

Contesting modernization in rural peripheral settings: the pioneering lens of Cynthia Hewitt de Alcántara

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Abstract: The interdependent inequalities in the production and circulation of knowledge in the social sciences have marked the historical development of mostly male canons from the centers. With the impulse of the feminist wave in Latin America, the great contribution of invisible women to the construction of the social sciences has begun to have high relevance. This article introduces for the first time the intellectual and professional trajectory of Cynthia Hewitt de Alcántara (1942) from the gender and sociology of knowledge perspectives. Based on her written production and an in-depth interview conducted in July 2022, I focus on the author's production during her first stay in Mexico between 1966-1985, reconstructing the interrelations between the contexts of production and her contributions contesting modernization processes within the green revolution, the situation of women in peripheral rural contexts and the entangled paradigms of the social sciences from a gendered perspective.

Keywords: Modernization. Green revolution. Rural women. Cynthia Hewitt de Alcántara. Circulation of knowledge. Gender.

Desenvolvimento na América Latina: uma questão de cultura

Resumo: As desigualdades interdependentes na produção e circulação do conhecimento nas ciências sociais marcaram a formação histórica de cânones majoritariamente masculinos e dos centros. Com o impulso da onda feminista na América Latina, o estudo das contribuições das mulheres invisíveis na construção das ciências sociais é um tema que começa a ter maior relevância. Este artigo tem por objetivo apresentar pela primeira vez a trajetória intelectual e profissional de Cynthia Hewitt de Alcántara (1942), segundo uma perspectiva de gênero e da sociologia do conhecimento. A partir de sua produção escrita e de uma entrevista em profundidade realizada em julho de 2022, analiso a etapa mexicana entre 1966-1985, reconstruindo as inter-relações entre contextos de produção e suas contribuições para a modernização, a revolução verde, as mulheres em contextos rurais periféricos, bem como os paradigmas entrelaçados das ciências sociais a partir de uma perspectiva de gênero.

Palavras-chave: Modernização. Revolução verde. Mulheres rurais. Cynthia Hewitt de Alcántara. Circulação de conhecimento. Gênero.

Introduction

Latin American (under)development theories in circulation: women's voices and interdependent inequalities

During a research stay in West Berlin in 1976, the German-born American agrarian sociologist Ernest Feder compiled an extensive book entitled *Gewalt und Ausbeutung. Lateinamerikas Landwirtschaft* (Violence and Exploitation. Latin American Agriculture), which aimed to introduce the German public to the crucial debates on the agrarian problem in Latin America. In a list of 24 contributions, there was only one contribution written by a woman: “The History of the Green Revolution: The Mexican Experience” by Cynthia Hewitt de Alcántara. This example, although randomly selected, demonstrates a constant in the production and circulation of knowledge in the social sciences: the minor presence of women in the formation of its debates and canons. Numerous research studies have emphasized inequalities in social science production and circulation at different levels. Structural inequalities and dependencies between centers and peripheries, the growing hegemony of English and a system of evaluation and indexing that privileges the centers have been highlighted (Alatas, 2003; Connell, 2007; Keim, 2009; Gingras; Mosbah-Natanson, 2010; Vessuri et al., 2014). Veronika Wöhrer (2016) has shown how even within the field of gender studies itself, which aims to make inequalities visible, the centers (especially the USA) articulate the debates and theories with greater global circulation to the detriment of production from the peripheries. Within the framework of these unequal structures, social science production in Latin America is considered “semi-peripheral”, taking into account different historical periods, the existence of peripheral centers, networks and their own circuits of recognition (Beigel, 2013; 2014). Studies of the Latin American case have focused on showing how interdependent inequalities (of gender, class, ethnicity, geography, languages and institutions) constitute the forms of production, circulation and marginalization of knowledge (Göbel & Martín, 2018). The Brazilians Lélia Gonzalez and Beatriz Nascimento are among the pioneering scholars and activists to denounce the marginalization and epistemic violence against black and indigenous women (Ratts, 2006). The current feminist wave, with a strong presence in Latin America, has produced a growth in academic production on women who have been made invisible in intellectual and scientific history from a gender perspective. In the reconstruction of the history of critical development theories, the sociologist Vania Bambirra has been one of the few women to receive attention (Ribeiro, 2019; Wildner, 2019). A very recent study of the trajectory of the nutritionist Emma Reh at the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)

