

Globalization and Christopher Columbus in the Americas

Elise Bartosik-Vélez

Dickinson College

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb>



Part of the [Comparative Literature Commons](#), and the [Critical and Cultural Studies Commons](#)

Dedicated to the dissemination of scholarly and professional information, [Purdue University Press](#) selects, develops, and distributes quality resources in several key subject areas for which its parent university is famous, including business, technology, health, veterinary medicine, and other selected disciplines in the humanities and sciences.

CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access learned journal in the humanities and social sciences, publishes new scholarship following tenets of the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies designated as "comparative cultural studies." Publications in the journal are indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), the Humanities Index (Wilson), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), the International Bibliography of the Modern Language Association of America, and Scopus (Elsevier). The journal is affiliated with the Purdue University Press monograph series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies. Contact: <clcweb@purdue.edu>

Recommended Citation

Bartosik-Vélez, Elise. "Globalization and Christopher Columbus in the Americas." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 8.4 (2006): <<https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1321>>

This text has been double-blind peer reviewed by 2+1 experts in the field.

The above text, published by Purdue University Press ©Purdue University, has been downloaded 7333 times as of 11/07/19. Note: the download counts of the journal's material are since Issue 9.1 (March 2007), since the journal's format in pdf (instead of in html 1999-2007).

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

This is an Open Access journal. This means that it uses a funding model that does not charge readers or their institutions for access. Readers may freely read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of articles. This journal is covered under the [CC BY-NC-ND license](#).

CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access learned journal in the humanities and social sciences, publishes new scholarship following tenets of the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies designated as "comparative cultural studies." In addition to the publication of articles, the journal publishes review articles of scholarly books and publishes research material in its *Library Series*. Publications in the journal are indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), the Humanities Index (Wilson), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), the International Bibliography of the Modern Language Association of America, and Scopus (Elsevier). The journal is affiliated with the Purdue University Press monograph series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies. Contact: <clcweb@purdue.edu>

CLCWeb Volume 8 Issue 4 (December 2006) Article 2
Elise Bartosik-Vélez,
"Globalization and Christopher Columbus in the Americas"
<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol8/iss4/2>>

Contents of *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 8.4 (2006)
<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol8/iss4/>>

Abstract: In "Globalization and Christopher Columbus in the Americas," Elise Bartosik-Vélez considers the responses of scholars working in colonial and early modern studies to recent exponential increases in the transnationalization of capital and the resulting changes in the role of the nation-state. The case of Christopher Columbus and his appropriation by US-American nationalists during the early modern period is particularly instructive with regard to this discussion because Columbus exemplifies not only the drive to globalization of early modern European colonialism, but also the limits of nation-centric thinking in understanding the intersections and overlappings between empire and nation. Columbus in the Americas became a symbol of both empire and the nation and the manner in which he was appropriated by nationalists reveals the contours of the relationship between empire and nation in the early modern period. Positioning Columbus as a transnational figure and analyzing how he is deployed in nationalist rhetoric calls into question the primacy of the nation in academic work and leads to a skepticism similar to that which has motivated recent challenges to dominant criollo nationalist narratives in Latin America.

Elise BARTOSIK-VÉLEZ

Globalization and Christopher Columbus in the Americas

Academics have responded in a variety of ways to globalization, perhaps the most important of which is a reassessment of their methodologies (for recent discussions regarding comparative studies, see, for example, Zamora Parkinson <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol4/iss3/1/>>; Grabovszki <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol1/iss3/1/>>). The usual rationale for such a reassessment can be summarized as follows: If capital is no longer subject to the same limits once imposed by the nation-state, a critical methodology that challenges the conceptual hegemony of the nation-state will help us better understand nearly any object of study because it provides a much needed new vocabulary and conceptual axes on which to plot the novel phenomena of a globalized world (I should add that I refer to "globalization" as the particular phenomenon experienced in recent times (see, e.g., Zamora), not in earlier centuries. As Enrique Dussel and world system theorists consistently argue, globalization is certainly not a new phenomenon). The need for new methodologies to deal with these changes has been felt for some time across the disciplines. I am particularly interested in how scholars working in colonial and early modern studies are reacting to recent exponential increases in the transnationalization of capital and the resulting changes in the role of the nation-state. The responses to globalization on the part of scholars working in colonial and early modern studies have differed from responses by scholars working in US-American Studies or US-American literature. Interestingly, the latter have advocated for "postnationalism," a term suggesting a chronological positioning of the field beyond nationalism. Colonial and early modern studies, however, which have traditionally been defined in chronological terms, have opted more often than not for "transnationalism," a term entailing a geographical positioning of the field beyond nationalism. In advocating for the adoption of the term "Colonial Atlantic" studies, Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel, for example, suggests that "colonial, or early modern period, [be studied] as a transnational field of inquiry that should not be conceived as pre-national or postnational, but as an international network of ethnic, racial, political, cultural, and economic interactions. This kind of approach constitutes a field of study that breaks with national paradigms in order to explore those experiences that took place long before and during the configuration of modern nations as we know them today" (Martínez-San Miguel <http://arachne.rutgers.edu/vol1_2intro.htm>).

