vehicle of analyses, interpretation and social changes on the continent. For these reasons Marxism became so attractive for popular movements and so dangerous for the U.S. corporations, the White House and the local ruling classes from Latin America.

The prolonged economic crisis and its consequences on all levels of Latin American societies was a third factor promoting the need for more comprehensive studies of the many problems that affected the region. Weak and biased formulations, explanations and solutions prevailing in traditional academe, international organizations and political authorities worked to stimulate search for alternative explanations and solutions to the cruel reality of Latin America. The lack of appropriated theoretical interpretations and the absence of reliable historical, political and economic sources originated a series of studies to fill the gap left by Eurocentric-oriented interpretations. Nevertheless, these alternative studies included a variety of interpretations and strategies to overcome the crises in the region. However, these analyses contributed to a rich reinterpretation of the conditions that originated Latin American’s current underdevelopment and proposed new strategies to confront the problems from a regional perspective. Let us briefly mention some of the main characteristics in these pioneering Latin American studies.

Preexisting Studies in Latin America

A type of studies developed in Latin America included historical, political, social, and economic analyses that were the result of exhaustive compilation and ordering of empirical data. Nonetheless, the information gathered excluded the theoretical elements that permitted interpretation. As a result, these studies did not yield observations

of trends other than what the data suggested. In certain cases, these empirical trends included some theoretical explanations. Most often these explanations did not give account for even the primary aspects of the social phenomena studied. This tendency generally occurred within historical analyses that used the structural-functionalist framework². Why? Because this theoretical formulation presents serious analytical difficulties in explaining why societies change and finally disappear. This theory, which is also known as the “theory of the status quo”, assumes that all parts of a society work harmoniously amongst themselves and do not create elements that are likely to generate drastic social changes³.

A second group of studies concerning Latin America displayed a lack of connection between the analysis and the information gathered. Thus, theoretical elements used in these analyses did not establish a relationship **among**, and **between**, various aspects in situations for which these studies attempted to give an account. Consequently, theory and reality run parallel; that is, they were separate from one another despite all of the efforts made to fit them together within the final conclusions.

Other types of analysis of Latin America made it very difficult to ascertain the period or the phase of a social phenomenon studied. Some of these works analyze occurrences, situations or processes without clearly establishing the corresponding historical stages that would permit to differentiate or observe the variations between them. Most of these studies assume incorrectly that a social process is something that occurs continuously as the summation of a series of events. A good example of this situation is the tendency to speak in general terms about the capitalist system and its effects on Latin America. References to any specific historical period are typically omitted, thus obscuring the various historical modalities that capitalism assumed in the region. Under these circumstances it is not possible to distinguish the historical effects of capitalism on the different regions of Latin America, the people and their processes. For example, to distinguish the process of transformation in some regions from agrarian production to industrialization, the modalities they assumed their similarities and differences.

Finally, some studies centered on very specific historical, political and economic aspects through focusing on a single aspect only totally disconnected from other important elements. For example, to conduct a detailed study of some of Mexico City’s baroque churches, as a form of “pure” architectonic expression while ignoring the social, political, ideological, or economic factors which accompanied this colonial construction. This tourist-oriented tendency is represented in many academic studies as an obsessive characteristic that dissects the whole and reduces it into disconnected pieces, which focuses heavily on studying a particular aspect isolated from the totality. This characteristic, which might be referred to as a “salami theory”, once that a historical “dissection” has been introduced, loses its connection with the global context of events being studied. Another example would be studies that focus solely on Mayan or Aztecs artistic expressions in the 15th Century that are disconnected from the central aspects of their cultures. This might include ignoring the Mayans or Aztecs systems of production, along with their respective social, political and ideological organizations from where all these artistic expression originated. Inattention to these matters predominated during the CPNS-95.

At this point it is necessary to remember that the intention of the socio-historical studies is to concentrate on knowledge of social phenomena as a totality. Failure to understand this important element can lead to studies concerned only with “dead people”, disappeared villages and ghost towns. Instead, studies should be designed for understanding formative material transformations in societies from the past, in connection with their correspondent social, political and ideological patterns. The concept of culture, for example, understood as a *complex whole consisting of symbols, languages, values, norms and elements of social control that people have acquired as members of a society* is fundamental to these type of studies. From a methodological point of view, the different disciplines in the social sciences carry on their observations and studies based on the fundamental cultural and productive forms in society. Anthropologists, sociologists, historians and other social scientists concentrate, then, on the study of “living” people. This characteristic requires tracing their social existence, systematically, from the past.

METHODOLOGY

Methodologically speaking, the process of defining **What** is a social/historical period and **How** to analyze it, causes researchers to consider several situations.

In the first place, it is necessary to define the **levels of abstraction** used to analyze society and history. Studies of society can, and must use different levels of abstraction. This means several things; a] Reality might be examined or “interrogated” beginning with study and the discovery of simple elements to provide an explanation of the basic articulations and fluctuations in society. In other words, this is an effort to comprehend the entire reality and its dynamics beginning from the simplest. b] Less abstract levels of analysis usually include greater quantities of the elements that makeup a social reality. As a result, we now have an increasingly complex growing collective that requires careful study of its multiple components before we can offer a cohesive and accurate explanation. c] Each level of analysis requires specific theoretical formulations in a double sense: to redefine these levels appropriately, and to develop specific theoretical frames that are adequate to the level of analysis needed for the study.

Another methodological aspect consists of **establishing the time periods** of the social processes being analyzed. This is linked directly to the necessity for establishing precise theoretical and methodological criteria, which permit introduction of historical periods. The objective is to construct accurate units of analysis to avoid the pitfalls of the “salami” approach, in which social phenomena are fragmented into isolated pieces losing connection with the whole.

Certainly, there exist different theoretical frameworks and corresponding methodological approaches to study our societies. This process requires the selection of theories that provide a methodology which permit the attainment of a proper approach to the subject of our study. Without denying the importance of artistic expressions, ideology, social consciousness, beliefs, values, behaviors and many other elements that take place at level of the superstructure, any serious analysis must consider the forms in which the members of society are organized on earth. Without any doubt, human beings organize themselves at the level of production. Around this fundamental activity, human beings develop their culture and society.

Now, to understand the category of culture from this “materialistic” paradigm, as many Latin Americans have done, it is necessary to consider two aspects. One of these refers to **scientific research**, wherein the definition of culture itself allows for the implementation of a methodology suitable for the study of many aspects of society (symbols, language, values, norms, social control, etc). The other element refers to the way of **orchestrating** the knowledge obtained through this process. This makes analysis of the particularities found in the each of diverse stages of the process being studied possible. Such an approach enhances the analysis of the most important relationships “revealed” by the study of all relevant historical facts.

A proper methodological approach, then, considers that the knowledge of reality **is a true discovery** (regardless of whether this knowledge comes in the form of history, archaeology or any other social discipline). Knowledge is not the acceptance of the first thing we see each time we open the “window of history” to look outside. In other words, knowledge is an effort of discovery for the researcher because reality does not merely reveal itself. The researcher needs to “interrogate” reality in order to learn it and organize an explanation for its characteristics. When reality presents itself to the researcher, it does so in a confusing, distorted and changeable manner. Consequently, to “interrogate” reality adequately **categories** and **concepts** that originate appropriate theoretical formulations must be organized and ordered hierarchically. Academic ingenuity utilized to study reality without a theoretical-methodological foundation can only obtain obvious answers; those of common sense. As a result, very little or nothing at all will be attained in the process of knowing social reality.

It has become a fashion in academia to use a research methodology of a *paparazzo* nature. This system consists in gathering data, elements, and anecdotes, altogether with spectacular situations, events or personalities. This formula, widely used by the sensationalist media today, where armies of journalists and photographers constantly circulate around movie stars, singers, politicians and celebrities also applies to some social researchers. The aim is to capture the latest sexual scandals (Michael Jackson and child molestation), for example, pornography (Madonna nude), divorces and marriages (Princess Diana and Dodi Fayed), incestuous relationships (Woody Allen and Mia Farrow adopted daughter), capital crimes (the O. J. Simpson trial), or the latest sexual scandal in the White House, for an exclusive. Once a paparazzi has succeeded in gathering exclusive information s/he will obtain a juicy economic compensation for the sale of his/her exclusive materials, as well as to gain prestige and fame. Each paparazzi hopes to win an award for his/her scoop. The final goal of a paparazzi is to publish a book, to sell millions of copies and to shape the images that end upon the movie screen and home video via Hollywood.

The powerful influence of mass media in the U.S. and its increasingly neoliberal and entrepreneurial characteristic has also influenced the social sciences. Without denying or ignoring the academic seriousness and excellence of many scholars in the social sciences field, it is nonetheless certain that many have adopted the *paparazzo* modality in their studies. The goal is to produce a kind of academic best seller that promotes the researchers' academic marketability via conferences, invitations to give lectures on the topic, to write articles for different journals and magazines, invitations to appear on television, consulting jobs, etc. Psychological, emotional, individualist and eccentric interpretations, mostly irrelevant for understanding the subject of the study are added to sensationalize the final work-product⁴.