in Guatemala in the 1960s has shown the marginalization of her critical voice on nutrition (Pernet, 2019). Corinne Pernet argues that Reh's being rendered invisible is related to a male and chauvinist tendency within international development organizations to marginalize female voices, as well as her unique critical and integrative work on nutrition planning based on sustained fieldwork with indigenous communities. Continuing with these new trends in the analysis of women's trajectories, this article aims to present for the first time Cynthia Hewitt de Alcántara's pioneering contributions to discussions of the agrarian question and anthropology in Latin America, especially in the period of the rise of the development/underdevelopment agenda between the mid-1960s and the late 1980s (Kay, 2010; Svampa, 2016; Ruvituso, 2020). Drawing on data from her publications and an in-depth interview conducted in July 2022, in the first section I propose to reconstruct Hewitt de Alcántara's intellectual and professional trajectory from her training in the USA (1960-1966), her research in and on Mexico between consultancy and academia (1966-1985) and her professional consolidation as a senior official at the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (Unrisd) in Geneva (1985-2002). In the subsequent three sections, I will provide an account of Hewitt de Alcántara's central and pioneering contributions, focusing on different aspects of the modernization process in its contexts of production. First, her book on the modernization of Mexican agriculture critically addressed the multiple social and political impacts of the green revolution in Mexico. Secondly, a report for the Economic Commission for Latin America (Cepal) on the transformation of the situation of low-income rural women in Latin America in the context of peripheral modernization. Finally, her pioneering study of the sociology of knowledge around the entangled paradigms that explain the different views that anthropology constructed of the Mexican countryside between 1920 and 1980. In the conclusion, I will provide an account of the interconnected factors that can explain the trajectory of Hewitt de Alcántara within the history of critical thought on underdevelopment and the agricultural question from a gender and sociology of knowledge perspective.

A trajectory between consultancy and research: training, trans-regional networks and care

Born in 1942 in Lexington (Ky., USA), Cynthia Hewitt's first contact with Latin America was during her family's move to Albuquerque, New Mexico, when she was a teenager: "It is a state with a Mexican, colonial past that still retains traits of Mexican culture. Spanish is an official language. There I was captivated by the Spanish-colonial-Mexican culture"¹. In 1960 she won a scholarship to study political science at the prestigious Vassar College (NY, USA), where she attended Charles C. Griffin's Latin American history classes. After graduating from Vassar, she entered

1. Author interview with Cynthia Hewitt de Alcántara, July 7, 2022 (own translation from Spanish).

Columbia University for a Master's degree in International Relations, where she continued her training with other leading figures:

At Columbia, I had quite extensive professors and contacts in Latin America. I was able to attend Charles Walter Wagley's classes on Brazil, Bryce Wood, Marvin Harris and Frank Tannenbaum, who had a very personal and intimate seminar, the Tuesday seminar, where he invited distinguished Latin American academics. Victor Urquidi and Rodolfo Stavenhagen, for example, came. I gained knowledge of history, political systems, but without having set foot in Latin America. I was still only a student based in the US².

2. Author interview with Cynthia Hewitt de Alcántara, July 7, 2022 (own translation from Spanish).

After a year at Columbia, Hewitt received a Ford Foundation grant to study the US foreign aid program in Northeast Brazil. This experience was crucial to the discovery of the subject that would occupy her life:

3. Author interview with Cynthia Hewitt de Alcántara, July 7, 2022 (own translation from Spanish).

The first time I touched Latin American soil was in Recife, Pernambuco. About two weeks after arriving, I realized that my plan was ridiculous. It was 1965, there had just been a coup d'État against President Goulart and against the immense mobilization of the left, almost revolutionary. It was a very murky situation. It was a time when the social movements were very strong and also when the misery of the people was very sadly felt. I saw really pitiful misery, people with leprosy in the streets, people dying of hunger, with all the peasant mobilizations and the violence of the big landowners against the peasants. The peasant leader Francisco Julião had just been imprisoned, the Catholic Church was trying to support the demands of the agricultural workers with very progressive Catholic trade unions. It was a moment like I had never seen in my life. I spent the next three months touring the countryside of Pernambuco State in trucks and with Catholic unions and seeing the terrible agrarian situation of absolute exploitation and a dominant power of the military, against any effort to improve the situation. As a result, I decided that what I wanted to study was peasant movements and the situation of the rural population³.

After finishing her studies at Columbia in 1966, Hewitt was hired as an assistant to the sociologist Henry Landsberger at Cornell University to collaborate on a multi-disciplinary comparative study on agrarian structure and agricultural development in Mexico sponsored by the Centro de Investigaciones Agrarias, with funding from, among others, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the Mexican government, and directed by anthropologist and sociologist Rodolfo Stavenhagen. It was during this work that Hewitt met her future husband and life partner, the anthropologist Sergio Alcántara Ferrer:

Sergio was Rodolfo's assistant and I was Henry Landsberger's assistant. Our bosses had other duties and we assistants went to do fieldwork. We went to Michoacán in a sugar-growing area (Taretan). We did a lot of field work. A year later the invitation to Mexico came up again: Landsberger and I returned in 1967. Again, Sergio and I were sent to conduct fieldwork, this time in La Laguna, a cotton-growing area of collective *ejidos* in the north. Within a year, we were married⁴.

The Centro de Investigaciones Agrarias was the base of her international intellectual networks. Researchers, consultants and civil servants passed through it, from Rodolfo Stavenhagen (the hub of the network) to Gerrit Huizer, Solon L. Barraclough, Andrew Pearse, Raymond Buve, Shlomo Eckstein and Sergio Maturana.

