

NATIONALISM, ORIENTALISM AND OTHERNESS: CONSEQUENCES OF
IMMIGRATION IN VENEZUELA AT THE END OF THE NINETEENTH
CENTURY FROM MEMOIRS OF WOLF'S HAND
(DOMINGO B. CASTILLO, 1934)

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El fenómeno de la inmigración es un tema que suele generar polémica sin importar la época en la que se origine. Algunos países como Venezuela, fueron visionarios y promovieron la llegada de mano de obra extranjera para potenciar la economía post independentista. No obstante, esto fue despertando un sentimiento nacionalista en los venezolanos y modificando su percepción sobre los extranjeros. Memorias de Mano de Lobo escrita por Domingo B. Castillo (1934), es un claro ejemplo de esta situación donde no solamente el nacionalismo sino también el orientalismo y la otredad se refleja en la narrativa de este autor venezolano. El objetivo general del presente artículo académico es identificar las consecuencias de la inmigración a través de Memorias de Mano de Lobo en la Venezuela a fines del siglo XIX.

Palabras Claves: Venezuela, Inmigración, Orientalismo, Nacionalismo, Otredad

The phenomenon of immigration always has sparked controversy regardless of location and age. Some countries, such as Venezuela, were visionary and promoted foreign workers to boost the economy during the post-independence period. However, this aroused a nationalist feeling in Venezuelans and changed their perception of foreigners. Memoirs of Wolf's Hand of Domingo B. Castillo (1934) describes this situation, where not only nationalism but also orientalism and otherness influenced the narrative of this Venezuelan author. The principal goal of this academic paper is through Memoirs of Wolf's Hand to identify the consequences of immigration in Venezuela at the end of the nineteenth century.

Key Words: Venezuela, Immigration, Orientalism, Nationalism, Otherness

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Introduction

Mass media has introduced most of the problems that the Venezuelan diaspora faces since 2015. In this way, more than five million Venezuelans are victims of xenophobia in different regions, especially those settled in Colombia, Ecuador and Peru. On the other hand, we cannot forget that Venezuela has been the home for thousands of immigrants shortly after its founding in 1810. Notwithstanding, some problems related to immigration and the perception of Venezuelans on this topic remains an issue understudied.

Before October 1830, Venezuelans attributed the social backwardness to the Spanish colonial past and the consequences of the Independence's War. The backwardness was present in different aspects of the nation and led to promoting immigration. However, this would trigger some discomfort in the Venezuelan population.

To know more about this reality, we have analysed *Memoirs of Wolf's Hand* (*Memorias de Mano de Lobo*), written by Domingo B. Castillo (1934). This work presents different social, political and economic aspects of Venezuela in the second half of the nineteenth century. Castillo describes Venezuelan's perception of immigration and the image of people belonging to Asia and North Africa, like the Turks, Cossacks and Bedouins respectively. He compares the last two with the Venezuelan Llaneros for some characteristics in common.

This academic paper answers the following research question, what are the consequences of immigration in Venezuela during the second half of the nineteenth century in *Memoirs of Wolf's Hand* written by Domingo B. Castillo (1934)? This qualitative research comprises a deductive method, which has applied a critical theoretical framework based on Orientalism (Edward Said, 1978) and Otherness (Zygmunt Bauman, 1991).

This work comprises two parts. The first examines the post-colonial period in Venezuela, where different governments promote immigration to take advantage of abandoned lands and boost agriculture. The second mentions how the Venezuelan people assume a reluctant attitude towards immigration. In addition, this last analyses how the author's perspective configures both an orientalist and otherness regard when he describes immigrants from Asia and North Africa, like the Turks, Cossacks and Bedouins.

1.1. Immigration in Venezuela at the beginning of the republican period

Immigration is a phenomenon that always creates considerable controversy when locals confront the culture of the newcomer. Certainly, sometimes this is a tough challenge to overcome since the second half of the nineteenth century when the Industrial Revolution provokes the flow of immigration labour. Especially, immigrants from the Eastern hemisphere, like Chinese, Japanese or Turks, including others from North Africa, have faced complicated integration into the Western societies. Perhaps the ignorance of their cultures led to make a stereotype from people with different cultural backgrounds.