In this paper, I explore two potential responses to globalization with regard to the Americas in particular: the adoption of a transnational approach and related challenges to the traditional narrative of criollo nationalism in Latin America. The case of Christopher Columbus and his appropriation by US-American nationalists during the early modern period is particularly instructive with regard to this discussion about academic responses to globalization because Columbus exemplifies not only the drive to globalization of early modern European colonialism, but also the limits of nation-centric thinking in understanding the intersections and overlappings between empire and nation. Columbus in the Americas became a symbol of both empire and the nation and the manner in which he was appropriated by nationalists reveals the contours of the relationship between empire and nation in the early modern period. Thinking of Columbus as a transnational figure and analyzing how he is deployed in nationalist rhetoric calls into question nation-centric thinking and leads to a skepticism similar to that which has motivated recent challenges to dominant criollo nationalist narratives in Latin America. I am thinking here of the work of Eric Van Young and Claudio Lomnitz (both with regard to Latin America), and Ed White (with regard to the US).

Christopher Columbus is fundamentally tied to the very real process of globalization fomented by European colonialism. The meaning of Columbus, since he returned in 1493 from his first voyage to the New World, has always required an interpretive framework that considers him across cultural and linguistic boundaries, as well as across boundaries that define political systems. A Genoan who has often been anachronistically labeled an Italian (he never spoke or wrote the dialect that later became known as Italian), Columbus established contacts with the royal house of Portugal, and probably with those of England and France, but he claimed the New World for Spain.

By the end of his career, he had managed to project his persona well beyond the confines of any one geographical or cultural unit. Indeed, he broke the boundaries of terrestrial geography, asserting at the end of his career that he was chosen by god to fulfill divine history by converting the far-flung peoples of the earth and directing the final crusade to Jerusalem as prophesied in sacred scriptures. Columbus forged himself as a figure of empire as it was understood in fifteenth-century Spain. At the heart of this multifaceted understanding, was a drive to universal Christian empire and a concomitant drive for territorial expansion. Not only did he consistently associate himself with empire in his own writings, European literati and historians consistently associated Columbus with empire. He was repeatedly portrayed as the first representative of empire and the first imperial conqueror in the New World. The Milanese humanist Peter Martyr, for example, the first historian of the Spanish discovery of the Americas, portrayed Columbus as a loyal agent of empire. His *Decades de Orbe Novo*, published first in 1493, was one of the primary sources of information about the New World available to the European elite. Martyr characterized Columbus as an imperial servant of Ferdinand and Isabel, in addition to subtly associating him with the Greek and Roman Empires. Martyr's replacement as royal chronicler, Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, then characterized Columbus as the first of the Spanish empire's messianic imperialists. The association of Columbus with empire was continued by Fernando Columbus, Columbus' son whose account of his father's life was published in Italian, and by the influential "Defender of the Indians," Bartolomé de las Casas. In literature, too, Columbus was presented as a figure of empire, beginning with the Florentine Giuliano Dati's 1493 poetic translation in *ottava rima* of Columbus' so-called *Letter on the Discovery*. Authors who later continued the portrayal of Columbus as a figure of empire include Lope de Vega and Ludivico Ariosto.

One of the most popular ways in which Columbus was paired with empire was by linking him to the Roman Empire. This was done not only in historiography and literature, but also by the Habsburg rulers. Both Charles V and his son Philip II referred to Columbus in their claims to imperial power, using him to portray their own reigns as analogous to the Roman Empire. Their tortuous logic began with their claim to be heirs of Aeneas, the legendary founder of the Roman Empire. Columbus served in their interpretations as a neo-Aeneas who began the expansion of their empire just as Aeneas began the expansion of the Roman Empire. In 1516 when Charles, who would be crowned Holy Roman Emperor three years later, adopted the Columns of Hercules as part of his personal device upon his ascension to the sovereignty of the Order of the Golden Fleece, he referred to Columbus's own act of sailing beyond the known world as the founding act on which his own empire was based. Philip requested that pictures of Columbus be painted on the ship he designed, the *Argo*, to lead the battle against the Ottomans. In appropriating Columbus as a figure of empire, the Habsburgs suggested that he was the "second Tiphys," a figure who Virgil prophesied in the Fourth Eclogue would pilot "a second *Argo*" that would lead to the founding of a great new empire (following that of Rome) in a terrestrial paradise ("Therewith a second Tiphys shall there be, / Her hero-freight a second *Argo* bear"). By doing so, the Habsburgs connected themselves and their own genealogy to the Roman Empire and, more importantly for our purposes, they strengthened the association of Columbus with empire by portraying him as a new Aeneas, father of the Roman empire. The European tradition that interpreted Columbus as an archetype of empire was taken up in the Americas. Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, for example, portrayed Columbus as a figure of empire in her "Loa para el auto intitulado 'El Mártir del Sacramento, San Hermenegildo'" (1692). In addition to crossing the Atlantic, Columbus also traversed the political system of empire into that of the nation-state when nationalists in both Europe and the Americas began to appeal to him as a nationalist figure. The manner in which Columbus was employed by nationalists indicates that he never lost his imperial associations that were forged by Columbus himself, the first historiographers of the Colombian enterprise, and European literati. In Europe, we see this, for example, in the poetry of Spaniard Ciro Bayo and in the novels of Italian Anton Giulio Barrili; in the Americas, it appears in the poetry of Joel Barlow and Gabriel Carrasco. The appropriation of Columbus in nationalist discourses illuminates the intersections and interactions between empire and nation. Yet this dynamic between the two concepts is largely overlooked if we take the nation-state to be our primary unit of analysis. Instead, a transnational perspective ena-