Everyone who had an interest in peasant movements and rural development on the progressive side at one time or another lent their support or came to collaborate with the Centro. That's where my network of contacts in the US and Europe came from⁵.

Between 1971 and 1985, Hewitt de Alcántara carried out various research projects as a consultant for Unrisd and the Economic Commission for Latin America (Cepal), and between 1980 and 1984, she was a visiting professor at the Centre for Sociological Studies at El Colegio de México, where she directed a research project on the food system in Mexico City. During this period based in Mexico, she produced the studies that have become her most widely published works: *Modernizing Mexican agriculture: socioeconomic implications of technological change-1940-1970* (1976) and *Anthropological perspectives on rural Mexico* (1984), as well as the report "Modernization and the changing life chances of women in low-income rural families" (1979). The production contexts of these two studies and the Cepal report were subject to the combination of her roles as researcher, consultant and mother:

Because Sergio worked at Plan Lerma, and then at Cepal, I had the privilege of staying at home when our daughters were small. I could work flexibly, accepting some consultancies when the topic was interesting and declining others. I also set my own schedule, which allowed me to combine academic work with family life⁶.

In 1985, the family moved to Geneva for Hewitt de Alcántara to join Unrisd, whose director at the time was Enrique Oteiza:

We were recommended by colleagues from the international network of rural studies. We stayed in Geneva for 16 years. Then we switched roles: instead of Sergio making a living and me doing consulting, I made a living and he did consulting. We have been a duo⁷.

4. Author interview with Cynthia Hewitt de Alcántara, July 7, 2022 (own translation from Spanish).

5. Author interview with Cynthia Hewitt de Alcántara, July 7, 2022 (own translation from Spanish).

6. Author interview with Cynthia Hewitt de Alcántara, July 7, 2022 (own translation from Spanish).

7. Author interview with Cynthia Hewitt de Alcántara, July 7, 2022 (own translation from Spanish).

8. Author interview with Cynthia Hewitt de Alcántara, July 7, 2022 (own translation from Spanish).

From 1986 to 2022 Hewitt de Alcántara was a Unrisd official. First as in charge of international comparative projects on food systems and society, markets in theory and practice, and on crisis, adjustment and social change in Latin America. From 1995 to 2002 she was Deputy Director, supporting a project to improve knowledge on social development within international organizations. During this period, Hewitt de Alcántara produced numerous articles, reports and books focusing on issues of development, food and democracy. After her retirement from Unrisd in 2002, she and her husband returned to their home in Guadalajara, Mexico, where she lives today: “Mexico is an absolutely fascinating place. I loved it in 1966 and I still love it”⁸.

A contested report: modernization, technology, social structures and waste in the Mexican Green Revolution

In 1976, the report “Modernizing Mexican Agriculture: Socioeconomic Implications of Technological Change 1940-1970” was published within the framework of Unrisd, and in 1978 the Spanish version appeared as the book “La modernización de la agricultura mexicana (1940-1970)” from the Siglo XXI publishing house. The report had been produced as part of a global project on green revolutions financed by Unrisd and directed by the British sociologist Andrew Pearse. It was a program that aimed to understand the effects of the technological innovations of the green revolution on the world, especially the implementation of new technologies and seeds. In the preface, Pearse pointed out the particularity of the report on Mexico:

The author of the present study was fortunate in being able to discuss the whole story of Mexico’s “green revolution” with a variety of participants, including scientists, political personalities, peasant cultivators from *ejidos* and indigenous communities, commercial producers, agronomists, extensionists and many other persons who acted in the drama, which was played out during thirty years (Pearse 1976: xi).

Hewitt de Alcántara’s study consisted of different research phases and methodologies: The first part included a critical analysis of agrarian development based on the results of an analysis of a large body of literature produced globally on Mexico. The second part concentrated on a case study of Sonora, based on an intensive six months of fieldwork. The author’s analysis included some general starting points:

- a. this was a study of rural modernization, which in no way could be thought of as synonymous with rural development or progress.

Modernization could lead to development, underdevelopment and non-development;

b. the application and introduction of new technology and the implementation of high-yield seeds produced not only changes in the type and forms of production, but also fundamental social changes with very diverse effects between social classes;

c. only through an analysis of the functioning of public and private institutions, class alliances and local contexts that enter into the expansion process can the redistributive effects of agricultural modernization be understood.

The question then was: who are the winners and losers and which economic groups are in a position to benefit from technological change? The result was a study of the agrarian modernization or green revolution from multiple and critical perspectives that included the socio-political and economic effects of the transformation of the Mexican rural world from 1940 to 1970, taking into account the framework of global capitalist structures, the actions of international foundations (especially the Rockefeller Foundation), and the contributions of local and foreign scientists, politicians, large landowners, industrialists, *ejidatarios*, landless peasants and indigenous communities, among others. The general framework was that of critical development studies in the context of dependency theories, whose general principles were shared by the researchers of the Centro de Estudios Agrarios:

I suppose that, having been in the Northeast of Brazil, having already worked in Taretan and being at the Centro de Investigaciones Agrarias, having worked in La Laguna in the collective *ejidos* that were very similar to the *s* in Sonora, seeing those situations and living with all the Mexican researchers of the sixties and seventies, well, it would be difficult not to have absorbed a progressive, more or less dependency-based point of view of some kind. At the Centro de Investigaciones Agrarias, we all had a way of seeing both the Mexican Revolution and what came afterwards with the establishment of an authoritarian and corrupt government. However, I didn't go to the field with the idea that I was going to apply something. And Rodolfo Stavenhagen, who was a great theoretician, simply urged us to investigate the reality we found⁹.