The second half of the nineteenth century coincides with the second phase of the industrial revolution in Europe. A scenario in which set up the industrial poles. Subsequently, started a migratory flow from the countryside to the city to be employed far from the deficiencies of rural life. «*The more active migration of Great Britain is only what might have been expected from its larger size, its higher commercial and industrial development, the greater variety of its resources, and more extended facilities for travel*»¹.

In this context, it starts not only internal but also external displacement. The Northern hemisphere seems to be attractive, especially in some large cities like New York, which caught the attention of the European workforce. According to Ravenstein, «*It does not admit of doubt that the call for labour in our centres of industry and commerce is the prime cause of those currents of migration which it is the object of this paper to trace. If, therefore, we speak perhaps somewhat presumptuously of «laws of migration», we can only refer to the mode in which the deficiency of hands in one part of the country is supplied from other parts where population is redundant*»².

In Latin America, the situation was quite similar. Shortly after its foundation in 1810, Venezuela opened its borders for immigrants who wanted to look for a better future and boost the worn-out economy because of the independence process. The Spanish-American countries had won their independence and began their republican life; some later, such as Peru, Bolivia, Uruguay and others earlier, such as Venezuela in July 1811. Thanks to the Constituent Assembly and the new Constitution of October 1830, this country faced a restart of republican life for 20 years until 1850.

Before October 1830, Venezuela was characterized mainly by heterogeneity and social backwardness, according to the Venezuelan politicians of that time, which they attributed to four factors such as the Spanish past, the consequences of the War of Independence, the political mistakes made and the structural problems of the Venezuelan economy. The backwardness remains present in different aspects of economic, social, cultural and religious reality. Thus, Venezuela adopted long-term strategies that encompassed a set of policies. Among them the gradual abolition of slavery, the reduction and «civilization» of the indigenous people under the principle of «enlightened piety», the establishment of a public education system, the implementation of modern rules that would allow economic recovery, and the social re-institutionalization and organization of the state apparatus and the promotion of immigration, etc.³.

With this policy of promoting immigration, Venezuela became an attractive nation to foreign labour, which knew how to take advantage of the situation favouring the development of this country. In his book *Traces of immigration in Venezuela*, the anthropologist Juan Carlos Rey Gonzales affirms «From the first years of republican life,

¹ Ravenstein, Ernst Georg, «On the Laws of Migration», *Journal of the Statistical Society*, n°48, part II, June, 1885, p. 171.

² *Ibidem*, p. 198.

³ Plaza, Elena, *Venezuela. La Construcción de La República, 1830-1850*, Fundación Rómulo Betancourt, Caracas, 2011, p. 41.

the loss of young men during the War of Independence exacerbated the lack of labour shortage for undertaking the tasks of peace, whose solution relied on a policy to attract as many people as possible. It also included entire families - who wanted to come and try their luck in our land. In the beginning, this policy focused on residents of the Canarian archipelago, to whom there was an immediate response. In a few years, this reached all European countries and the United States of America. With an outstanding result in peninsular Spain, Portugal, France, Italy, Germany, and Arab latitudes from where we received small groups»⁴.

These historical events are present in *Memoirs of Wolf's Hand*, written by Domingo B. Castillo. It describes the socio-political and economic aspects of Venezuela in the second half of the nineteenth century. This work is originally published in 1934 by the editorial Litografía e Imprenta la Reforma - Editorial Jouvin (Guayaquil), which was founded by Jacinto Jouvin Arce in 1905⁵. Another aspect to highlight in this work is the language used by the protagonist *Wolf's Hand* because it seems to be very popular. And this argot can hardly be understood by another Spanish speaker. In this sense, this work contains a glossary of terms from that Spanish spoken in Venezuela in the late nineteenth century⁶.