bles us to follow the intricate and intertwined paths traced by empire and the nation-state in early nationalist discourses about Columbus in the Americas.

The relationship between empire and the nation-state is often simplified in the ideology of the nation-state to the extent that it is viewed as oppositional, the first term being replaced by the second at the moment when the new nation-state was born of the colonial/imperial experience. According to this understanding, nation-states assumed sovereignty from empire in the early modern period. In some ways the nation-state was indeed an entirely novel entity compared to empire. Take, for example, the manner in which one belongs to and identifies with a nation-state, via a shared language, culture and ethnicity, which can be entirely different from the manner in which one belongs to and identifies with an empire (via colonization, dynastic marriages, a divinely ordained political hierarchy and its system of patronage). However, this implies that life under empire had little to do with affinities of language, culture and ethnicity, which is not the case. Seeing the nation-state and empire as two distinct entities, the one cleanly replacing the other, suggests that the nationalists who formed independent states after empire did so *ex nihilo*. This perspective results in a slew of historical inaccuracies, including a reluctance to acknowledge that early nationalists of the Americas modeled their new political systems with empire in mind -- especially the British and the Roman, but also indigenous American empires. As has been argued almost to excess in recent years, this disavowal of empire is endemic in the popular cultures of the Americas. In the US, it is evident in George W. Bush's statement during the 2000 presidential campaign that "America has never been an empire" despite clear evidence that shows that the "framers" of the Constitution thought of "nation" and "empire" as interchangeable terms. The blindness to empire in Latin America is seen in the common perception of Brazil as an anomaly because of its status as an empire after independence in 1822. Other transgressions of empire into the nation-state are regularly excluded in popular histories by the logic of the nation-state that interprets the colonial period as its prelude. It is often forgotten, for instance, that several of the well known figures of Latin American independence advocated a monarchy, including the so-called "precursor" of the independence movement, Francisco de Miranda. It is also often overlooked that the first government established after Mexico's independence from Spain was the empire of Agustín de Iturbide, who established a full blown imperial court and assumed the name Emperor Agustín I. In his biography of Iturbide, Timothy Anna notes that despite Iturbide's pivotal role in the independence of Mexico: "Historians of Mexico almost universally dismiss Iturbide as a usurper, perjurer, traitor, as a vain and inexperienced man scarcely worth a mention after September 1821. Viewing him as an opportunist, some historians refuse even to recognize him as Liberator. Most standard histories of Mexico skip over the Iturbide interregnum in a few sentences, anxious to get on to the story of the creation of the first federal republic, with the associated presumption that a federal republic was inevitable and that Iturbide merely delayed the natural evolution of historical events" (13).

Popular Mexican historiography and George W. Bush, then, both exhibit an ignorance of history that privileges the emphasis of the evolution of republicanism during the early national period and severely underestimates, or even omits entirely, the continuities between the colonial period and the early national period as well as the import of the concept of empire after independence. One of the most instructive ways in which empire and nation-state have been artificially constructed as opposing terms in the variants of nationalist thinking in the Americas is with regard to the manner in which they sketch out relationships of power. The overarching structure of empire is generally understood as a vertical structure, originating in a sovereign king and reaching down through the various strata of society via an ordered system of hierarchy and patronage. The most important relationships, then, are vertical ones, between subjects and the various lords above them in the hierarchy. In the nation-state the corresponding relationships are commonly understood to be horizontal (Benedict Anderson, for example, stresses the horizontal bonds of nationalism and I return to this below). Social and economic hierarchies, especially in the US but also in Latin America, have therefore been often interpreted as anathemas to the nation-state. J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur offers this kind of interpretation when he writes in his *Letters from an American Farmer*: "we have no princes, for whom we toil, starve and bleed: we are the most perfect society now existing in the world" (50). The upshot of this fervent rejection of hierarchy is that

the nation-state, which has so often been extolled in nationalist rhetoric as a republic -- a *res publica* -- has come to be understood as antithetical to monarchy and empire in general despite the fact that the new nations modeled their political systems after their antecedents.

