

LATIN AMERICA
AND THE IDEA OF EUROPE

The problem of spontaneity and the capability of adaptation in the development of civilizations, which is the subject of the current issue, is in my view inseparable from the problem posed by the relations between reality and the images of reality. Two cultures existing side by side confront each other in many ways and in countless sectors. And in every case this confrontation gives rise in each of them to a particular image of the other. Unstable, changing images succeed each other, and from the moment they appear condition the terms of the confrontation to the extent to which they constitute the key that every culture possesses for judging the singular characteristics of the other. It is this image that gives meaning to each of the isolated elements and consequently to the whole. Judging—or pre-judging—on the basis of this established meaning, the social groups through which two cultures make contact with each other accept or reject the peculiar characteristics of their opposite number, and react in this confrontation with conditioned atti-

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tudes. Thus, the image of a cultural reality has become an established fact of the reality and operates as such. What appears spontaneous in one culture, which has become merged with another, or what results from adaptation, may derive from certain genuine forms of the other culture but also from the idea that one culture may have gained of another. And as this belief—which operates as a given factor of the reality—has been elaborated through very obscure psycho-social processes, it is indispensable to start from the basis of the accepted forms that have created it and to follow from there the process of its formation.

Proceeding on the basis of this idea, I propose to show the significance that the idea of Europe may have in American life. The limits of this study allow me to point out only some of the aspects and thus to risk frequently being neither very precise nor very profound. But if one chooses the most significant aspects of the problem, one will see that the subject merits careful attention. If the word Europe implies more than a geographic contour, a cultural entity, it is normal that it should have at first been synonymous in America with conquest and colonization. But it later became enriched by elements that were implicit in the type of influence that the European countries exercised on America. Europe has infused Latin America to such an extent that for many America is equivalent to Europe. For others, on the other hand, Europe presents only a conglomeration of negative influences. And between these two opinions there is doubtless room for many degrees of difference. But it is worth the trouble to consider the debatable facts, since it is precisely these that give an idea of the enormous influence that the image of Europe in its many variants, which America has formed, has been able to have in turn on America.

Unquestionably, the essential fact of the conquest was the consciousness of the conquistadores of their just right to take possession of America. They considered that the new continent belonged to no one, that is, that the indigenous peoples had no right to possess the land and to self determination. The roots of this attitude must be looked for in the systems of values that had developed in the course of the Middle Ages with regard to race and religion, or, more specifically, in relation to the

cultural differentiations and their bases of divine origin. The term Christianity connoted not so much a religion as a culture, whose values were founded on sacred bases. It was in Spain that this idea received its greatest impetus and determined the attitude of the conquistadores—an attitude similar to that of Portugal and England. And it was this idea that justified the conquest. The indigenous American populations were compared to the Turks who were threatening Europe and endangering not only the possession of the land but also European culture of Christian faith. The conquest was a war of cultures, that is, a merciful war in which victory meant the annihilation of the vanquished or, at the least, unconditional surrender. The conquered continent had to be transformed into a new Europe, in which some non-European segments could subsist who would not enjoy any rights and who would be for this reason simply economic instruments at the service of the conquerors. Claims in theory to the contrary were plentiful, but the invariability of the facts proved that this attitude was intrinsic and irreversible.

A coherent policy of colonization corresponded to this attitude. Colonization, to the extent to which it was deliberate, consisted of imposing European culture in its entirety on to something that was declared to be a cultural void. (There were different opinions on this subject, but they cannot alter the facts.) This required a tremendous effort on the part of the conquerors since in fact America was not a "cultural void." If this effort was possible—and often fruitful—it was due to the fact that the settlers worked on the basis of an image of America that was simplistic and absolutely irrevocable. Experience succeeded only very slowly in prevailing over this idea, which meanwhile persisted. This image that Europeans formed of America corresponded to the image they held of Europe itself at the time of the wars of cultures. According to the latter, Europe represented the new chosen people, the custodian of truth, the trustee of the revelation, that is, of the superior culture. This image of Europe inspired the conduct of the settlers for several centuries. They referred to themselves as "Spaniards of Spain" and considered that they were an entirely different kind of being from the indigenous populations of America.