THE CONCEPTS

A fundamental aspect in social analysis is the need to provide a rigorous definition of the concepts and the categories used to give account of any particular social phenomenon. Concepts are usually understood like an abstract idea that represents an aspect of the social world in a somewhat idealistic and oversimplified form--social class, income *per capita*, social consciousness, ethnocentrism, for example. Some concepts can have a value that varies from case to case, in much the same way that price in a supermarket varies from item to item. Social scientists use the term **variable** to signify any concept that has a different value from case to case. Related to the use of variables is the process of **measurement** that is, *determining the value of a variable in any given case*. However, not all variables are easily measured, so variables must be operationalized in order to accomplish the functions assigned by the researcher when they were created (Macionis: 1987:33).

Those concepts understood as tools essential for working in social research could also manipulate reality through a series of epistemological maneuvers and serve particular interests in society. This is the case in the concept of democracy, for example, which may become a form of tyranny depending upon who defines or interprets it. Evidently, the White House and the Cuban Government have a different understanding and application of the same concept. In other words, ideological distortion or interpretation of a reality can also negate, hide, confuse or twist factual relationships of a social or cultural phenomenon in our explanation or functioning of a society.

In the CPNS-95 the concepts of *center* and *periphery* were introduced to differentiate between Europe as the center and New Spain as the periphery during the period between the 14th and 16th Centuries. These concepts, which could offer certain analytical value, were not properly defined and thus lead to confusion⁵. The concepts were also used in reference to relationships between Mexico City and the territories that are today New Mexico and contiguous regions. Consequently, all those territories that developed forms of centralized power under the conquerors also were interpreted by these analyses as "centers". Similarly, these subordinate regions, towns or villages to the control of the "centers" were also referred to as "peripheries." This indiscriminate application of the concepts of center and periphery impeded observation of the singularities and differences in the nature of the processes occurring in Europe (the center) and New Spain (the periphery), for example, and between New

Spain (also a center) and California (also a periphery). In other words, it is not possible to compare relationship between and among these societies and, more importantly, their gradual integration into the world economic order.⁶

SOCIETY AS A HISTORICAL PROCESS

Historicity of social processes became a central point in the studies about the Latin American reality since the 1960s. The aftermath of the Cuban revolution contributed valuable theoretical formulations regarding the Latin American social reality and social change. As a result, the need to clarify the process of **historicizing knowledge** in order to give a more realistic account of the Latin American underdevelopment considered three main elements.

Firstly, the concepts and the theoretical formulations created to give an account of Latin American reality are restricted or subjected to transformations, because they correspond to particular historical moments in a social process. Consequently, concepts and their corresponding theoretical formulations can be reformulated or simply discarded to the extent that new scientific element can be incorporated into the analysis. This approach permits opportunities to give account for new elements not observed or presented in other stages of the same historical process. In other words, the only enduring element in this process is the analysis of reality and its motion, the analysis of reality and its contradictions, understood as historical phenomena. Categories and elements discovered through this process can become obsolete factors and, therefore, replaced by new theoretical development.

Second, the process of “historicizing” knowledge also implies understanding of social organizations as changing elements continuously in motion. That is, a social process is born, develops, and then finally disappears in the same way that a human being does. What is important then, is to identify which stage in this process we are studying to account for its characteristics. Consequently, in this approach the only permanent thing is **social change**.

One of the most important criticisms by Latin American scholars is the lack of historicity in analyses by neoliberal economists and neopositivist scholars. In response, significant numbers of studies originated in Latin America worked at demonstrating the manifest absence of historical frameworks in most of these paradigms. This explains the tendency to present capitalist movements in the economy as productive and organizational intrinsic modalities for all type of societies. In this manner, neoliberal free markets economies work equally well in Belize, Ethiopia, Japan or the U.S.; it is simply a matter of making the appropriate adjustments.

According to this approach to give a historical context to the process of knowledge implies that the subject of study of any event presents in different stages which must not be avoided or ignored by the researcher. On the contrary, through this process, it is possible to discover new fundamentals that permit not only to understand the past, but in addition, how these tendencies contribute to shaping the present and future in relation with the social phenomenon being studied. For example, an alternative approach to the study of “center” and “periphery” or Europe and New Spain, during the 15th Century should consider aspects such as: ethnic and social sectors who originated those regions; their organizational characteristics; forms of resistance and struggle; their productive sectors and characteristics; their cultural and ideological, political and religious structures and posterior development. In sum, this historical study should have been approached like a process in motion, and not like an ahistorically stable and permanent situation. In consequence, the instructors of the CPNS-95 could have avoided becoming trapped in historical oversimplification. In this fashion, the general concepts become abstract or empty elements, without a concrete foundation because they do not include specific events that condition the study elements. In other words, **abstract truths do not exist; on the contrary, reality shows that truths are always concrete**.

Merely collecting historical data about a conqueror, a town, a culture, or a social class is not adequate to gain sufficient knowledge about these and other subjects. Data requires synthesis within a conceptual framework that allows for interpretation and relationship to the whole social totality. In this way, the concepts “center” and “periphery” will not only appear as two geographically different regions but they will be observed for their economic, political and social relationships. As a result, appropriate comparisons between these regions could be carried out to understand the enormous differences, on all levels, that existed between Spain and New Spain. This approach does not imply that each researcher must study every single or all the elements of the social totality relating to the study. Key aspects such as the economy, the State, social organizations, etc., can be collected from other studies and reconnected with the specific aspects of the phenomenon being analyzed.

The Quality of other Theoretical Focuses

There exist many different theoretical paradigms to explain society, its structures, its social dynamics and transformations. Faced with this variety of theoretical alternatives it is necessary to make a decision about which is the most appropriate model to apply in a particular social, political, or historical study. However, **not all theoretical models permit the researcher to obtain the same accuracy, quality and amount of details for explaining a social phenomena.** In effect, there exist theoretical formulations that contribute to broadening the field of study and allow deepening into the social processes that interest us. Consequently, this requires evaluation of the different theoretical trends, which permits researchers for understanding the degrees of knowledge that are attainable from these theoretical formulations. From an empirical analysis of society, for example, it is possible to gather series of data about various relevant facets, such as, study of a population census of a region or a particular period. Now, if the study stops at this level we will reach only a partial and limited understanding of that particular process. To the extent we combine the population census or other empirical data, with additional information such as population movements in that region, their crises, conflicts, stagnation, development and ruptures, the explicative value of the study will increase.

At this stage, certain theoretical interpretations begin experiencing weaknesses because their conceptual and methodological applications do not include, or give only passing attention to analytical categories such as social change, for example. For these reasons it is not beside the point to explain the rapid development of Marxist studies in Latin America between the 1960s and 1970s. This paradigm provided most of the historical, conceptual and theoretical elements needed to give an account of the chronic condition of underdevelopment affecting Latin America. Most importantly, Marxism also provided the foundations for alternative development best expressed in the Cuban Revolution. Non-Marxist sectors such as the Church, governments and politicians also utilized this theoretical approach in research mainly because of the depth in its analytical elements. Without a doubt Marxism was and continues to be widely used as a tool in the social analyses in Latin America. Its operational and, most important, explicative advantages allow researchers to understand and observe what is occurring in the countries of the region with relation to the insertion of their economies into world capitalism.⁷

In one way or another theoretical trends permit researchers to grasp certain aspects of reality. Nonetheless, there is a serious risk inherent in mixing categories and concepts from different sources to bridge some methodological or conceptual gaps, or to enhance the theoretical framework of a study. This common trend in the social sciences is called **eclecticism**, that is, the *combination of categories originating from different theoretical frameworks*. As a result, eclecticism does not permit scholars to overcome the existing theoretical weaknesses. On the contrary, eclecticism reproduces the same weaknesses, but in other forms. To choose eclecticism is to close a door that should remain open in the search for a correct theoretical solution.⁸

In the following pages I will discuss some theoretical-methodological-conceptual problems encountered in the studies of Latin America during the CPNS-95. This discussion is in response to some of the main topics that were analyzed, and consequently follow the same order and structure as the presentations and corresponding readings. I begin with the formation of the Spanish Empire in Europe (the center) to facilitate an understanding

of the nature of the “discovery” of the Americas, and the “encounter” with the “Indians” from the “New World” (the periphery).⁹

SPAIN AND THE FORMATION OF CAPITALISM

Historically, the development of capitalism occurred in different stages and each of them is characteristically distinct in terms of the level of maturity reached. These stages can be identified by the specific period in which certain developmental aspects of capitalism were manifested. For example, Marx in his theoretical paradigm (historical materialism) spoke about the primitive accumulation of capital in reference to the initiatory stage of capitalism's prehistory as the capitalist mode of production. In order for that stage to occur it is a necessity that two processes precede it: a] the total separation of the workers from ownership of the means for production (of tools, equipment, property) and subsequent transformation of those tools into capital goods (under the control of the capitalist); b] and secondly, the transformation of peasants (the former owners of those productive tools) into wage laborers. As a consequence of this, social systems in a “pure” form do not exist in any period in the development of capitalism. Therefore, it is only possible to find transitional combinations that include elements from these various stages in the development of capitalism, with historical modes identified only by the dominance of one particular developmental mode of production over the others. In this way, we can ascertain which stage of development we are discussing.