The manner in which Columbus, an archetype of empire, was appropriated by nationalists in Europe and the Americas at the time of the four hundredth anniversary of Columbus's first landfall in the New World suggests the artificial nature of the boundaries between empire and nation-state that have been constructed in nation-state-centric discourse. Before considering the case of Columbus in Latin America, let us look briefly at the case in Europe and the US for purposes of comparison. Spanish and Italian nationalist discourses in the nineteenth century drew heavily upon the history and discourse of empire because, and here I borrow a metaphor from Benedict Anderson, monarchical dynasties there had successfully dressed the empire in nationalist drag (87). This costuming was successful in Europe where the imperial could easily be subsumed into nationalist narratives by transforming it into a kind of nationalism *avant la lettre*. Around the year 1892, nationalists in both Spain and Italy both claimed Columbus as a national hero and emphasized his connection to empire. In characterizing Columbus as an imperial figure, they invoked the collective memory of their own respective historical experiences with empire, which were construed anachronistically as a golden age of the nation-state. When Spanish nationalists lauded Columbus, they often conjured up the imperial salad days of Ferdinand and Isabel; when Italian nationalists did so, they often portrayed his greatness as a product of the legacy of the Roman Empire, which they portrayed as the germ of the nation-state. One might think that the contradictions between empire and nation-state, referred to earlier, not to mention the anachronistic contortions this kind of discourse entailed, would have rendered it ineffective, yet it seems that the more Columbus was associated in Spain and Italy with the great empires of the past, the greater his appeal as national hero. Thus the "official nationalisms" (Anderson [86] borrows the term from Seton-Watson) of Spain and Italy found in Columbus an especially apt poster boy. But why would nationalists of the newly independent states of the Americas who recently freed themselves from the bonds of the imperial colonizer, look to Columbus, an archetype of empire, when searching for a national symbol? Nineteenth-century nationalist discourse in the US mirrors in many respects the corresponding discourses in both Spain and Italy. Unlike European nationalisms, however, US nationalism developed an ambiguous stance with regard to empire: it both opposed empire, in so far as it was associated with the Old World, and supported empire, in so far as "empire" represented power and dominion according to the US cultural and philosophical European inheritance. Because of nationalists' desires to construct a national genealogy separate from the corrupt influences of the Old World, US discourse about Columbus in the nineteenth century only vaguely acknowledged the nation's general experience or contact with empire, going to extremes to avoid the topic of its own affiliation with the British empire. Thus, while Spanish and Italian nationalist discourses about Columbus appealed to their countries' respective historical experiences with empire in order to bridge the gap between nation-state and empire, the corresponding discourse in the US attempted to bridge that gap by focusing on the trope of *translatio studii*, or the transfer of the civilization and culture of Western empire that tacitly accompanied the *translatio imperii*, the transfer of empire. Nationalist discourse about Columbus in the US in the nineteenth century therefore often entailed portrayals of the nation-state as the modern cultural heir of all the great empires of the Western world. Such is the case in Thomas Brower Peacock's "Columbian Ode," a poem presented at the opening of the World's Columbian Exposition in May of 1893 that portrays Columbus as responsible for the movement of the "Star of Empire" from Asia to America (8).

While the contradictions in what Anderson calls the "weld between nation and empire" (88) were easily absorbed by nationalist discourse about Columbus in Spain, Italy and the US, the postcoloniality of Latin America rendered those contradictions more glaring. That post-independence setting problematized nationalists' claims to Columbus as a national hero because of the enduring legacies of colonial rule. Thus, while the model of nationalist discourse about Columbus that developed in Spain and Italy applies to some extent to the US, it is less applicable to the case of Latin America. There, while some nationalists did try to construct Columbus as a national hero by emphasizing his connection to the empire of the Spanish motherland, these constructions

were contradictory. On the one hand, we see an attempt to construct Columbus as a national hero, but on the other, we also see somewhat of a rejection of Columbus because he represents empire. This ambiguous characterization of Columbus in Latin American nationalist discourse is seen in a poem entitled *Canto al descubrimiento de América* (1882) by Gabriel Carrasco (1854-1908/1909), a well known Argentine journalist, writer and publicist. His Columbus is first portrayed not as a victim of Spanish cruelty but as a vile imperialist. At the beginning of Carrasco's poem, the embittered volcano of the Canary Islands, angry at Columbus for daring to venture beyond his sight, damns the Admiral for the destruction he will cause in the New World: "Mira á la Guerra: su sangrienta tea / Esparce de la América en los campos / Su rencorosa luz: al aire ondea / El pendon de la lucha fratricida, / Y la mísera espalda del esclavo / Al crujido del látigo verdugo / Roja sangre gotea. / Mira los pueblos, bajo el duro yugo / Los carros arrastrar de sus tiranos, / Y verter, en sacrílega pelea / Noble sangre de hermanos" (10). The poem here invokes a gruesome scene of civil war ("la lucha fratricida") and bloodshed ("verter ... noble sangre de hermanos"). The colonizers' enslavement of the native population is conveyed by the most powerful image of the quotation: the bleeding back of a whipped slave. Columbus is deemed responsible for this horrific scenario, as it is his "sangriento tea" that "esparce de la América en los campos / Su rencorosa luz" at the beginning of the stanza. But after damning Columbus as a brutal colonizer, Carrasco's poem then rescues him by reinterpreting his connection to empire and conquest so that he becomes a spiritual king of the Latin American nations who is disassociated from the physical violence of colonization. This rescue is accomplished by superseding the initial view of the conquest at the beginning of the poem with an alternate view of history which is introduced by the virgin "Nymph of America" who reprimands the volcano, calling him a "tenebroso mónstruo" and commanding that he flee. "Huye," she orders, "Tu secular imperio, derrumbado / A los pies de Colon, está prostrado" (11).