The means that permitted European culture taken as a whole

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to efface the traces of the American reality were numerous. They were not entirely new, but they acquired certain attributes that made them effective. At first the conquerors and settlers grouped together in normally organized towns in which the continuity of the social and cultural order of the group was assured; from there the region was governed in accordance with a rigorous system of institutions in the metropolis patterned on European models; and although they corresponded to the general tendencies of the conquering and colonizing groups, these institutions frequently proved to be inadaptable to the new and unforeseen conditions which sprang up in the different regions of America. Later an economic system was adopted which assured the conquerors and settlers of ownership of the means of production—land, mines, etc.—and the disposition of a free labor force. Various reasons could have been put forward for the enslavement of the indigenous population, but they do not change the fact itself. Finally, they undertook energetically to induct, in order to attempt to integrate at least formally, the subject population into the cultural system of the conquerors, and above all to establish, in a transcendent and sometimes magical way, the justification for the new order. Despite their possible shortcomings, these devices operated effectively and impressed their stamp on the American situation.

Considering the situation, it is evident that the ultimate design of the conquerors was to make of America a new Europe. It follows clearly from this that the prevailing idea of Europe during the first periods of colonization was, for the colonizing groups, that of a cultural entity of the highest order without any common level with the indigenous culture. Europe was Christian civilization, formerly at war with the Moslems and Turks and now against other idol worshippers. But the idea that the subjugated peoples formed of this civilization was quite different. For them Europe was simply the place of origin of the conquerors with all the negative aspects that this implied.

On the other hand, the idea of Europe soon became modified. When the Spanish and Portuguese colonies—the most extensive—were consolidated and became productive, the cities followed a characteristic evolution. Powerful Spain began to acquire in Europe a peripheral position that was to become

typical and the country began to decline politically and economically. Other powers, on the contrary, became more important and looked to America with entirely different aims. Meanwhile the Reformation had taken place and the colonizers of America began to form a slightly different conception of Europe. Spain continued to be during the colonial period a cultural power of undisputed importance but, for the first time, a distinction began to be made between the "Spaniards of Spain" and the "Spaniards of America." For the latter the intangibility of Spanish values began to recede to the point where the term "Creole" acquired a positive meaning. In the second place Spain began to set itself apart from Europe. Europe was the cradle of the pirates and buccaneers who attacked and destroyed the towns and boarded the rich galleons; it was also the place where heresy was progressing to the point where Protestantism had become the official religion of certain countries; and it was the place where absolute monarchy was disappearing and where great social changes were underway. Europe, then, was primarily Holland and England with their Protestant background and capitalist revolutions. Spain meanwhile appeared unchanging—even more so viewed from America—and hence a stranger to the Europe, which, reduced to what experience America could have of it, assumed an increasingly negative aspect. Naturally this distinction had no meaning for the subjugated peoples and was not even felt by them. Europe continued to be an entity from which the conquistadores and hence their own misfortunes stemmed.

But for the settlers at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries, the idea of Europe was constantly being enriched and diversified. The thinking of the encyclopedists divided opinion and, still more, the French Revolution and the policies of Napoleon. Spain and France appeared as two poles of one reality, or rather as two irreconcilable realities. The value judgements expressed at the time varied according to the degree of conformism or of non-conformism of the different groups: the Francophiles (*afrancesados*) or the traditionalists (*castizos*), the partisans of progress or of tradition, the liberals or the conservatives. This affinity of different groups with the currents of thought, each of which presented a different image of Europe, became more precise and hardened when the

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first effects of the industrial revolution began to be felt on the American market. The incentive to freedom of trade was a promise of riches, but also the possibility of dislodging certain groups from the monopoly they held. Spain and England appeared then, too, as two very distinct realities. And opinion was divided among the groups.

It was in this epoch primarily that the idea of Europe became sharply distinguished from that of Spain. For both the traditionalists and the progressives Spain represented tradition and Europe change. But they were two conceptions which had not yet become mutually exclusive, although they were opposed. The *afrancesados* thought that Spain should rally to the politics of progress, while the traditionalists hoped that Europe would return to its former ways, responding to the efforts of the Holy Alliance.