From this perspective, the “discovery” of America coincides with the process of the dissolution of feudalism with its corresponding productive system and social relations. Servile types of relationships and an agrarian economy based on an exchange system characterized the feudal system. Around the mid-Middle Ages, payments in money became more common so that it was utilized in the economic transactions of that period. This productive system reached its peak between the 9th and the 11th Centuries, when a series of factors contributed to its decline. Let us discuss, briefly, some of these factors and their effects on Spain.

Capitalism and Territorial Unification

Because of their strategic geographical location in the Mediterranean, Spain and Portugal became one of the first regions where gradual transformations from the feudal system began to occur. The first springtime of capitalism originated in these regions of Europe. The Christian kings undertook the task of unifying the territories under Arab control. They were aided by a group of merchants who benefited from the trade occurring in the Mediterranean. These commercial sectors contributed to the territorial unification of Europe by providing large portions of the funds needed to accomplish this enterprise. Important pro-industrial bourgeois sectors began to emerge in most of these territories. This initial stage of capitalism in Spain allowed the merchant sector to obtain political advantages as expressed through representation in the Courts (1238) and later in 1527, in the City Halls (Vitale: 1971:121).

The origin of the Spanish commercial sector comes from the trade relationships established within the regions of the North Atlantic and various other ports located in the Mediterranean, including Lisbon, Marseilles and Genoa. During the 12th century, Barcelona had become the primary center of operations for maritime expeditions from the Old World. Commercial capital played an important role in the transformation of the feudal system through financing of new industries. Thus, during the 15th Century, 50.000 workers labored in the textile industries of Spain. Moreover, during the reign of Charles V, the city of Seville had 15.000 looms and 130.000 workers who supplied the internal and external demand for these products. In all of Western Europe, there was an increase in trade and a great economic surge, expressed through expansion of commerce in the Atlantic and the rise of mercantile and industrial predominance of cities such as Lisbon, Antwerp and London. (Gilbert: 1981:19).

During the 15th century, various European nations presented different aspects of development. On the one hand, Spain demonstrated its inability to transform its commercial stage into an industrial one. On the other

hand, after the consolidation of commercial sectors and the development of a mercantile system, both France and England initiated a process of industrialization that allowed them to increase their bases of accumulation, first internally and later abroad. This occurred because the unification of territories in France and England was solid and the bourgeoisie worked in close alliance with the kings. Simultaneously, these countries underwent important developments that secured the internal consolidation of the bourgeois sector and implemented a protectionist system to defend their national industries against foreign competition. This process became an artificial mode of “manufacturing manufactures” and also, a form of expropriating independent laborers from their means of production. In addition, this system facilitated capitalization of the national means of production and subsistence, and cutting short the transition from a medieval to a modern productive system. (Le Riverend: 1967:130). Having consolidated the internal control of their countries the bourgeois sectors consolidated the development of industries in their territories.

In Spain, the process of unifying its territories was different from that of the rest of Europe. For one reason, unification of Spain was only achieved in 1492, with the conquest of the City of Granada. At first, the different interests of the various commercial sectors weakened the overall process of industrialization. Afterwards, as new territories occupied by the Arabs were re-conquered, they were re-distributed among the nobility and the Church who continued operating as feudal lords rather than promoting industrialization as occurred in other regions of Europe. A powerful yet unproductive bureaucracy was imposed in Spain. This factor was followed by the imposition of a heavy taxation system upon the population to finance the Crown's enormous military budget, the imperial administration, and some parasitic economic sectors such as the **nobility** and the **clergy**. Finally, at the ideological level the alliance between the Church and the kings was particularly strong because they had common enemies in Islam, and Judaism.

The “discovery” of America (which occurred the same year as the Spanish unification) put an end to Spain's industrialization. The enormous wealth extracted from the American colonies increased royal power making the Crown independent from the merchants and industrial sectors. This element gave a noticeable conservative character to the Spanish State in a period of drastic and rapid social, political and productive transformations. Spain fell into a process of stagnation that consolidated the same year 1492 when the Crown decreed expulsion of the Jews, thus depriving the Empire of its most dynamic pro-industrial sector, and one of its most important merchant and scientific community.¹⁰ Manufactured goods required by Spain and its colonies began to flow in from industrialized European nations through the services of Italians merchants who took over that important economic sector from the Empire.

Financing of Overseas Expeditions

Let us insist that Spain was one of the first countries in Europe to initiate a transformation from feudalism into capitalism through the commercial relations established with the Mediterranean, North Atlantic and the Middle East. Thus, during the 12th and 13th Centuries, Spanish merchants began to establish active trade with the most important world trade centers of that time. Such relations cannot be described as part of capitalism, but they certainly contributed to the emergence of that productive system and the development of primitive accumulation of capital (the prehistory of capitalism).

The rapid advances made by the Turks began to place serious stress on the flourishing mercantile era. The Turks continued to progressively take over the Arab Empire that had previously ruled Egypt and Asia Minor. In 1453, the Turks conquered Constantinople, the last bastion of the declining Roman Empire. This was an event that created many problems for trade in the Mediterranean even though the Turks did not stop merchants from Genoa and Venice for carrying on business in the region. Commercial and international crises created as a consequence of the Turkish expansion forced the European nations to finance maritime expeditions to find alternative routes to the Mediterranean Sea to normalize maritime trade. There was always a drive to obtain new wealth for the ever more competitive nation-states now consolidating in Europe. According to historical records,

these enterprises were funded by sectors of the emerging bourgeoisie where many groups had evolved from simple intermediaries and moneylenders to bankers. These sectors became the main financiers of commercial and manufacturing enterprises (Gilbert et.al: 1979:17).

The process of transformation of the European society and its social classes during the 15th Century entered a new phase with the creation and establishment of financial houses and commercial societies, such as the Hanseatic League that perfected the system of capital transfer and credits. Banks like the House of Saint George of Genoa, one of the first modern banks established in 1407, the House of Soranzo in Venice, and the House of Medicis in Florence, combined money trading with trading of goods and financing new enterprises.

The Spanish commercial sector also became integrated in this expansionist process and was associated with German and mainly Genoese bankers, who made possible the financing of overseas expeditions. Contrary to the romantic interpretations that emphasize Queen Isabella's altruism and Columbus' fantasies, there is doubt as to whether this overseas expedition could have been possible without the active participation of bankers. The banking groups badly needed geographic expansion for support and growth in their economic and trade operations. Consequently, the maritime expedition that brought Columbus to the Americas was funded by Spanish and Genoese merchants who were interested in finding a new route to India. Spanish traders invested approximately two million in gold, of which more than half came from a loan from merchants from the Holy Brotherhood. The rest was covered Martin Alonso Pinson, the richest merchant in Palos. Some authors maintain that Genoese merchants, Di Negro and Doria, and the Florentine banker, Juanoto de Berardi, also funded Columbus' expedition (Teilteibom: 1943).

Columbus expedition was, without any doubt, a successful investment and also, the beginning of many others that inundated Europe with gold, silver and other products from the Americas. This made possible the expansion of capitalism from its mercantile form to the industrial stage. Another crucial year in the prehistory of European capitalism was 1502, when the Portuguese, sailing southward in the Atlantic along the coast of Africa, found a new route to the regions rich with goods that were in demand in the European market. These products, traditionally bartered in the Near East, were supplied to that market by Venetian and Genoese merchants. The discovery of this new route was a decisive cause in the decline of the Italian cities on the Mediterranean, which up to that point had shown the highest development of primitive capitalism (Le Riverend, op. cit. 146). Within this international context, let us observe the social classes of Spain.

SOCIAL STRATIFICATION VERSUS SOCIAL CLASSES

One of the major problems in the existing analyses of pre-Columbian Spain is the extremely fragile sociological paradigm used to explain the behavior of the diverse classes that made up the rigid Spanish social structure in that period. The problem derives from the use of a structural-functionalist approach to describing social classes. This approach does not permit application of a rigorous study of social classes nor a mean to reach comprehensive understanding of the ruling ideology in Spain. The study of the ideology dominating Spain during this period is an important element, because it allows an understanding for the conqueror's behavior and attitudes toward populations in the Americas in their "encounters" with the "New World."

The dilemma with this analysis lays in confusing the categories elaborated by the structural-functionalist theory with those theories of social classes based on historical materialism. The concept of social classes is, without any doubt, very ambiguous and, therefore, has different meanings. Many scholars in academia associate social class with economic income, social status, prestige, education and occupation. Thus, individuals from society are grouped into upper, middle and lower classes along with some variances including high-middle, middle-middle or lower-middle class, and so forth.