9. Author interview with Cynthia Hewitt de Alcántara, July 7, 2022 (own translation from Spanish).

The first part of the study summarized the prehistory of the green revolution: from the land reform of President Cárdenas (1934-1940) that strengthened the *ejidos*, that is, communal tenure and production, to the subsequent liberal presidencies (1940-1970), the focus of the analysis, which implemented a modernization pro-

cess that benefited large landowners and land concentration, causing not only the impoverishment of the *ejidatarios* but also a formidable waste of resources. Hewitt de Alcántara reconstructed how the implementation of new technologies through cooperation programs between the Rockefeller Foundation and the Mexican government strengthened and exponentially increased the *latifundista* (large landowners) wheat sector, in turn influencing a range of Mexican agrarian scientists and technicians who were convinced of the modernization process and the inefficiency of land reform and the *ejidos*. The study showed in turn that the green revolution in Mexico was the result of an alliance between large landowners and the urban industrial sector in a fierce struggle to show and provoke the failure of land reform. All the evidence in the study pointed to the fact that the *ejidatarios* and small private farmers competed at a disadvantage, for example, for agricultural credit and irrigation water. In the second part of the report, Hewitt de Alcántara analyzed the effects of these policies and transformations based on in-depth fieldwork in *ejidos* and indigenous communities in the Sonora region, showing their multiple dilemmas: the exodus of poor peasants to the cities, the destruction of indigenous communities' identities and life styles, internal conflicts, corruption and disintegration, and the creation of a culture of poverty. The publication of the report was strongly resisted by the Rockefeller Foundation:

My purpose was not to criticize the Rockefeller Foundation, my purpose was to see what the impact of the green revolution had been in Sonora, in the communities. Probably if I had had access to archives and the internet, the report would have been much more critical of the Rockefeller Foundation than I was. However, they still got angry and vetoed the publication. I had to go to Geneva from Mexico to defend it, and although many colleagues were on my side, they had a problem. Then Andrew Pearse came from Geneva to Mexico and we went to the Rockefeller Foundation's green revolution center in Mexico, and I had to defend it again. They agreed that I should publish it in Spanish, but not in English. So the English version is only in paperback, it is from Unrisd, but it did come out in Spanish; it was translated and published by Siglo XXI¹⁰.

10. Author interview with Cynthia Hewitt de Alcántara, July 7, 2022 (own translation from Spanish).

Pearse's preface to the English version made it clear that the views expressed in the study were not necessarily those of Unrisd. The translation of Hewitt de Alcántara's study into Spanish, corrected and revised by her husband, was published in 1978 by Siglo XXI, a central publisher house within the Latin American critical intellectual field, and by 1988 it had gone through six editions. Despite this recognition in the Mexican intellectual field, the manuscript was not accepted as a doctoral thesis at the University of Leiden (Holland), because it was "too empirical".

The situation of rural women in a process of modernization “from above and from without”: dependency, exploitation, *machismo* and the importance of listening to their voices

“The changing position of rural woman is a vast and terribly understudied topic”, wrote Cynthia Hewitt de Alcántara in a report entitled “Modernization and the Changing Life Chances of Women in Low-Income Rural Families” published in 1979 by Cepal and translated into Spanish as “La modernización y los cambios en las condiciones de vida de las mujeres campesinas”. The report was produced within the framework of a consultancy at the request of the Argentinean sociologist Liliana de Riz, who lives in Mexico:

The person who asked me for this report was Liliana de Riz, a sociologist who worked with Cepal. She had been studying gender issues for many years, but she was unable to report on this meeting. Lourdes Arizpe, who is the pioneer in gender studies and anthropological studies specifically on the situation of women, was also unable to do the report and she passed it on to me. I used the ideas I already had from years of working in the field. I also drew on what I had read. Before that, I had done an enormous amount of work for Rodolfo Stavenhagen as a consultant trying to create a kind of data bank for the Mexican countryside, and so I had a huge bibliography. I found studies on women that I included in the footnotes. Not many. That’s where I got the question of the psychological and socio-economic roots of *machismo*¹¹.