The Nymph's pronouncement that the volcano's "secular imperio" now lies in pieces at the feet of Columbus suggests that Columbus reigns over not a secular realm but a spiritual one. This is the key to Carrasco's reinterpretation of Columbus' connection to empire. He is capable of assuming the throne of the American nations because of his noble imperial spirit, not because of the bloody conquest he initiated. The poet thus claims that the nations like Ecuador, Mexico, Chile, and Argentina owe their existence to Columbus, referred to here as "el genio": "Súrgen [sic] naciones que la gloria cantan / Del génio á quien le deben la existencia, / E infinitas ciudades se levantan / Llenando la pradera / Que ignota soledad poco antes fuera" (12). In the first lines of the final two stanzas, the poet twice repeats: "Esas tus glorias son," emphasizing the debt of the nations to Columbus. The poem ends by describing Columbus' spiritual apotheosis which coincides with his arrival in the New World: "Y muy luego, Colon, alborozado / Cuando al Puerto llegó, subió radioso / De la inmortalidad al alto asiento" (13). Thus in Carrasco's poem, Columbus' association with empire is reinterpreted to the extent that he is extricated from the history of Spain's colonization and its bloody consequences and placed at the head of a spiritual empire of nations. As is clear in the case of *Canto al descubrimiento de América*, nationalist discourse in Spanish America that appealed to Columbus at the end of the nineteenth century was of an entirely different nature than the corresponding discourses in Spain, Italy and the US. In those countries, Columbus was portrayed as a national hero precisely because of his association with empire. Spanish America, however, was still struggling in the nineteenth century with the deep-rooted legacies of colonialism. The region's long experience with empire was not incorporated without contradiction into the narratives of nation building. Carrasco's poem is representative of the plasticity of much Latin American nationalist discourse of the nineteenth century that claimed Columbus as a national hero in the post-independence setting. Columbus was an unavoidable character in the history of the region and many nationalists felt compelled to address him, but because he represented the imperial colonization from which nationalists in the nineteenth century had only recently escaped, his inclusion in nationalist narratives often required creative innovations. Many nationalists, like Carrasco, therefore portrayed him as a spiritual and decontextualized figure of power.

Other Latin American nationalists embraced Columbus as a father who had been mistreated, like themselves, by negligent mother Spain and the cruel excesses of power she allowed in her

colonies. This kind of nationalist discourse appropriated the leyenda negra, according to which Spain and the conquistadors were cruel and enslaving opportunists who hid their true material motives with the professed desire to convert pagans and serve God. Portraying Columbus as a victim of the leyenda negra, a well established narrative that needed little explanation, was one of the most effective ways in which nationalists attempted to resolve the contradiction at the heart of the claim to a figure of empire as a symbol of the nation. An example of this kind of portrayal of Columbus is found in the rhetoric of those advocating for the adoption of the name "Colombia" for the confederation of states known in retrospect as "La Gran Colombia." In his well-known 1815 *Letter from Jamaica*, Simón Bolívar, writes, "Esta nación se llamaría Colombia como un tributo de justicia y gratitud al creador de nuestro hemisferio" (1: 171). Four years later, Bolívar was even more explicit about the honor due to Columbus. To his "amigos íntimos," including his aide de camp Daniel Florencio O'Leary, whose memoirs preserve the following quote, Bolívar portrayed Columbus as a victim of the Spaniards and suggested that by honoring Columbus, as Spain failed to do, Latin Americans would show themselves to be worthy of independence: "El plan en sí mismo es grande y magnífico; pero, además de su utilidad, deseo verlo realizado porque nos da la oportunidad de remediar, en parte, la injusticia que se ha hecho con un grande hombre y a quien de ese modo erigiremos un monumento que justifique nuestra gratitud. Llamando nuestra república Colombia, denominando su capital Las Casas, probaremos al mundo que no sólo tenemos derecho a ser libres sino a ser considerados bastante justos para saber honrar a los amigos y bienhechores de la humanidad: Colón y Las Casas pertenecen a América. Honrémoslos perpetuando sus glorias" (II: 20). Bolívar's language here is typical of this kind of discourse in that Columbus is completely severed from the context of the Spanish conquest and colonization. His "glories" are spiritual in nature and appear to relate to his status as discoverer and as a bearer of Christ, although Bolívar never makes this connection clear. As the naming of Colombia indicates, nationalist portrayals of Columbus in Latin America suggest a complicated dynamic between empire and the nation-state whereby the former works both in support of and against the latter. Empire is denied by nationalist discourse because it rejects the Old World from which it claims to be entirely different. Yet empire simultaneously infiltrates nationalist discourse because the nation-state was imagined in terms of empire and its narratives of power and dominion. The manner in which Columbus functions in Spanish American national discourse points toward this complicated dynamic between the nation-state and empire. Traditional methods of inquiry that fall under the spell of the compelling narrative of the nation-state, however, do not allow us a clear vision of this situation. The naming of the territory "Colombia" is one such invocation of Columbus by nationalists that cannot be fully understood if it is not viewed in a transnational context.