The Emancipation accelerated the evolution of ideas. Spain was the past, and Europe—which represented freedom of conscience, rational thought, modern science, technical development and freedom of trade—was the present and the future. The image of a Europe without Spain, that is, without conservative traditionalism, took root among the predominant elements. It was then that a positive opinion began to be formed as to what was European, whereas whatever was Spanish was viewed as decidedly negative. Naturally Europe was practically speaking France and England. The enlightened few began to be sustained at the fount of the former, while they followed the latter in economic questions. And if Hispanic values had then, in an ephemeral way, a revival of actuality, it was only by way of a reaction.

In certain countries the massive European immigration—Spanish, Italian, Jewish, Central European—modified in the nineteenth century the positive impression that had been gradually formed of Europe. Popular elements, generally with little education and determined to advance themselves socially, led the local elites to distinguish between two Europes; this proletarian Europe, of which they had direct personal experience, left them with an entirely different impression from the one they had gained through books or their occasional contacts with the high society of London and Paris. The contrast became more and

more flagrant. If in certain regions the term *gringo*¹ was pregnant with a certain resentment against the foreigner who controlled the wealth but who was recognized as being of a superior class, in others it became distinctly depreciative when applied to emigrants who occupied socially inferior positions.

A new change occurred when the national personality of certain American countries began to take shape. The rivalry between creole and Spanish—with all that it implied of opposed values—was in certain locales replaced by that between national and foreign. The idea of Europe underwent another change. Where large indigenous masses constituted the lower strata of society, national reality began to assume an indigenous character. Europe, again including Spain, appeared as the conqueror, the ravager of a community which had owned this land by right and had enjoyed a culture of great value. *Gringo* and *gachupin*² then became terms with many significances. They designated a new phenomenon, that of the voracity and cupidity of those who oppressed the weak in order to subjugate and exploit them. The reactions were many, but opinion of Europe ceased to be unanimous and the conception of it was again controversial.

Starting in the period of the world wars, Europe itself—and not only the idea that had been formed of it—entered into a period of crisis. This was the moment in which Valéry warned of the danger which menaced it, namely, that the peripheral areas that had inherited its teaching could very well revolt against it. That is what actually transpired, and not only in the form of political upheavals which overthrew the old colonial empires, but also in the form of currents of opinion which began to judge European influences according to a new scale of values. A depreciation of the latter and a revalorization of autochthonous values occurred; and what is most significant, there was a revision of the relative value of the various influences that each country could entertain—influences perceived as a range of possibilities. Europe ceased to be one sole value and soon was only one value among others.

The final aspect of the problem could be the relationship

¹ Foreigner.

² Spanish immigrant established in the country.

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—in the second half of the twentieth century—between the idea of Europe and other ideas, which admit the differentiation among and the recognition of other cultural aggregates. Among the most significant of these are the *Western Christian culture*, the *industrial world* and the *socialist world*. For the South American Europe is beginning to appear only as Europe. The idea that comprises the whole of positive values overflows the boundaries of Europe, or rather does not coincide with them. But then just when it seemed that Europe was losing its value, it began to regain some of it. It reappeared suddenly between the gaps in the far greater entities in the guise of what could be called the concept of European specificity. And, in Western culture as well as in the industrial or the socialist world, the appearance of a European nuance puts us at present on a new track. The concept of Europe not only comprised a totality of positive values but also a certain tone which marked the manifestation of these values. This tone is not so much national—at least as seen from the American perspective—as it is generic; but if one wants to perceive and to conceptualize it, one must separate it from its national expressions. The task is difficult. Europe has not undergone the necessary soul-searching to recognize what constitutes its particular nuance, perhaps because of the feeling of a cultural totality that for a long time was peculiar to each of the dominant nations, which were at times heads of empires, or perhaps because she believed that the sum of her national values was not a simple nuance within the framework of a much greater unity but the totality itself of supreme values. At present the rest of the world is about to undertake this examination, since it will have to choose between different solutions, and in each of them Europe is present. America, too, will have to declare itself, and in doing so it will discover that such an examination assumes in a certain way an examination of itself, of what it has received from Europe, of what it must conserve of this, and of the directions in which it must develop. It seems then that there is a new thesis here to investigate: what is Europe and what does it represent for the Americans?