In principle, it was a compilation of the results of a meeting held from 23-30 October 1978 in Mexico City, supported by Clacso, FAO and Unicef with the aim of discussing “the changing livelihood possibilities of low-income families in their own regions over the past few years” (Hewitt de Alcántara 1979: 1). Participants in the discussions included representatives of land reform settlements and cooperatives, officers of national or regional rural women’s associations affiliated with political parties, agricultural extensionists, home economists, rural schoolteachers, a bilingual development worker in an indigenous community, an expert in literacy training by radio, and a sociologist who had worked for several years with rural women- in total fifteen people from seven different countries¹². The topics of the workshop were:

- a. the changing position of women within low-income rural families (their contribution to the physical subsistence of the family through non-remunerated labor; their ability to care adequately for children; their status, in their own estimation and that of others);

11. Author interview with Cynthia Hewitt de Alcántara, July 7, 2022(own translation from Spanish).

12. The countries they represented included El Salvador, Costa Rica, Honduras, Panama, the Dominican Republic, Cuba and Mexico.

- b. changing opportunities for participation by rural women in the labor market (the conditions for obtaining remunerating jobs; hours and wages compared with those of men; the necessity of migration; the impact of remunerated work on family life; the use to which the income of rural woman is put); and
- c. trends in the participation of rural woman in community government, political parties, unions, and cooperatives (Hewitt de Alcántara 1979: 2-3).

In addition to participating in the workshop, Hewitt de Alcántara's report was inspired by a thorough collection of sociological and anthropological bibliographical information on the role and status of rural women, together with the impressions and lessons learned from her fieldwork in various regions of Mexico:

When I was doing fieldwork on the green revolution in Sonora, I lived in the house of Don Bernabé Arana and his wife Doña Petrita Rodríguez de Arana who was incredible, she was one of those women from the north, strong, who actually managed many elements of the peasant organization, but generally in private. So, I thought a lot about her, about what women have to tell and say. And also the children, who nobody interviews, are a great source of information. I see it as a call with Liliana de Riz, with Lourdes Arizpe, for more attention to be paid to women's issues. I don't know if it's feminism or not. At that time there wasn't a big feminist movement in Mexico¹³.

13. Author interview with Cynthia Hewitt de Alcántara, July 7, 2022 (own translation from Spanish).

The author summarized the workshop as a "collective effort" to understand the complexity of the situation of rural women in processes of change, which had meant that each of them had had sufficient time to describe their specific context and experiences. The report then brought together the extensive exchanges of the meeting, together with a thorough reading of the existing literature and the author's own field experiences in order to systematize the problems of rural women, taking into account the many differences. The report concluded with recommendations for future rural development policy that included protection against the ravages of capitalism, improvements in structural services and, above all, listening to women's own perspectives.

*Rural women:
contextualizing differences*

In the introduction to the study, Hewitt de Alcántara began with a contextualization of the changes that the rural world in Latin America had undergone since the post-war modernization process, i.e. the accelerated incorporation into global capitalism

as an economic but also a socio-cultural system. This not only changed the forms of production, but also the forms of family and community relations around subsistence among peasants in different scenarios: large landlords, haciendas, plantations, communities. The question was then: What happens to the situation of the poorest rural women in such vast scenarios in the process of modernization? For Hewitt de Alcántara, the situation of rural women depended on the way and ability with which both sexes establish satisfactory ties with the wider socio-economic system. She differentiated four scenarios that served as a comparative prototypical way of understanding women's situations in the rural world and explained, for example, the striking differences in male violence between closed and open communities, women's new dependence as wives of modernized commercial farmers, the historical over-exploitation of the hacienda and the fact that this had been insufficiently overcome. The first section was devoted to women in "closed" peasant communities. The author referred to remote peasant communities in Mesoamerica and Mexico, which had survived for centuries, speaking their own languages and practicing their own religions. Based on evidence from anthropological studies, Hewitt de Alcántara indicated that before their incorporation into global capitalism and the intensification of their interaction with urban society, women in such communities enjoyed a status that was different to that of men, but nonetheless high and central, so that one cannot speak of patriarchy, but of a cooperative society (Hewitt de Alcántara 1979:14). In contrast, women in "open", mestizo communities were characterized by a high degree of macho violence. Hewitt de Alcántara analyzed this feature in the context of the unequal integration of these communities into capitalism and its negative effects on men and women:

They had access to neither the material comforts nor the educational credentials required to obtain prestige within the modern urban society, and their political power was absolutely insufficient to exert much pressure for future improvement. They were often, in their own minds, second-class citizens of the contemporary national society, while the inhabitants of "closed" indigenous communities were first-class members of a local land group. This fundamental difference in the self-evaluation of different groups within Latin American peasantry, inseparable from differences in the kind of relationship maintained with the national socio-economic system, would seem to constitute an important element in explaining the prevalence of "*machismo*" in mestizo communities and its virtual absence in "closed" indigenous ones (Hewitt de Alcántara 1979: 20).