The author, Domingo B. Castillo, highlights the participation of *Wolf's Hand* in the legalistic revolution of 1892, and the return of *Wolf's Hand* to pastoral life. With this work Castillo aimed to arouse the interest of his compatriots. According to him, the presentation of *Wolf's Hand* is a very realistic, popular and versatile literary style. Thus, he left it to the consideration of the public, and ordinary justice, so they will judge his work.

The importance of this work lies in the fact that the author describes the social, economic and political aspects of Venezuelans in the second half of the nineteenth century. In addition, Castillo refers to some inhabitants from Asia and North Africa, with orientalist regard. Castillo's work has undoubtedly been an example of these stereotypes and generalizations of Eastern people, like Turks, Cossacks, and Bedouins.

2.1. Consequences of immigration in Venezuela at the end of the nineteenth century

2.1.1 Nationalism

This wave of immigration provoked a feeling of resentment against the foreigner. *Memoirs of Wolf's Hand* underlines the irony in a saying of this period. «That is why many say that Venezuela is the mother of foreigners and the stepmother of Venezuelans». As a result, aroused a feeling of nationalism around the country. The political scientist Lloyd Cox defines nationalism as follows «The link between citizenship and nationality, the specificity of national as opposed to other forms of collective identity, and the impacts of globalization, capitalism, state centralization and war on national phenomena and vice versa»⁷. Precisely, all that happened in this nation since Venezuelans began to appraise the national and rescue their identity.

This situation became more and more complex because it was not only the presence of foreigners in Venezuelan society that caused some rejection in the second half of the nineteenth century but also their presence in the economy. «Almost all domestic production continues to increase the prosperity of foreign merchants who promote and exploit it, anticipating money and merchandise to the producer so that

⁴ Rey González, Juan Carlos, *Huellas de la inmigración en Venezuela: Entre la historia general y las historias particulares*, Fundación Empresas Polar, Caracas, 2011, p. 9.

⁵ El Universo, Legado de servicio a la colectividad, 30 de junio de 2004.

<https://www.eluniverso.com/2004/06/30/0001/18/EoD6C58CF7EC494DA56ED58255515B83.html/>

⁶ Castillo, Domingo B., *Memorias de Mano Lobo* (Edición Completa), Lit. e Imp. La Reforma, Editorial Jouvin, Guayaquil, 1934, p. 379.

⁷ Cox, Lloyd, *Nationalism: Themes, Theories and Controverses*, Palgrave Pilot, Sidney, 2020, p. 40.

they can pay him with fruits; the industries are rudimentary and the exploitation of the subsoil is undermined and executed by strangers because of the concession policy»⁸.

It seemed that Venezuelans felt to be under the elite group of foreigners. «If within that harmony the foreign capitalists do not feel comfortable, even if their absence is noticeable, then is preferable they remain absent and not to be a slave under their ruinous impositions»⁹. This finally created a narrative against foreigners by the intellectuals of this time. «Visionary patriots gathered there, daily composing and decomposing the country as they pleased; writers who made mincemeat without sauce with certain poets and prosecutors, nationals and foreigners, who were not of their devotion; and writers who amassed glory and immortality, in a doctoral tone, consecrating stylists and thinkers»¹⁰.

2.1.2. Orientalism and Otherness

Venezuelans began to create stereotypes regarding immigrants from Asia and North Africa. This practice, known as Orientalism, is a theoretical approach introduced by Edward Said in 1978. *Memoirs of Wolf's Hand*, written by Domingo B. Castillo, is a clear example. In this work, the Venezuelan author introduces different socio-political and economic topics of his country including, immigration in the second half of the XIX century.

Orientalism describes aspects of life in Eastern culture by writers, artists, painters from the Western world. « *I shall be calling Orientalism, a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience. The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other*»¹¹. A part of civilizations and languages, this approach includes other fields such as art, music, cinema, and literature.

Concerning the latter, it becomes a tool that allows knowing a certain period of history focusing on the dynamics of society. « If the literary representation of the universal library may be said to be an image of literature as world encompassing reality, the concept of world literature, which has proven equally irresistible at decisive moments in the bourgeois era, is by the same token a systematization of the other»¹². However, systematization of the other implies generalizations based on a biased identity of the individual.