Simón Bolívar was not the first to think of Columbus when looking to name the territory of the Americas. The first to propose his name appears to be Bartolomé de las Casas, who suggested that the New World be named "Colomba" in honor of Columbus. Las Casas consistently portrayed Columbus as the agent responsible for bringing Christ to the New World and he argued that naming the continent in Columbus' honor would reflect the evangelical mission at the heart of Spain's colonization project. In the seventeenth century, Juan de Solórzano Pereira, a Spanish colonial judge and author of *Política Indiana*, argued that the Spain's American territories should be named "Colonia" or "Columbonia." Most experts agree that the modern application of Columbus's name in South America likely derives from the transatlantic figure, Francisco de Miranda, who toured the US in 1783-84 and met with many of the region's elite. By this time, the term "Colombia" had been used for decades in the north as an opposition to "Britannia" and as a general term referring to the territories that were or had been part of the British Empire. It was only shortly after Miranda's visit, in 1791, that the nation's capital was named after George Washington and Columbus. It is unclear whether Miranda adopted the term Colombia from his experience in the US or from someone like Bartolomé de las Casas, whose characterizations of Columbus Miranda surely would have known. Perhaps both sources served as his inspiration for the title he gave to the short-lived serial published in London beginning in 1810, *El Colombiano*, which was addressed to "el continent Colombiano" and argued in favor of its independence from Spain. Miranda also requested that his written works, which he viewed as historical documentation of the effort to forge one great united

confederation of an independent Spanish America, be published under the title "Colombeia" after his death. Given this transnational context, we can apprehend more easily that the adjective "colombiano" ("el continente colombiano"), as it appeared in the first federal Constitution of Venezuela of 1811, invoked the same kind of connotations with regard to political independence that Miranda would have perceived the word as having during his travels through the US.

As the above illustrates, a complete understanding of the appropriation of Columbus in the early nationalist discourses of the Americas requires the adoption of a transnational perspective that not only allows us to analyze the global currency of ideas about the nation-state, but also allows us to label as an illusion the notion of the nation-state as completely separate from that which preceded it. Recent challenges to the traditional interpretation of the development of criollo nationalisms in Spanish America mirror the move to transnationalist perspectives in their discomfort with the category of the nation-state and their insistence on the importance of the broad historical context within which the nation-state developed. A simplified version of the traditional interpretation of the rise of criollo nationalism might read as follows: A homogeneous group of criollos, who were influenced by the revolutions in France and the US, united in their hatred of the Spanish Empire as a result of the limitations imposed on them by the Bourbon reforms of the eighteenth century. Thus united, they took advantage of Napoleon's 1808 invasion of Spain by declaring independence from the empire and fighting for republican ideals. After their successful rebellion, so the narrative goes, the criollos took control of their political destiny and constructed their own republican nation-states and national identities as they saw fit. This traditional narrative is theoretically grounded with regard to nationalism most formidably perhaps in the work of Benedict Anderson whose 1983 seminal work *Imagined Communities* has cast a long shadow in the Americas. At the time of the book's publication, Anderson defied the conventional understanding of nationalism and its origins by suggesting that nationalism first developed in the colonial world of the Americas and only later was transferred to Europe. Historian and anthropologist Claudio Lomnitz notes the reception of Anderson's innovation by Latin Americanists: "This move caught Latin Americanist historians off balance, for the historiography of independence up to then was dominated by treatises on the intellectual influences of Europe -- of liberalism, of the Enlightenment -- on American independence. Rarely did the Latin American specialist dare to claim much originality for these movements, let alone to suggest that nationalism itself had been invented in Spanish America and subsequently exported to Europe" (4). Yet despite the prime importance they grant to the American context, Anderson's theories were not embraced in Latin American scholarship, mostly because while his grand sweep regarding the etiology of nationalism was intriguing, he was wrong with regard to the particulars. While he was innovative in placing the roots of nationalism in the Americas, he contributed to the perpetuation of the traditional narrative of triumphant Creole nationalism by his exclusive focus on horizontal bonds of fraternity among what he calls "Creole pioneers."