Within this framework of so-called modernization, Hewitt de Alcántara described the different labor opportunities for poor rural women using different examples

drawn from her experience or from the literature: seasonal migration for harvests, where women (and children) are paid less than their husbands, increasing their dependence; migration to the city, which obliges them to perform domestic services, being subjected to “humiliations never experienced in their own villages”; or women who manage to establish themselves as street vendors, as was the case portrayed by the Mexican anthropologist Lourdes Arizpe in her study of “Las Marias”. Another scenario presented the reality of women in the context of modern capitalist agriculture, for example as the wives of commercial farmers, who in most cases seem to lose all economic function within the family, except for childbearing and housework. For the author, women in this situation provided some of the “most pathetic examples of dependence” to be found in the literature: “They feel themselves prisoners of fate and exhibit a passive disinterest in the affairs of the community” (Hewitt de Alcántara 1979:30). This position of housewife in the capitalist context differed from that of women engaged in domestic work in communities, where their work is valued for its dual productive and affective nature:

There is nothing intrinsically belittling about domesticity. In a society based on the domestic entity, not only for affect but also for production, responsibility for the smooth functioning of the home is an honor. Within a capitalist setting, however, production is increasingly separated from the domestic unit and is valued only in terms of money, not in terms of simple utility for subsistence. The work of both men and women thus comes to be considered of secondary importance, and members of the family who devote themselves entirely to unremunerated domestic activities lose social recognition from the wider society for their efforts (Hewitt de Alcántara 1979: 33).

Thus, Hewitt de Alcántara explained that there were elements of cultural change in adaptive strategies for subsistence, one of them being *machismo* and its codes, which become an economic resource, enabling men to establish political and commercial ties with others who can be useful in making money. Finally, the author returned to the hacienda and the exploitation of women: “If ever there has been an institution in Latin American history which has provided the structural requisites for a thoroughgoing exploitation of women, [it] is therefore the hacienda” (Hewitt de Alcántara 1979:40). On haciendas, women were considered nothing more than a complement to their husbands and therefore available to assist (free of charge) to maintain good relations between the male hacienda dependents and their patrons. However, the transition from hacienda dependents to land reform beneficiaries, while it did entail a radical transformation of the legal status of peasant families, did not remove the obstacles to women’s full equality in society at large. Peasant household units found themselves to be small producers facing new inequalities.

*Recommendations:
participation, barriers to capitalism
and incorporation of services*

Despite many of the differences in the resources and strategies of poor peasants in the context of modernization, for the vast majority of families, modernization meant increasing incorporation into a market on terms that were systematically unfavorable to small producers. This process tended to isolate families, putting an end to traditional strategies of cooperation and security. Hewitt de Alcántara emphasized that the main socio-economic determinant of women's roles in the rural scenario were not the type of family, or their own gender, but the form of incorporation into the market and the consequent adaptation of both sexes for survival, affecting the livelihood options of both men and women. Often the types of work available to women in modernizing contexts go against their own culture and norms, generating harmful effects on individual and community psychology. Hewitt de Alcántara also contradicted studies that assumed that leaving the domestic sphere to work outside the home increased women's chances of a better quality of life and emancipation. This conclusion of gender studies from industrial countries did not apply to the experience of low-income rural women in the Latin American context, whose living conditions did not improve as domestic servants, or as a poorly paid agricultural labor force, without access to care systems for their children. On the contrary, the need for paid work, the need to make money in order to survive, and the discrediting of unpaid domestic work, made them more dependent on their husbands and resulted in fewer community ties. This raised the question of what can be done to counteract this within the framework of development policy? Hewitt de Alcántara's recommendations included a combination of barriers to capitalist logic within communities, the participation of affected people in decision-making and structural improvements in state services:

Rural development must therefore be given high priority in national planning, and the participation of local people in the planning process strongly encouraged. At the same time, the value of local culture must be upheld in the face of an overwhelming tendency towards its extinction. All of these measures may well imply the reconstruction of certain barriers to the penetration of the countryside by the broader capitalist economic and socio-cultural system. They certainly imply the existence of grassroots organizations of men and women free to discuss local problems and manage local resources (Hewitt de Alcántara 1979: 57).

Hewitt de Alcántara also recommended the implementation of a range of services for women and their families including: piped water, health centers, literacy pro-

grams and technical training, child care centers and adequate housing. The author indicated that the affected women and families should be involved in determining the prioritization of these programs, as well as how best to ensure local participation in their implementation: “To deliver them entirely upon outside initiative would constitute simply an added element in a long history of modernization from above and from without” (Hewitt de Alcántara 1979: 57).

*Cuba:
modernization and the socialist revolution*

The diagnoses of the situation of rural women developed by Hewitt de Alcántara in the report were mainly framed in contexts of peripheral capitalism, which presented very specific impediments to the inclusion of rural women in the national society. In one section of the report, the author reflected on these processes in the context of socialist systems, highlighting the Cuban case. For Hewitt de Alcántara, while the transition from a capitalist to a socialist socio-economic and cultural order would by definition remove some of the main impediments to the equal incorporation of low-income families into national society, there is no necessary link between a transition to socialism and the abandonment of the urban bias so typical of modernization, and development may continue largely from above: “[...] socialism does not always imply immediate and effective efforts to eliminate discriminatory treatment of women within the work force and the family” (Hewitt de Alcántara 1979: 45). The Cuban case, twenty years after the revolution, took on special relevance because of its singularity, and her analysis highlighted the positive effects for women:

The case of Cuban socialism is particularly interesting because it has involved not only a shift in national priorities towards the satisfaction of the basic needs of all low-income groups, but also because the Cuban government has granted special priority to increasing local level participation in the decision-making process, fomenting rural development and providing equal opportunities for women. It has therefore gone further than many other socialist experiments in attempting to improve the life chances of low-income rural women and their families (Hewitt de Alcántara 1979: 46).