2.1.2.1. The Turks

By 1890, the Ottoman society was divided into Muslim and non-Muslim, creating a dichotomy between first and second-class citizens (dominant and dominated). Among these is the Christian community. Under the administration of Hamid II, took place the worst massacres against non-Muslim minorities. As a result, occurred a confrontation between the Muslim community and the Christian minorities represented mainly by Armenians. Another consequence of this religious persecution is the Turkish Diaspora.

⁸ Castillo, Domingo B., *op. cit.*, p. 78.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 124.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 251.

¹¹ Said, Edward, *Orientalism*, Penguin Books, London, 2003, p. 1.

¹² Mufti, Aamir R., *Forget English! Orientalism and World Literatures*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2016, p. 4.

The Turks were a small community well settled in Venezuela who arrived before the fall of the Ottoman Empire¹³. It is necessary to underline that the word «Turk» in Latin America refers to those migrants who arrived from the Middle East (Lebanese, Syrians, Ottomans, etc.) in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century.

The scope of Orientalism includes « a very large mass of writers, among whom are poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators, have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, « mind », destiny, and so on »¹⁴. In this context, Domingo B. Castillo refers to Turks, when Barrabas, Vizcaino and Vate, both friends of Wolf's Hand arranged a meeting to examine the scope of Memoirs of Wolf's Hand in October 1890.

In this sense, Vizcaino replied:

«If the orator and his supporters to whom I refer both wish to adopt the polygamous social regime, Oh! Holy peace! Then they need to transform Venezuela into the Turkey of the new world, if and only if their power is enough. That will be a hit in the domain of modern sociology. Of course, you need to consider that the children of polygamous Turks have a legal father, their wives are legitimate, and they exercise rights with many duties and vast obligations. We must recognize that our polygamous regime, without a responsible leader, supports and encourages a charity or antisocial charity service, or what is the same, to be anticultural »¹⁵.

The Turkey of the New World in 1890 means a modern State. During this time, the Ottoman Empire enjoyed a powerful image in the international arena. Thanks to the *Tanzimat* (Reorganization), which triggered a set of reforms between 1839 and 1876. During the first years of Hamid II's administration, as Sultan-Caliph, he performed a double function. As a sultan, he exercised power on the political branch; and being Caliph, he protected Islam from deviationism. The synergy of these two functions aimed to ensure the application of Sharia. In this way, Islam had become a tool that regulated different aspects of the Ottoman Empire. Thus, Castillo underlines just this facet of Turkey society based on Islamic values, which shaped the faith of Muslims and other socio-political aspects.

When Vizcaino, on the one hand, says « taking into account that the children of polygamous Turks have a legal father »; and, on the other hand, that «their women are legitimate wives», Castillo underlines the image of the average Turkish man who professed the faith of Islam in the late nineteenth century. According to Quran, Sura 4 (An-Nisa), Ayah 3, they had the right to marry up to four wives. It is necessary to underline the context of religious persecution in this period of history to understand that not all the Turks from the Ottoman Empire were Muslims.

Moreover, this mention related to polygamy shows a moral connotation concerning the definition of «otherness». According to Bauman, the stranger could be a synonym for chaos because it breaks the status quo. Zygmunt Bauman states « There is hardly an anomaly more anomalous than the stranger. He stands between friend and enemy, order and chaos, the inside and the outside. He stands for the treacherousness of friends, for the cunning disguise of the enemies, for fallibility of order, vulnerability

¹³ Joshua Project, 2021. https://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/18274/VE

¹⁴ Said, Edward, *op. cit.*, pp. 2-3.

¹⁵ Castillo, Domingo B., *op. cit.*, p. 317.

of the inside »¹⁶. The ideology of Wolf's Hand has an ultra-conservative character regarding the role of men in society, which contrasts with the right of Ottoman Muslims to marry women. For this reason, they are afraid to become the Turkey of the New World.