Anderson's exclusive focus on horizontal camaraderie ignores the importance of vertical bonds of dependence and the concept of empire in general in the imagining of a nation. The undiscerning characterization of American nationalism as anti-colonial and as construed by definition by horizontal relationships of equality fails to explain the continuation of imperial patterns after independence. Anderson understands nationalism, at least in the Americas, as republican and anti-monarchical. Yet Iturbide's *Plan of Iguala*, the document in which Mexico declared its independence from Spain (Iturbide <<http://www.ordenjuridico.gob.mx/Constitucion/cn4.pdf>>), describes the independent government specifically as a constitutional monarchy ("monarquía moderada, con arreglo á la constitución peculiar"). Furthermore, that document invited the Bourbon king Fernando VII to occupy the throne of the new nation. Should Fernando refuse the offer, the Plan of Iguala required that it must be offered to other members of the Bourbon royal family or other members of a (European) royal house. Nationalists obviously craved the authority that they believed would be granted by the imprimatur of an established monarchy. The *Plan of Iguala* thus demonstrates that "nation" and "empire" were not mutually exclusive terms for the first nationalists in Mexico. They did not imagine a nation composed of horizontal bonds of fraternity and equality, as per Anderson's understanding (see Lomnitz 9-10). Rather, the same vertical relationships of dependence

that were the norm of empire were now used to envision the nation. Early nationalist thinking in Mexico was thus not republican, but rather a hybrid form that drew heavily on monarchism and the ethos and forms of empire. We see evidence of this hybrid form in poems written to praise Emperor Agustín I. One of these, an *endecasílabo* apparently written by Mariano Barazábal in 1821, compares the Emperor Iturbide to Aeneas, the legendary founder of the Roman Empire: "¿Y quien os negará, Septentrionales, / Los sagrados derechos luminosos / Que tuvieron los teucros, los asirios, / Los romanos, los griegos y mil otros? / ¿Quien desaprobará en el Universo / A los Padres Conscriptos, el heroico / Rasgo de gratitud a la familia / Del héroe que tan digno fue del Sólido? / No ha perdido á su Anquises nuestro Eneas, / Ni menos á su Creusa, en el transtorno, / Ni se cifra su prole en un Ascanio / Ni es Turno, que á una hermana cause lloros" (10). The poem's beginning here confers upon members of the new nation the rights of the great empires in history: the Trojans, the Assyrians, the Romans, and the Greeks. The independent nation-state takes up the torch of empire and Iturbide is cast as a new incarnation of the epic founder of the Roman Empire, Aeneas, thus emphasizing the importance of the nation's royal family (and perhaps, subtly, the filial relationship of the ex-colony with Spain). Other poems lauding Iturbide explicitly refer to him as "Caesar" and interpret him within the imperial tradition.

Contrary to what traditional narratives of criollo nationalism might have us believe, the criollo authors of these kinds of poems were far from representative of the greater population. The great majority of the population in Latin America failed to "imagine" a national community of any sort (whether it be a republican nation-state or an imperial one). The work of political scientist Eric Van Young bears this out in the case of New Spain. "Did most common Mexicans of the 1810-1821 period," Van Young asks, "'imagine' a community called Mexico, a national entity beyond the reach of their own accustomed horizons of political reference?" ("The Limits" 5-6). His meticulous archival research provides a resounding "no." Not only do his investigations attest to the heterogeneity of the Mexican (and Latin American) population in the nineteenth century, they also emphasize the survival into the national period of colonial markers of identity in agrarian communities. In one of his most fascinating arguments, Van Young asserts that in certain rural communities of New Spain, insurgencies that have commonly been interpreted as "nationalist" were, in fact, highly localized and not in concert in any way with the nationalist program of the elites. Hence, while the violence of rural villagers against peninsulares has commonly been interpreted as part of the Creole-led independence movement, in reality, Van Young argues, these rural and for the most part indigenous people were merely taking their frustrations out on the most obvious cultural "other." In fact, many of those living in rural areas desired to maintain their current relationship with the Spanish Crown whose colonial juridical system had afforded them certain legal rights. Van Young even provides evidence that some indigenous rural villagers believed that Ferdinand VII was their imperial savior who was secretly roaming the countryside and inciting rebellion. "Of a group of young Indian men and women from Celaya, captured in November 1810 and accused of insurgent activities," Van Young writes, "all but two clearly believed they were following the orders of the king of Spain, who was physically present in Mexico, riding about the countryside in a black coach, and who had himself commanded Father Hidalgo to take up arms against the Spanish colonial authorities" ("The Limits" 28). The contradiction at the heart of the notion that Ferdinand VII was inciting indigenous communities to revolt against Spaniards is almost breathtaking. Equally intriguing is that Ignacio Allende, the Creole-military officer and co-conspirator of Hidalgo, was venerated and proposed as candidate for king in certain indigenous communities. One indigenous rebel, Van Young recounts, is said to have declared: "and now he [Allende] is going to obtain the crown of Mexico and in a few days we will fall at his feet and kiss his feet and hands, because he is going to be nuestro Católico [our Catholic King]" (qtd. in Van Young, "The Limits" 29). These rural villagers were not rebelling against the Spaniards because they espoused the nation as imagined by the Creole elite. Rather, they sought to preserve the protections that had traditionally been granted to them by the Spanish sovereign through the laws and bureaucracy of the Empire. So while they have been traditionally interpreted by nationalist historiography as "nationalists," these indigenous communities in fact aligned themselves closer to empire, converting Ferdinand VIII into an object of messianic veneration. Van Young's work emphasizes the need to "disaggregate[e] independence movements into a