The explanation of the difference between the Cuban case and that of other socialist experiences was based on a combination of factors:

- a. the experience of the revolutionary leaders in the countryside during a long period of guerrilla warfare reinforced their commitment to rural compatriots and to women, who played a significant role in the guerrillas;

b. sugar required abundant labor during the sugar harvest, as well as a relatively skilled contingent of sugar mill workers located in the countryside;

c. with the land reform, the countryside began to see itself reorganized into administrative units integrated into a regional planning system;

d. unemployment in both rural and urban areas was tackled simultaneously through a massive program of public work and agricultural expansion. In total the number of women in the labor force doubled between 1959 and 1970, increasing from 295 thousand to 600 thousand; and

e. public investment in an extensive network of day-care centers, primary and secondary schools and cafeterias in workplaces lightened the burden of domestic workloads.

Hewitt de Alcántara pointed out that for women these changes meant not only greater economic participation in “traditionally female” fields (teaching, nursing, community work), they also played an important part in every harvest, became tractor drivers, mill workers, automobile mechanics, policemen and doctors, and occupied an increasing number of high administrative posts. Despite these structural changes, the resistance and discussions surrounding the new Family Code of 1975 showed that there were numerous impediments, especially cultural ones, to gender equality. Thus, for Hewitt de Alcántara, the major challenge for Cuba were cultural rather than the structural definitions of sex roles.

Anthropological perspectives on rural life in Mexico: entangled, transregional paradigms

In 1984, the book *Anthropological perspectives on rural Mexico* was published in the prestigious collection “International Library of Anthropology” by Routledge & Kegan Paul, edited by Adam Kuper of the University of Leiden (Holland). It was the manuscript defended as a doctoral thesis in sociology and anthropology by Cynthia Hewitt de Alcántara in 1982 at the University of Leiden. The book was translated into Spanish under the title *Imágenes del campo. La interpretación antropológica del mundo rural* and published by El Colegio de México in 1988. *Imágenes del campo* is a pioneering study in the sociology of knowledge applied to Latin America. The genesis of this book dates back to 1976, when Hewitt de Alcántara began a bibliographical review of the studies produced on the Mexican rural world with the intention of being able to elaborate indicators and identify patterns of change. After reviewing

more than 1,000 works, the author detected substantial similarities among a group of researchers who worked under the general view of functionalism, as well as differences with researchers working under other theoretical paradigms. For Hewitt de Alcántara, this raised the question of whether the similarities and differences in research paradigms that she had identified reflected actual changes in rural livelihood patterns, or whether they were the result of theoretical evolution or changes within academia. In response to this question, Hewitt de Alcántara's work turned to a new research question and hypothesis, namely that patterns of change in the rural world could be detected, but these were always mediated through the eyes of "non-peasants" or "outsiders" with a particular urban experience and university training, which framed their views. She thus decided to study anthropologists and their production as a disciplinary field in a pioneering exercise to understand the changes and intersections of paradigms in the social sciences in different socio-political and historical contexts that involved national and foreign anthropologists working on the agrarian question in post-revolutionary Mexico, between 1920-1980. The choice of this research problem in the fields of the history of ideas and sociology of knowledge also occurred in the context of Hewitt de Alcántara's decision to write a doctoral thesis, which was to deal with theoretical issues, as well as the importance at that time of working mostly from home (due to the impossibility of her going out into the field because of care of two daughters) and the fact that from her own home she had a specialized library and contacts with many anthropologist colleagues:

I couldn't go out into the field, so I read. At home there are bookshelves everywhere, Sergio's anthropology books, and all the publications of the Instituto Nacional Indigenista, studies of villages, towns and communities. In addition, I lived for decades within the community of anthropologists talking about these issues. Then I wrote *Imágenes del campo*¹⁴.

14. Author interview with Cynthia Hewitt de Alcántara, July 7, 2022 (own translation from Spanish).

Entangled paradigms in a transregional anthropological field

Hewitt de Alcántara's study applied Kuhn's notion of paradigms to a disciplinary field (anthropology) and a specific problem (rural Mexico) in an entangled, transregional setting. These were national and foreign social scientists characterized by urban university training (often in the USA or France) studying "otherness" in colonial and post-colonial contexts. The book included anthropological narratives produced in parallel ways mainly in Mexico, the US and Europe between 1920 and 1980. The author warned of the existence of competing and entangled parallel paradigms and the multiple factors that could affect research results beyond the boundaries created by one paradigm:

[...] one must remain constantly alert to the possibility that the conclusions of researchers working within different paradigms were affected, through chance or design, not only by the intellectual boundaries of their own research traditions, and the temporal boundaries of an historical moment, but also by the particular socio-economic and ecological characteristics of the setting within which observation took place (Hewitt de Alcántara 1984: 5).