2.1.2.2. Bedouins and Cossacks

From the beginning of Venezuela's foundation in 1810, it was a comparison between the Llaneros and the nomads of the Don Lowland (Cossacks) and another with the barbarian nomadic peoples (Bedouins)¹⁷. The work of the Venezuelan sociologist Laureano Vallenilla Lanz «Democratic Cesarism» refers to a stratified society. He highlights the ferociousness in certain groups of Llaneros, cataloguing them as «Cossacks», «Bedouins», and any other designation that refers to nomadic and barbarian peoples¹⁸.

Quoting Benjamin Disraeli (February 1874 – April 1880), Edward Said affirms that «There were—and are—cultures and nations whose location is in the East, and their lives, histories, and customs have a brute reality obviously greater than anything that could be said about them in the West »¹⁹. Of course, this is also present in *Memoirs of Wolf's Hand*, «Don Ramon declared on the Hat's road, the Bedouins and Cossacks that you admire, they spoiled the home that Spain left us and made necessary the regime of force, which is increasingly brutalizing us»²⁰.

However, the identity of Llaneros remained linked to Cossacks and Bedouins, because of their savagery or ferocity. «The fate, however, denied him in death the glory he deserved and brought him the dark end of a defeated fugitive, whom the Bedouin of Boves and Morales beheaded with insatiable ferocity»²¹. In this sense, Castillo's work falls into generalizations based only on a diffuse identity, but which becomes a reality and serves to compare a domestic ethnic group, in this case, the famous Venezuelan llaneros.

Conclusions

The phenomenon of immigration is an issue that creates convergences and divergences, depending on the context. However, immigration also means cultures with different values into the host society. And it is precisely here where subjectivities invade the perception of people to build the identity of the immigrant and trigger a process of cultural generalization. The same occurred in the nineteenth century with immigrants in Venezuela because of a public policy aimed at reactivating the economy deteriorated by the independence process.

It has been determined three consequences of the immigration phenomenon in the second half of the nineteenth century thanks to the literary work of Domingo B. Castillo. First, nationalism influenced Venezuelans when they realized how their nation became a prosperous home for immigrants. Most of them arrived from different regions of the world to seek a better future. Thus, the saying «Venezuela is the mother of foreigners and stepmother of Venezuelans» became popular.

¹⁶ Bauman, Zygmunt, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2007, p. 73.

¹⁷ Thibaud, Clement, «*De la ficción al mito: Los llaneros de la independencia de Venezuela*», Editorial Equinoccio, Caracas, 2006, pp. 327-342.

¹⁸ Vallenilla Lanz, Laureano, *Cesarismo democrático y Otros textos*, Fundación Biblioteca Ayacucho, Caracas, 1991, p. 381.

¹⁹ Said, Edward, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

²⁰ Castillo, Domingo B., *op. cit.*, p. 175.

²¹ *Idem*.

Second, Castillo describes some passages that refer to Muslim Turks, and the identity of Bedouins and Cossacks, both belonging to the regions of Asia and North Africa. The author compares the identity of Bedouins and Cossacks with that of the Venezuelan Llaneros. Castillo argues that their irreverence and savagery are similar. Therefore, it is possible to affirm that the author has an Orientalist regard.

Third, it is possible to appreciate the vision of a character in this literary work referring to the wives and children of the Muslim Turks subjectively. He invokes morality to judge the culture of the other, falling into what Zygmunt Bauman calls «Otherness».

This academic paper has identified the perception of Venezuelans on immigration that it faced shortly after its foundation, especially in the second half of the nineteenth century. The arguments presented in this literary work agree with other primary and secondary sources used in this research. For this reason, it is possible to say that the content of *Wolf's Hand* is faithful to reality. And it describes the Venezuelans and author perceptions regarding immigrants, most of them acclaimed at the beginning of the republic but finally repudiated in the late nineteenth century. Something predictable in postcolonial societies whose context contrasts with the problems affecting the Venezuelan diaspora nowadays.

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