Essentially, social stratification correlates with social inequality, which according to the functionalists is needed to accomplish a positive **function** in the preservation of society. In effect, social stratification motivates individuals to work harder. In compensation for their sacrifices, society rewards hardworking individuals economically and by awarding them power and prestige. The social reward depends upon the importance of an occupation or role that an individual plays, along with the specialized training and abilities. For example, medical doctors receive more social and economic compensation than do garbage collectors because their work socially defined as more important and requires additional training and talent. This type of thinking posits that individual sacrifices promote a type of social mobility, which is possible because of social stratification in a particular society.¹¹

When these types of analyses are applied to historical periods, as occurred in the CPNS-95, leads to confusion and to analytical mistakes by giving the impression that anyone who was a hard worker in Spain could have become a member of the nobility. Perhaps, this was also the understanding of the conquerors that came to the Americas. Nevertheless, a careful analysis of the rigid class structures and ethnicity in Spain displays a different reality. This characteristic requires the application of a more rigorous theoretical framework to fully understand the behavior of the diverse sectors in the Spanish Empire. The use of appropriate analytical-historical tools that permit observations of differences between social classes, and within them, are essential for understanding the existence of a rigid social and ethnic structure in Spain.

In one of opening sessions of the CPNS-95 the following figures regarding the Spanish social classes during the period of Columbus' incursion into the Americas were presented.

Aristocracy

5.000 magnates and bishops	0.07%
50.000 military nobility	0.72%
60.000 urban nobility	0.85%

Subtotal 1.64%

Middling Classes

70.000 clergy	1.00%
160.000 urban	2.30% (40.000 <i>converses</i>)
25.000 rich and small farmers	0.35%

Subtotal 3.56% *

Lower Classes

850.000 artisans and workers (city)	12.15%
5.780.000 peasants	82.50%*

Subtotal 94.65%*

* Information not included in this table, but inferred from the data.

According to this information, Spain had a population of seven million inhabitants during the period. Out of the total population, 115.000 persons (1.64%) belonged to the aristocracy; 255.000 (3.65%) made up the middle class; and 6,630 million (94.65%) were lower class.

From these data it is possible to observe the unequal social structure of the Spanish Empire and to grasp an idea of the concentration and distribution of wealth among its population. However, these analytical categories

inaccurately lead to the belief that both, Christopher Columbus and Hernán Cortez, were members of the nobility just as the Bishop of Castile or a Titulo from Leon. In fact, Columbus and Cortez were appointed to the nobility in payment for their services to the Crown, while the others were born into nobility. Material, political and social differences within the nobility were enormous. Consequently, the rigid stratification of Spain and its unequal distribution of wealth, power and prestige created an extremely complicated situation.

At the time of the Conquest Spain was stood atop of two different worlds: the international world and its own world. The first was part of the future while the second world belonged to the past. By the end of the 15th and beginning of the 16th Centuries Spain had become the most dynamic trade center in the world. Paradoxically, the inflow of gold, silver and other products from the Americas augmented the parasitic nature of the ruling classes of Spain.¹² Considering that during this period one third of the Spanish's wealth belonged to the Crown, another third to the nobility and the rest to Church, it is not difficult to understand the structural impediments of this country to give up the past to achieve true economic development (Vinces: 1967:270).

To gain an idea about the concentration of wealth in Spain, Hans Jürgen (1978: 16) suggests that out of a population of nine million under the reigns of Castile and Seville in 1542, the nobility was divided as follows: 0.8 % belonged to the high nobility and 0.85% to the urban aristocracy. Together, these minority groups controlled more than 97% of the land of the Iberian Peninsula, at the time, the most valuable productive element.

The irrationality of the Spanish Empire was based on deep social inequalities originated by the rigid central power structure imposed upon the different social classes. Additionally, these social classes were also totally separated from the others. Class disparity made it practically impossible for any type of social mobility to occur between the classes. On the contrary, classes themselves were divided into a series of sub-classes, limiting ability to act as united and organized sectors, motivated by common interests. Within these ill-fated sub-classes, people were differentiated both by religious factors (to be Christian) and biological factors (to have pure blood). In other words, not to have Jewish or Moslem heritage. Class, then, became the determinative factor, making the probability of social change or social mobility unlikely within the rigid structure of Spain during that period. The nobility was the most rigidly divided of the social classes. This explains the different behaviors of its members, including those who would become conquerors. The noble class was made up of four very different sub-classes: Los Grandes, Los Titulos, Los Caballeros and the Hidalgos.

Los Grandes

From an economic point of view this sector was the most powerful. Also, Los Grandes were the closest group to the monarchy and in many ways were considered a part of it. The power and importance of this segment of the nobility came from the enormous privileges and benefits awarded by the Crown. This situation made the Grandes the most faithful collaborators of the monarchy. As unwavering allies of the monarchy the Grandes contributed to bonding other noble sub-classes to the Crown as well. While the Grandes were the base of support for the Crown they also contributed to alleviating the tensions and conflicts existing between central and local powers, a typical characteristic of feudal times.

The Grandes were also notorious for their conspicuous consumption of luxury goods and squandering. As a result of their ostentatious pattern of consumption the economy suffered and rapidly weakened, thus further impeding investment in more productive national pursuits and enterprises. On the contrary, the consumerist behavior of the Grandes transferred most revenues obtained from the Americas into the hands of foreign exporters. This situation resulted in paralysis and destruction of Spain's internal industry. Consequently, Spain continued to exist under a feudal form of society while capitalism rapidly advanced over Europe.

Los Titulos

This fraction of the nobility is sometimes confused with the Grandes. However, while each Grande was a Título the reverse was not also true. In other words, Títulos were not in a position to become a Grande. Unlike the Grandes, the Títulos were not directly linked to the Monarchy. The power of this sub-class came as a result of their territorial possessions more than their cooperation with the central power. In any event, the importance of the Títulos was a political one. The Títulos were rural landlords who acted on behalf of the Crown within their respective domains. This characteristic was the link that solidified power relationships with the nobility and therefore the Crown. However, similar to the Grandes, the Títulos also displayed squandering and ostentatious consumerist behaviors. In this sense, both groups were detrimental to the economy of the Spanish Empire. Fraction of the noble class augmented during the reigns of Charles I and Phillips II¹³ (Chanau: 1976:239).

Los Caballeros

This evidently inferior sub-class that existed within the rigid social structure of the Spanish kingdom, represented a sector that was more linked to the corporatist state. It is through the Caballeros that the nobility can exist as a class. The Grandes and the Títulos sent their younger sons to the most prestigious branches in the army --the cavalry for example-- while the Caballeros hoped and waited to do the same for their own sons. However, no one was ever born a Caballero. Becoming a Caballero was the result of rigorous and continuous effort and meritorious services to the Crown. This situation explains why the Caballeros felt the strongest sense of belonging to the noble class especially in comparison to the Grandes and Títulos.

Similar to the Clergy, the Caballeros were organized into Orders, and each with their respective rules and rituals, that were based on rigorous observation of Christian faith and the notion of race purity. To become a member of an Order of Caballeros meant that one had reached a higher level of prestige, as well as social and economic status. Additionally, Caballeros could participate in military campaigns that permitted them opportunities to increase their material wealth.

Noble Orders appeared during the Middle Age and were semi-autonomous organizations that survived economically by engaging in military campaigns (the old Lords of the War). Noble Orders became part of the State during the reign of Ferdinand the Catholic. In this way, the Caballeros became the most fanatical faction in the noble class. In other words, they were the most Catholic and the most racist members of the entire Spanish nobility. As a practical matter Caballeros had to behave as such, because they were dependent, in every sense, on the State (Mires: 1986:22).

Los Hidalgos

The Hidalgos (literally, the sons of someone) were the most complex faction in the nobility. Unlike the other sub-classes of nobles being a Hidalgo was primarily a matter of lineage--*el linaje*. Lineage was a very confusing term that signified ancestry from old Christian families in a direct line from an important personage who lived in the past. Like the Caballeros, the Hidalgos had to continuously produce evidence of their lineage, whereas the Grandes and Títulos had to prove nothing. This faction was composed of individuals willing to make the most incredible sacrifices to serve the King and God in hopes of becoming members of the nobility, in accordance with the mindset of that epoch.

In a strict sense, the Hidalgos were a sub-class that opposed the birth and development of capitalism without even being aware of this situation. This group was primarily motivated by their obsessive desires to accumulate gold and silver and to go back to Spain to live in lordly castles as members of the parasitic nobility of the Kingdom. However, this wealth did not come from productive labor because work was not noble. In stead, wealth was something that came from adventure, plundering and pillage as would later intensify in the conquered

territories of the Americas. Thus in 1541, for example, because of this aversion to labor, 13% of the families in Spain did not even pay taxes, nor did they engage in any type of productive work (Ibid.).

The roots for this cultural behavior had origins in the social and ethnic class system in an epoch where the diverse occupations had a notorious religious and racial character. The Moors worked the land, were shoemakers, tailors, carpenters, bricklayers, artists, etc. The Jews were artisans, industrialists, merchants, medical doctors, pharmacists and people of science. The Christians, for their part, were peasants or descendants from noble families. As such, if Christians did not want to be identified with the Moors or the Jews they had no other option than to become a Hidalgo or a clergy. In other words, poor Christians who were not members of the clergy were divided between Hidalgos and those who wanted to become Hidalgos. In this sense, it is a mistake to interpret the **hidalguía** as a typical characteristic of the Spanish culture during that epoch. On the contrary, this situation was instead the product of a society divided rigorously by social, racial and religious factors.