number of separate movements or rebellions, conflated at points but essentially of different natures" ("Millennium" 412). I would suggest these disparate movements shared, at least to some extent, a penchant for empire that suffused their ideological frameworks. For the Indians, empire and its King figurehead represented a patriarchal system that had granted them a certain degree of privileges and protections; and for the Creoles, the empire -- its imaginary and its discourse -- provided what was seen as a viable set of tools with which to launch the independent nation.

Although this discussion of recent challenges to traditional narratives of the nation-state on the surface appears to have taken us off the path following Christopher Columbus in the Americas, it in fact sketches the outlines of the same concepts that motivates transnationalism: skepticism regarding nation-centric thinking and the necessity of deep contextualization. Both, I would argue, are necessary responses by those studying the early modern period to globalization. Both allow for the adoption of a versatile hermeneutic that reveals historical subjects in the variegated contexts of their diverse cultural centers and in relation to subjects in other temporal and geographical contexts. They allow us not only to read Columbus as a symbol of empire and the nation, but also to excavate the intersection between these two readings by making its context three dimensional on both the local and global levels. In this rich context, different ways of understanding the various conflicts and convergences between empire and the nation in the early modern period come to light.

Note: A previous version of this essay was presented at the 2006 meeting of the Latin American Studies Association in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Thank you to Sandra Alfery, Jeremy Paden, and Victoria Sams for their insightful comments on previous drafts.

Works Cited

- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. 1983. London: Verso, 1991.
- Anna, Timothy E. *The Mexican Empire of Iturbide*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska, 1990.
- Barazábal, Mariano. "Ramillete Alegórico de flores poéticas que de su simple huertecillo ofrece á nuestro amado Emperador, en el dia fausto de su coronacion, el rústico Anfriso." México: Imprenta Imperial del Señor Valdés, 1822.
- Bolívar, Simón. "Contestación de un americano meridional a un caballero de esta isla." *Obras completas*. By Simón Bolívar. Ed. Vicente Lecuna. 2nd ed. La Habana: Editorial Lex, 1950.
- Carrasco, Gabriel. *Canto al descubrimiento de América*. Rosario: Imprenta de Carrasco, 1882.
- Crèvecoeur, J. Hector St. John. *Letters from an American Farmer*. New York: Fox, Duffield, 1904.
- Grabovszki, Ernst. "The Impact of Globalization and the New Media on the Notion of World Literature." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 1.3 (1999): <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol1/iss3/1/>>.
- Claudio Lomnitz. *Deep Mexico, Silent Mexico: An Anthropology of Nationalism*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 2001.
- Martínez-San Miguel, Yolanda. "Introduction. Special Issue: A Colonial Atlantic?: Rethinking Colonial Studies." *Arachne@Rutgers: Journal of Iberian and Latin American Literary and Cultural Studies* 1.2 (2001): <http://arachne.rutgers.edu/vol1_2intro.htm>.
- O'Leary, Daniel Florencio. *Memorias*. 3 vols. Caracas: Imprenta Nacional, 1952.
- Peacock, Thomas Brower. *Peacock's Great International Prize Poem, The Columbian Ode*. Topeka: Thomas Brower Peacock, 1892.
- Van Young, Eric. "The Limits of Atlantic-World Nationalism in a Revolutionary Age: Imagined Communities and Lived Communities in Mexico, 1810-1821." *Nationalism in the New World*. Ed. Don H. Doyle and Marco Antonio Pamplona. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006. 184-207.
- Van Young, Eric. "Millennium on the Northern Marches: The Mad Messiah of Durango and Popular Rebellion in Mexico, 1810-1815." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 28.3 (1986): 385-413.
- White, Ed. "Early American Nations as Imagined Communities." *American Quarterly* 56.1 (2004): 49-80.
- Zamora, Lois Parkinson. "Comparative Literature in an Age of 'Globalization'." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 4.3 (2002): <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol4/iss3/1/>>.

Author's profile: Elise Bartosik-Vélez holds a Ph.D. in comparative literature and teaches in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at Dickinson College. Her interests in research include Christopher Columbus and the revolutionary and early national periods in the Americas, both North and South. She has published "The Three Rhetorical Strategies of Christopher Columbus" in the *Colonial Latin American Review* (2003) and is currently working on a book manuscript and two essays about Columbus. E-mail: <bartosie@dickinson.edu>.