The Hidalgos were part of the nobility but, at the same time, they were not. This characteristic of younger sons longing for noble rank was a life pattern that permeated all aspects of the Spanish society in the 16th Century. Significantly, this was the mentality of most conquerors, including Hernán Cortéz, who came to the Americas. These are the ingredients that permit understanding of the historical cruelty of the conqueror and their unquenchable thirst for gold, silver and other material wealth. Also, it gives account for the profound religious fanaticism and contempt the conquerors held for other cultures and beliefs.

The Classist System of the Clergy

In a strict sense, the Church and the Spanish State cannot be considered as two dissimilar institutions because both were constituencies of the same system. The Church constituted a part of Spain that played an important role in the economy, the judiciary system and politics. Additionally, the Church was the most influential ideological component in the Spanish Empire and Europe. The Church was, therefore, part of an existing social structure where Catholicism became the center of the political ideology of the State. As a result the Clergy permeated all levels of Spanish society and with tremendous authority, including important aspects of the Empire's economy.

During the Conquest of America, the Church's revenues and wealth was enormous. However wide disparities existed between the incomes obtained by the Low Clergy in comparison to the High Clergy. This situation within the Clergy was comparable with that of the Hidalgos and the rest of the nobility. Juan Reglá (1958) argues that during the economic crises that affected the last period of Philip II's reign, the numbers of clergy and seminarians had doubled because other means of subsistence were in short supply (P.54). For this reason the Clergy was a type of social class in view of its organizational form, its functions, political meanings and powers within the State. In this sense, the Clergy was organized and functioned very similarly to the nobility. As a form of social class, then, it was not unusual for the Clergy to support the existing social, political and economic structure of the State and the structure of the Empire. The Clergy was an important segment of the State and benefited both materially and spiritually through the Church's strong monopoly on ideological power. Coincidentally, it was not a surprise that the Clergy followed spiritual leadership from Rome only when it did not interfere with the politics of the Spanish State. Nevertheless, most of the time the trends between Rome and the Spanish Empire were practically identical.

The priests who accompanied the conquerors of the Americas came from these clerical and noble factions in Spain, right along with their religious intolerance and racism. The evidence of these characteristics permits understanding of the conqueror-priest's mission as displayed in the Americas. The noble or friar who came to the Americas was not merely an adventurer nor a spiritual guide or an altruistic personage as portrayed by the apologists of the Conquest. On the contrary, these people were ambitious and cruel individuals, who were thirsty for gold and silver. The conqueror-priests came camouflaged with rosaries, cassocks, erudite writings, poems, and penitence, among other holy things.

The risks taken by Hidalgos-Priests-Conquerors were calculated actions relative to the forms of appropriation and distribution of the enormous wealth extracted from the Americas. The missions these conquerors carried out in the name of God and the King of Spain were done while they counted the gold and silver coins they pocketed. In this sense, both the military and the religious conquerors came with intentions of not only becoming rich but, also, to change their social class. These objectives could only be achieved if the conquerors appropriated the material and natural goods belonging to the native communities that lived in the Americas; and likewise, by forcing their indigenous populations to work for the conquerors. The writings of the Indian defender Fray Bartolomé de las Casas¹⁴ are, probably, the best evidence to support this reality, when in his *Brevísima Relación de la Destrucción de las Indias* wrote:

The reasons why an infinite number of Indian souls have been destroyed and killed has been only so that Christians can obtain gold and thus get fat on riches in only a few days, and then climb to high positions lacking any relationship to their social background. These are their ultimate goals (T.1: 21).

WHO WAS THE CONQUEROR?

The essential need to understand the behavior and motivations of the conquerors within their own European context is commonly obviated by structural-functionalists. Journalistic narrative has replaced analytical explanations. For these reasons, analyses become superficial and fail to grasp the totality of a historical phenomenon. Similarly, these types of studies also separate political, economic and ideological factors occurring in the same reality. Most of the time these elements are analyzed independently and they barely mix or combine. Consequently, the explanation is incapable of giving an accurate account of a particular situation. Clearly, we are in the presence of an historical reductionism (the “salami” approach). Consequently, we have access only to partial visions of whole situations and this leads to confusing meanings or exclusion of other important elements in the analysis.

To respond to the question, Who was the conqueror it is necessary to understand that we are in the presence of complex and contradictory *historical processes*. This requires an analysis based on the variables of time and place in which these processes occurred; let us insist, *historically*. However, to analyze the relationships between the conqueror and his mission does not mean to reduce historically observable facts (such as Indian massacres, types of religions, cultures or productive systems) to simple descriptive or narrative formulations based upon disputable objective studies. Also, studies conducted by Latin American scholars are not necessarily intended to continue blaming Spain and Portugal for committing crimes against humanity. Nevertheless, it should be clearly stated that both Spain and Portugal were the instruments used by capitalism to expand worldwide during the mercantile stage. However, many Latin American scholars and politicians do consider this process to be the original sin of modern civilization. Most importantly, these analyses permit explanation to present and future generations in Latin America for realizing how much pain, humiliation, and wealth they must yet sacrifice in the name of “progress” and “modernity”.

On the Trail of the Conqueror

For many centuries Gibraltar was the sole geographic point of entry and exit for the many maritime expeditions that linked the Mediterranean and therefore Europe --*Mare Nostrum*-- with Asia and Africa. Commercial activities between the diverse regions of the world during that epoch began or ended in what today is Spain, thus giving the impression that the Iberian Peninsula was the center of the planet. The culture of what later would be Spain originated then, based on its privileged geographical location. There, two social sectors flourished: those made up by the Iberians and those from the Mediterranean region. The first group arrived to the Iberian Peninsula approximately 2000 years before Christ. Later, around the year 900 BC they mixed with the Celts forming the Celtic-Iberian culture, which was deeply involved in agriculture and located in the interior of the Peninsula. The

Mediterranean sector, on the other hand, appeared with the arrival of the Phoenicians around 1000 years BC and they developed a culture based on foreign trade that was very much open to the rest of the world. The Phoenicians and later on, the Greeks established commercial centers around what today are known as the Ports of Cadiz and Malaga. In this way, a notorious contrast between the groups living in the interior of the Peninsula and the Mediterranean developed.

Once the Greeks left Spain the region became the focus of attention for Carthage in Africa and Rome in Europe, the two most powerful empires from that epoch. Mediterranean Spain became an indispensable place for the conquest of Europe by the Carthaginians, commanded by Hannibal. The successive victories of the African invaders convinced the Romans of the importance of conquering Spain in order to stop North African expansion through the region. From the year 200 A. D. Rome colonized the center of the Iberian Peninsula until the Moslem invasions in 711 AD

The decline of the Roman Empire, which for 1000 years dominated the Old World, weakened Spain leaving it exposed to a wave of invasions by other empires and civilizations. The Barbarians who came from the North of Europe and the Christians coming from the East finally ended the vacuum left by the Romans. The first Christians arrived to Spain during the first century of the present era. This was followed by a wave of invasions during the 6th Century by the Suevi, Alans and Vandals coming from Gaul and Germany. A series of conflicts developed between the new invaders and the Visigoths gained control of the territories. This civilization was Christian, in name, but Barbarian in reality. A fierce struggle against the heresies that characterized the era of Visigoths swamped Christianity, but continued penetrating the culture so that the people, including women who refused marriage and became nuns, dedicated themselves to contemplation of Christ (Fuentes: 1992: 48)

Because of the multiple wars of succession the Visigoth rulers began gradually to transfer the administration of the State into the Church. A continued intervention by the Church in the political affairs of the State there originated. This characteristic became strongly rooted in Spain and later in Latin America. From the Catholic Council celebrated at Toledo in year 598, King Recared, who had previously converted to Catholicism reaffirmed it as the official religion of the empire. According to the Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes, Isidoro, Bishop of Seville, was the most influential Spanish personage during the period that lasted from the fall of the Roman Empire (476 AD) to the Arab invasion (711 AD). He was a central force in the restitution of the juridical and political continuity of both the Church and Spanish State.

Because of the laws of the Roman Empire and its corresponding bureaucratic apparatus continued in authority the Catholic bishops became the real administrators of the Spanish Empire. The incompetence and the crises affecting the Gothic monarchs in power eased this process. By taking advantage of this situation Bishop Isidoro decreed a unification of Church and State. The State, which was subordinated to the Church on spiritual matters, also became subordinated to the Church in regard to secular matters. However, the new order also established that both the Church and the State could intervene in each other domain when necessary to avoid a vacuum of power. In two centuries of Visigothic rule, thirty kings with their various crises, rivalries and murders rotated into power, allowing the Church to become a permanent and influential actor in the public affairs of the Empire. Nearly a century later, Spain would face a new threat, this time from the Islam.

Eight centuries after the death of the prophet Muhammad, Islam reached its religious and political peak conquering Egypt and Tunis. Later, in the year 711, Tarik with his powerful army invaded Spain, which was under the Gothic control. The Arabs stayed on the Iberian Peninsula for almost eight centuries.¹⁵

The Christian resistance to Islam was organized in the mountains of Asturias and expanded toward the rest of Spain through centuries of military confrontations. The frequent crises and fragmentation of the Moslem State into small kingdoms finally allowed the Spanish forces to defeat the Arabs in the Naves de Tolosa Battle in 1213.

The Moslems retreated and concentrated in the City of Granada until 1492, when they were definitively defeated and expelled from Spain by the military forces of the now powerful Spanish Empire.

During the period of the Reconquista (Re-Conquest) it is possible to observe an interesting cultural phenomena where the division between Christians and Moslems was not clear. There existed the *mozarabes* (Christians who adopted the Moslem culture without converting to that religion); the *mudejares* (Moors that lived like Christian vassals); the *muladies* (Christians that converted to Islamism); the *tornadizos* (Moors converted to Christianity) and finally, the *enaciados* (a group that fluctuated between both religions according to their conveniences). The influence of this cultural contact is even reflected in the Spanish language. One quarter of the vocabulary used by this language contains words with an Arabic origin. However, for almost eight centuries Christian Spain concentrated its efforts on struggling with the Moors, a period known in history as the Reconquista.

Based on the Islamic concept of *jihad* the Moors accepted the holy war. Religious asceticism and wars against the unfaithful ones were integral parts of Islamic politics. In that way the Moors combined a fervent religious faith with a high warrior spirit that made them fearsome on the battlefields. Even Moslem clergy engaged in fighting. The Christian faith, on the other hand, had not allowed its clergy to become directly involved in activities of war and violence. But following the year 711, as a measure of response to the Moslem invasion, the Church began to militarize its orders. According to Carlos Fuentes (Ibid. 63), during the 11th Century the armies from the North were formed by contingents of monks who had become warriors. Identification between war and religion, a preponderant factor during the conquest of America was born from this notion of holy war.

Military orders made up of militant monks and priests like the Calatrava, Santiago and Alcantara Orders were created to combat the Moors. These Orders were funded and organized under the command of the Monarchy. The sense of holy war solidified through the creation of religious figures such as Santiago Matamoros (Moors Killer), who became an inspirational symbol of the popular resistance against the Arabs, which deepened the spirit of the Reconquista. In this symbol it is possible to see the combination of the Christian spiritual factors of faith and war. This notion accentuated by an inaccurate yet popular belief that Apostle Santiago was "Christ's twin brother" sent by God to Spain transformed into a ferocious warrior against the Moors. In this sense, if Apostle Santiago was with the Spanish Christians so was God. This belief gave the war of liberation then, the same holy character as that of the Moslems.

In 1248, King Ferdinand III captured the City of Seville. The King expelled 100.000 Moors who lived there and installed a monarchy that lasted for many years, and played an important role in reunifying Spain and later, in the Discovery of America. In 1469 Princess Isabella married Ferdinand of Aragón, known also as Ferdinand V, the Catholic, a convenient link which permitted the unification of the important kingdoms of Castile and Aragón¹⁶. From that moment the final mission was clear: to conquer the last Moslem position located in the City of Granada. This goal was achieved in 1492, the same year that Christopher Columbus "discovered" America for the Spanish Crown.

Spain succeeded in unifying its territory and originated a powerful empire that became one of the most important centers of Europe. The unification of its territories, the Moslem defeat, the expulsion of the Jews, and the Discovery of America, occurred in the same year 1492. Contradictory, as it may appear, these events caused a rapid flourishing of Spain while, at the same time, the Empire began a process of stagnation compared with the capitalist world.

The defeat and expulsion of the Moors was a political and religious triumph, not only for the Spanish Empire, but also for the Christians in Europe. The war against the Moslems had been fought in the name of Christianity, and therefore, this victory of Spain was interpreted as a reward bestowed on the Catholic Monarchy by God Himself for their crusade in support of Christianity. Consequently, the Spanish Crown and its ecclesiastical collaborators tried to give to the conquest of the Americas, a missionary-religious character where the material objectives of

the conquest appeared to be a secondary goal. According to Fernando Mires, this missionary sense can be clearly observed in Queen Isabella the Catholic's will and testament.

When the Holy Apostolic See granted us [titles] to those islands and the lands from the continent [Americas] we had and would discover. Our main intention was . . . to attempt to induce or attract their populations, and convert them to our holy Catholic faith. [Also], to send to those regions, religious people, priests and others who were well educated about God to instruct the neighboring inhabitants in the Catholic faith . . . (op. cit. 34). [Trans.]

The "New World" was then a divine gift to the Spanish Crown through God's representative on earth, Pope Alexander IV, as compensation for the losses suffered by the Catholic Church due to the advances of the Protestants and other religious trends. Fray Bernardino de Sahagún, a chronicler from that period, became a herald about this fact.

. . . And in these lands and with these people, our Lord has wanted to restore to the Church what the Devil has stolen in England and France, in Asia and Palestine. We are deeply obliged to thank our Lord and to work in this, His New Spain¹⁷ (trans.).

In the above context it is possible to conclude that the conquest of the Americas accomplished two main objectives: the conquest of souls and the conquest of material wealth. Significantly, no political, economic or ideological contradictions existed between these two goals among the hidalgos-priest-conquerors.

ENCOUNTER VERSUS CONFRONTATION

Structuralist historian and scholars frequently use sophisticated concepts (commonly, inadequate ones) to refer to certain social facts where their conflictive natures are generally concealed. Typically, these explanations make attempts to rationalize the irrational. Concepts like "cultural encounter," "cultural dialogue," "negotiating capacity of the Spaniards," the "New World," "center" and "periphery", have been stamped with the approval of many scholars in the First World to explain the relationship between Europe and its colonies. Such a conceptualization has a highly ethnocentric connotation, but also hides, twists or dilutes the countless pieces of historical evidence in regard to colonialism and its consequences for the Americas.

Let us insist that the Europeans, did not "discover" the American continent. In a strict sense, this was a casual encounter, but moreover, a violent confrontation between cultures and peoples. The cultures imposed by the Spaniards and Portuguese in the Americas could not remain identical to those from whence they came. The simple transplantation of their cultures obliged the Europeans to modify and adapt to the new forms of existence and specific objectives (accumulation of gold and silver). The Conquest beheaded native cultures: it caused native religions, arts and sciences to disappear, in particular, it drastically changed the cultures of the Mayans, Aztecs and Incas. In the case of the Mayans, Aztecs, Incas and many others their cultures, writing and buildings were destroyed, incinerated and buried. Nevertheless, many local traditions of their daily, domestic lives survived. European elements are central components of the Latin American and Caribbean traditions and life. Nevertheless, these characteristics do not authorize scholars and politicians to speak about a supposed "encounter" and "dialog" because of the notorious and obvious consequences from violence, exploitation, cruelty and pillage that characterized colonial enterprises.

At the moment of their arrival the Spaniards brought with them a tradition of confrontations, racism, cultural fanaticism and religious intolerance, already discussed in this article. Let us remember that in 1492, the Catholic Kings, Isabelle from Castile and Leon and Ferdinand of Aragon re-conquered the City of Granada. Thus, the last hub of Moorish culture that had established on the Iberian Peninsula the year 711 disappeared. It is important to note that after almost eight centuries, the Arabs still were considered foreigners. It is important to note that after

almost eight centuries, the Arabs still were considered foreigners. At the same year, these Catholic Monarchs expelled the Jews, and with them, disappeared the last vestige of the religious tolerance in Spain, which in one way or another, had existed until almost 1400. Finally, in 1609, the last groups that still maintained the Moslem religion were also expelled. Within this context, in the name of Queen and God, Christopher Columbus “discovered” America and initiated the “encounter” with the inhabitants of “Las Indias,” as the Spaniards incorrectly called the continent.

The Portuguese were not very different from the Spaniards, with whom they shared a similar background until the XII century, when they organized their empire. During that period the Portuguese took over the lands occupied by the Arabs re-conquering land in the Southwest of the peninsula North to Lisbon. In 1580 the Portuguese Empire unified with the Spanish Empire, but in 1640 recovered its independence again.

The history of Portuguese culture is much linked to Spanish culture and in this sense the influence has been reciprocal. After the voyage on which Pedro Alvares Cabral¹⁸ first found Brazil in the year 1500, the Portuguese attempted to establish a colony in that region for the first time in 1503. For many years, the American continent did not interest them very much since their attention was focused on Africa, India and Indochina as well as on the islands located in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. The expansion of the Portuguese Empire once they established in Brazil was not different from that of the Spaniards. In fact, the Portuguese share a similar history of pillage and genocide of the African and Brazilian populations.

THE ‘NEW WORLD’

The regions of the Americas conquered by the Spaniards, Portuguese, and the French (wrongly called Hispanic America) today embrace 20 nations and Puerto Rico which is under control of the United States, Brazil, the nation with the largest territory on the continent, uses the Portuguese language. People in Haiti, a Spanish colony until 1697 when the French occupied it, and controlled it until 1791, speak Creole, an Africanized variation of the French language. The rest of the 18 nations, including Puerto Rico, use the Spanish language.

Before the conquerors arrival the characteristics of the continent were different. The fact, the European were not aware of the existence of the Americas does not constitute a justification to speak about the “discovery” of the region. Scientific studies have proven that before the “discovery of the Indies” by the Spaniards and Portugal, there existed many cultures established for many centuries in the diverse territories of the region. These populations ranged from the Onas in the South of Patagonia to the most complex civilizations of the Incas from the Andes and the Aztecs in North America. In addition, important cultures had already existed in the regions of the Yucatan, of Central America, especially Guatemala, as well as in the Tiahuanaco region, near the lake Titicaca in Bolivia.

The ethnic variety of the inhabitants from the American continents was very broad and many languages were spoken. According to the linguistic classifications proposed by the philologist Paul Rivet (1876), there existed 123 linguistic families. Some of them had only one language such as the Arauca, from Chile, while others embraced dozens of languages like the Utoaztec or the Shone-Aztec spoken in Central, Mexico and the South of the United States, which has 25. The Chibcha family in Central and South America, the Maya-Quiche family in Mexico and Central America, are two examples of this sort of linguistic diversity¹⁹.

It is very difficult to enumerate how many civilizations existed in Mexico; also to name the epochs they were established. The burning of native books by the Spanish deprived humanity of an important historical memory. Some scientific studies estimate that the foremost civilizations appeared during the first years of the Christian era; that is, three millennia ago, and reached their peak between 7th and 8th Centuries.

The Quiches and other Mayan civilization located in the Yucatan and Central America are also very old. Both cultures reached their peak between the 6th and 15th Centuries. Their splendor can still be observed through the magnificence of their remaining temples and pyramids, which still exist like silent witnesses of another epoch. The Mayan cities and religious temples were not all contemporary. According to the traditions of the people temples and cities were gradually abandoned, one after the other, due to wars, floods, droughts, epidemic, etc. When the Spaniards arrived, most of the major cities and temples had been in ruins for a long while. When the Spaniards arrived, most of the major cities and temples had been in ruins for a long while. After the Conquest a few one remained; the last city, Tayasal was destroyed in 1697.

The Quiches and other Mayas developed extensive and precise astronomical knowledge only achieved by the Europeans during the XVI century. At the beginning of the Christian era they had invented the zero concept and the position principle that eased such mathematical calculation. Also complex, their writing originated in an ideographic form, similar to the Egyptian hieroglyphics and evolved phonetic forms that began to represent in writing their religious and historical traditions. Once they learned the Roman alphabet, they soon translated the *Popol Vuh*, the Quiche book about the origins of the world; the *Rabi Nal Achi*, a warrior drama and the magic books called *Chilam Balam*, which originated in Yucatan, and many others into that system of writing.

The year 1492 divided the history of the Americas in two parts. On the one hand, the European conquerors, with an incredible ethnocentrism, which speak about the “discovery”, the “New World,” “Las Indias,” give the impression that the continent emerged into history only with the arrival of Spanish frigates. It is as though the populations of the Americas did not exist, nor their civilizations as the true God; Europeans imposed their languages on natives who their Christianized and baptized to redeem them from their original sin. But to achieve eternal salvation the Indigenous people were required to relinquish all their gold and silver to the European redeemers. On the other hand, for the Indigenous inhabitants of these regions 1492 means the beginning of a never ending calvary in which they must submit to a painful underdevelopment from which they still have not recover.

After five centuries the situation has not changed very much. Misery, poverty, and neocolonialism are still alive. Latin America and the Caribbean continue sweating their wealth to new empires of the Group of Seven nations through the unplayable foreign debt, sacrificing and exploiting their population as happened in the past. Within this context, I would like to ask, once again: What type cultural “encounter” are we talking about? What is being taught about this “encounter” in academia. What types of societal model the politicians and international agencies from the developed world are promoting? Is it possible to impose a historical amnesia on the new generations of this planet and to forget the past? Do we have the right to twist historical interpretations to suit the economic interests of privileged minority?

The well-known Uruguayan writer, Eduardo Galeano (1993) tells us that in 1614, the Archbishop of Lima ordered all the Indians’ musical instruments burned. He also prohibited all their dances, songs and ceremonies because “through them the Indians had a pact with the Devil”. Thus to take possession of the Indians’ wealth and their freedom, it was necessary first to take away the symbols of their identify that were the tools of their survival long before they became part of the “new world.” Sects of fanatic priests and imperial functionaries massacred Indians in the name of God, a celestial excuse used to appropriate their lands and cultures.

About a similar colonial process, the South African archbishop and Nobel Peace Prize Winner, Desmond Tutu, eloquently tell us:

They came: They had the Gospel and we had the land. And they told us: “Close your eyes and pray.”
And when we opened the eyes, they had the land and we had the Gospel (Ibid.).

Five centuries later, in a letter addressed to Pope John Paul II during his visit to Peru by the Organization of Indian from the Andes and the Americas, among other things, they expressed:

We, Indians from the Andes and the Americas, decided to use this opportunity of the visit of John Paul II to return his Bible because for five centuries it did not bring us love, peace and justice. Please, take your Bible back with you and give it to our oppressors because they need its moral precepts more than we do. Since the arrival of Christopher Columbus to the Americas, through force, one culture, one language, one religion and set of values concerning what is proper has been imposed from Europe (Gilbert: 1991: III).

This letter brings to our attention that history constructed in the academy not necessarily is a reflection of people historical reality. The effects of the past are still very much alive in the Americas. There are still those who refuse to forget what other pretend to silence.

ENDNOTES

¹ Cited in the program *Center and Periphery in New Spain: 16th and 17th Century and Indigenous Cultures in Mexico and New Mexico*. From now on I will refer to this Institute like CPNS-95.

²The structural-functionalist paradigm is a theoretical framework that understands society as a system composed by various parts that work among themselves to generate its social stability. As its name suggests it, this theoretical formulation has two components. First, the **social structure**, understood as *patterns of relatively stable social behavior*. The most important social structures are, simultaneously, the main parts of society such as the family, religion, politics, and formal organizations (the State and bureaucracy, for example) and the economic system. Second, each element of the social structure is made up of **social functions**, which refers to *consequences for the operation of society as a whole*. Thus each part of society has one or more important functions that are necessary for the society to persist, at least in its present forms (Macdonis: 1987:16).

³The first formulations of the structural-functionalist theory originated on the ideas of the British Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), who argued that society and human organisms were very similar. The human body, for example, is formed by different parts --organs. Each of them accomplishes a specific function that allows its survival. The same occurs with society, where the different social institutions and organizations are structural parts interdependent among themselves. This is what allows society to operate. The French, Emile Durkheim, later reformulated this theoretical framework.

⁴Analyses of the Church's 15th Century pre-reform period in Spain over the course of the first three presentations entitled, "The Reign of Ferdinand and Isabelle," the CPNS-95 speaker frequently utilized the paparazzo style as just described. Presentations were generally followed by titillating sexual or sensational anecdotes such as: "In the Convent of Zamora -monks dressed as nuns and vice versa and then cavorted together." Another example, "Joanna the Mad . . . maybe she was not mad, but incompetent . . . eventually goes mad and Ferdinand returns to Castile to administer the kingdom . . . Joanna dies in 1554, it is said that she practiced necrophilia with her dead husband's sexual organ . . . Isabelle really liked Ferdinand despite his being a Finlander." This Information was taken from notes recorded by Andrés González and reproduced for the participants of the CPNS-95. Lecture # 2, June 6, 1995, pp. 1-3. Curiously, the person who prepared these notes did not include the many objections that were made to the theoretical or methodological approaches used for these historical interpretations.

⁵The authorship of both concepts were--wrongly--attributed to Emmanuel Wallerstein (1988), probably because he was the first to apply them in English.

⁶These conceptual categories were originally introduced by the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA) as an alternative to the evolutionary model proposed by the Argentinean sociologist Gino Germani (1966). This model interpreted social change in Latin America as a form of transition from traditional to modern societies. According to Germani this transition occurred in different phases in Latin America. Consequently, the process of transforming a region extended beyond the process of integration, producing social disequilibrium. This permitted archaic and traditional societies to coexist with modern societies.

Critics of the theoretical model suggested that it was not only an evolutionary model, but also, a Eurocentric one. From another angle, The Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA), suggested that inequality between *developed and underdeveloped* countries was not a result of evolutionary stages of development. ECLA argued that the condition of underdevelopment contains a structural difference: the emergence of a world economic system based upon unequal forms that originate *centers* and *peripheries*. This uneven and combined development is the result of the distribution of technological progress in the world economy. This is the factor that widens the breach between the center (industrialized nations) and the periphery (non-industrialized nations). In the center, technological advances corresponds with a homogenic but diversified economic development that is able to absorb and use its material advantages to create a superior social and economic standard of living, major productivity, capital density and saving capacity. Periphery, on the other hand, asserts that technological advances originated during the period in which the economies from Latin America were organized around an agro-export model oriented toward the international market-- beginning of the 19th Century. In this way, countries from Latin America became exporters of raw materials and purchasers of manufactured and capital goods. This situation generated an uneven development within those countries and their productive capacities. This pattern is characteristic of Latin American underdevelopment, and according to ECLA, the gap is responsible for widening negative effects, mainly in terms of exchange of products. In other words, Latin America received less income over time from its exports and paid more for imported goods.

⁷On this topic see the work of Jaime Osorio, *Las dos caras del espejo: ruptura y continuidad en la sociología latinoamericana*. See especially Chapter one *América Latina como problema teórico*, and Chapter two, *El marxismo latinoamericano y la dependencia*. In English see from the same author "The New Sociologist: In the Track of the Latin American Sociology" in *The New World Order and Latin America*. Jorge Gilbert (editor), Olympia: Center for Latin American Studies (1994). Also "Latin American Marxism and Dependency" in *Latin America: Dimensions of a Crucified Continent*. Jorge Gilbert (editor). Olympia: The Evergreen State College. (1991).

⁸In the introduction of his book *The Spanish Frontier in North America*, the historian David Weber (1992), and one of the guest lecturer in the CPNS-95, criticizes what he calls anthropological models and sociological or economic paradigms or "Americans" or "Europeans" interpretations to explain the Spanish agenda in North America. He argues that this historical situation can be understood in many forms. Weber correctly suggests that "all these modes of explanation are valid, but no one is fully satisfying." Thus, "preferring eclecticism to reductionism, I have sought to incorporate a variety of models into a framework that explains Spain's empire in North America as one side of a many-sided frontier." (p. 11). It is interesting to note that the works criticized by Weber are all Anglo-Saxon studies published only in English. Should this scholar have consulted some other sources written primarily in Spanish, Portuguese and even in French, he would have found a series of valuable studies done by Latin American scholars. These studies have successfully applied different and appropriate theoretical approaches to these types of studies. Let us mention, for example, the valuable work of Silvio Zavala, Sergio Bagú and Enrique Semo, among many others. Thus, the rich and valuable information gathered by Weber in his work, however, dilutes and becomes confused because he mixes different theoretical ingredients. As a result, his interpretations are weak and do not offer a clear understanding of the situation he has attempted to explain. Was De Vargas cruel or he was merely the product of a particular historical period? In this very same line of reasoning I am led to wonder, whether or not, Hitler in Germany or General Pinochet, in Chile, or Pol Pot in Cambodia were also products of another historical period. I hope their innocent victims can understand Weber's explanation better than I do.

⁹At this stage, I should mention that neither the facts nor its scientific interpretations of historic-cultural phenomena can be separated from those studied in archeology, economy, anthropology, history, sociology and other disciplines. At the moment we begin separating them is the moment when we move into the study of “dead” people, speculations and narrative sensationalism. These are the ingredients that make up the “salami” approach already mentioned.

¹⁰ One of the major mistakes committed by the Spanish Crown was the expulsion of the Jews --and the Arabs-- for ideological and economic considerations. Ideologically, the dominant sector of that period promoted a unification of Spanish empire based upon a religious orthodoxy and the purity of the blood. Economically, the Crown expropriated the Jews’ industries and wealth. The consequences of these actions were felt immediately. In 1492, from a population of 7 million inhabitants only half a million were Jews and *converso*. Jewish descendants made up one third of the urban population. After the decree that expelled the Jews the City of Barcelona, the main commercial port, faced bankruptcy and the incomes of the City of Seville diminished 50 per cent (Fuentes: 1992:90).

¹¹According to the structural-functional paradigm an oligarch belonging to the ancient aristocracy and a peasant working for this member of the nobility who happens to win a lottery would both be classified as belonging to the upper class based on their economic income.

¹²The Chilean Fernando Mires correctly points to the irony of these armies of idle nobles, fanatic and obscurantist priests, who along with impoverished hidalgos, were the sectors who took the lead of the mercantile revolution at the time of the “discovery” of the Americas.

¹³ Charles I, king of Spain between 1516-56, fought a losing battle to keep his Roman Catholic Empire together in the face of emergent Protestantism and outside pressure. Philip II (1527-98), Habsburg king of Spain (1556-98), ruled the country at the height of its power and influence and used that power in the service of the Roman Catholic church and the Counter Reformation. During his reign the Philippine Islands (named for him) were conquered and colonies were established in what is now the southern United States.

¹⁴ Bartolomé de Las Casas was Spanish missionary and historian who was the first to criticize the oppression of Native Americans by their European conquerors. Las Casas was born in Seville in August 1474. He arrived to Hispaniola, in the West Indies, in 1502 where he served as adviser to the colonial governor in Santo Domingo. In 1512 he became the first person in America to be ordained a priest. For his service in several expeditions, Las Casas was awarded an *encomienda*, a royal grant of land including Native American servants. Firsthand experience with the abuses of the system caused him to begin a crusade for the abolition of Native American slavery and the general improvement of Native American conditions. He gave up his own *encomienda* in 1514. In 1515 he appealed directly to King Ferdinand V of Spain on the Native Americans' behalf; a year later he returned to Hispaniola as their official protector. He entered the Dominican order in 1522 and spent the next six years writing *History of the Indies* (1528; trans. 1970), a monumental account of the early Spanish colonies in America. In 1537 Las Casas was asked to pacify the warlike Native Americans in northern Guatemala. He won their confidence and converted them to Christianity. All of his efforts resulted in the enactment (1542) of the New Laws, which abolished the *encomienda* system and prohibited the enslavement of Native Americans. In 1544 Las Casas was made bishop of Chiapas in southern Mexico; in 1547 he returned to Spain, where he continued to plead the cause of the Native Americans, especially in polemical writings that received wide distribution in Europe. Las Casas died in Madrid on July 31, 1566.

¹⁵ The Moslems tried to expand to the rest of Europe but were stopped in Poitiers by Carlos Martel in 732. Ten years later the Moor forces had suffered their first defeat --722-- in the battle of Covadonga by the Asturian Pelayo.

¹⁶Ferdinand of Aragón, known also as Ferdinand V, the Catholic married princess Isabelle in 1469. She was the daughter of John II of Castile and León by his second wife, Isabella of Portugal. On the death of her brother,

Henry IV, Isabella and Ferdinand jointly succeeded (1474) to the throne of Castile and León. Alfonso V of Portugal, who supported the claim of Henry's daughter Juana la Beltraneja, contested Isabella's succession, however. Alfonso attacked Castile and León but was defeated by the Castilian army in 1476. Three years later Ferdinand succeeded to the throne of Aragón. This union of the two main Spanish kingdoms laid the foundation of Spain's future greatness. They had five children, including Catherine of Aragon, the first wife of Henry VIII of England, and Joanna the Mad, who was the mother of Charles V, king of Spain and Holy Roman Emperor. Isabella and her husband (known together as "the Catholic kings") are remembered for initiating the Inquisition in 1478, for completing the reconquest of Spain from the Moors and for their ruthless expulsion of the Spanish Jews, both in 1492. That same year they sponsored Christopher Columbus's voyage, which led to the creation of the overseas Spanish colonial empire, bringing great wealth and power to Spain.

¹⁷ See Fray Bernardino Sahagun, *Historia General de las Cosas de Nueva España*, Mexico, 1829, Tomo I, pag. XIX.

¹⁸ Pedro Álvares Cabral (1460?-1526?) was a Portuguese navigator who claimed the Bahia State of Brazil for Portugal. He was born probably in Belmonte. In 1500 Emanuel, king of Portugal, appointed him commander of a trading expedition to India. With 13 vessels and more than 1000 men, Cabral left Lisbon under orders to proceed along the Cape of Good Hope route discovered in 1497-98 by the Portuguese navigator Vasco da Gama. To avoid storms and calms, Cabral set a more westerly course than that followed by da Gama, but winds and currents drove his vessels still farther westward. On April 22, 1500, about three months after the arrival of the Spanish explorer Vincente Yáñez Pinzón, Cabral reached the present-day Bahia State of Brazil. After claiming possession of the region for Emanuel, he sent a vessel to Portugal with news of his discovery. He then resumed his voyage, sailing eastward, but four of his vessels were lost in a storm off the Cape of Good Hope. The remainder of his expedition succeeded in reaching Calicut, India. There he negotiated a commercial treaty with the native ruler and established a trading post. He returned to Portugal in 1501.

¹⁹ The precise number of Native languages in the Americas is unknown. Estimates are that about 200 distinct languages are still spoken in North America (that is, north of Mexico). Perhaps 300 to 400 more were spoken at the time of first European contact. In Middle America (Mexico and Central America) about 350 languages are known. South America has been the least studied, linguistically. About 450 languages are in use there today; information survives for 120 extinct languages, and another 1500 to 2000 languages are mentioned in documents. For the number of past and present speakers of these languages, only rough estimates can be given. It is believed that when Europeans arrived in the Americas in the 15th and 16th centuries, about 1.5 million people spoke Native American languages in North America (down to about 200,000 today); about 5 million in Middle America (up to about 6 million today); and about 10 to 20 million in South America (up to about 11 to 12 million today).

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