Thus, the presentation of different paradigmatic edges was to be understood from an analytical point of view, in which particularism, functionalism, historical structuralism, *indigenismo*, Marxism and dependence entered into dialectical combinations, interrelations and confrontations. Thus, the different chapters did not show a history of successive paradigmatic shifts, but different parallel combinations of debates produced within the framework of anthropology dedicated to Mexico, and in particular to political and institutional contexts. Hewitt de Alcántara's diachronic narrative included a constant opening of the paradigmatic boundaries that she analyzed, from the transdisciplinary, the political and the institutional. Thus, in the first part, "Particularism, Marxism and functionalism in Mexican anthropology, 1920-50" the author showed (to name but a few examples) how the Mexican anthropologist Manuel Gamio, who trained with Franz Boas at Columbia University, instead of adopting the growing relativist fashion in anthropology, developed a view of the rural communities of Teotihuacán in which the indigenous people were characterized as fundamentally backward and archaic. For Gamio, the solution was the integration of the indigenous groups into a homogeneous and modern Mexican national identity as the basis for progress. In contrast, Hewitt de Alcántara analyzed the *indigenista* position of Moisés Sáenz, who recognized the exploitation and misery of rural indigenous communities, considering it important to bring them out of this situation, while maintaining their own governments and cultural plurality. To this position, Hewitt de Alcántara added that of Marxist *indigenista* such as Vicente Lombardo Toledano and Luis Chávez Orozco, who explained the structural elements of indigenous misery, the importance of land reform to overcome it, and at the same time criticized liberal educational policies that violated the right of communities to maintain their languages and customs. Hewitt de Alcántara also explained that, in the midst of these disputes between Mexican anthropologists, a shift was taking place in the global anthropology of the 1920s towards structural-functionalism (Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown), which was applied to Mexico in Robert Redfield's work on the Chan Kom community. This change initiated a new analytical and political trend: the study of communities that were no longer closed but in contact with greater Mexican society, giving rise to the problem of acculturation and the focused study of the aspirations and values that explain social integration. Unlike Gamio, some of his adherents did not seek to make changes

in communities, but to understand them in terms of greater or lesser acculturation. Thus, the second part of Hewitt de Alcántara's work, entitled "A dialogue on ethnic conflict: *Indigenismo* and functionalism, 1950-70" described the productive discussions between local and foreign anthropologists, exemplified by the collaboration between the functionalist Branislaw Malinowski and the Marxist *indigenista* Julio de la Fuente in their joint study of the markets of the valley of Oaxaca. They combined the two perspectives and succeeded in explaining both unity and dependence. Hewitt de Alcántara also analysed how De la Fuente produced a fundamental contribution to *indigenista* theory and practice by introducing the question of inter-ethnic relations. These same combinations of international debates with local political practices and aspirations were repeated in Hewitt de Alcántara's work in the chapter on cultural ecology and Marxism, dependency and historical structuralism. A further chapter, of singular originality, was devoted to the dependency "paradigm". Here, Hewitt de Alcántara introduced an original analysis of the encounter between dependency and anthropological discussions, highlighting the ways in which they were entangled, which had until then been little-studied. Hewitt de Alcántara's study of her own colleagues, many of them close friends, was well received:

Eric Wolf wrote back that he liked it very much. Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán said he thought it was too critical of *indigenismo*, that it had hurt him little, but that he respected my ideas. When Roger Bartran presented the book at El Colegio de México, I was terrified, I thought, he's going to tear me to shreds! He said: This book is so interesting, I learned things about myself. There are some people who have criticized it terribly and still do, they were angry that I didn't include their favorite people, they have a list of people I didn't include. I was aware that I didn't include everyone, but at some point I had to stop¹⁵.

15. Author interview with Cynthia Hewitt de Alcántara, July 7, 2022 (own translation from Spanish).

This pioneering study of the history of anthropology from a transregional and entangled perspective had and has to this day a wide reception within Mexico, but much less in the global canons of the history of science and sociology of knowledge.

Conclusions

Cynthia Hewitt de Alcántara's intellectual trajectory in the period of the rise of the development/underdevelopment agenda, between the 1960s and 1980s, took place during the period of greatest international circulation of social theory produced in Latin America. Dependency was a paradigm of Latin American origin

that accumulated acceptance in critical development studies at the global level (Kay, 2010; Svampa, 2016; Ruvituso, 2020). Drawing on Beigel's (2014) concept of the peripheral center, Mexico City and Guadalajara can be considered spaces of transregional knowledge production on the multiple issues related to underdevelopment. The agrarian and indigenous question was of crucial relevance, the latter especially due to the articulating presence of the agrarian sociologist Rodolfo Stavenhagen. Progressive researchers and consultants on the agrarian question - a transregional network of which Hewitt de Alcántara was a member - shared the general positions of *dependentismo* regarding a critique of modernization, the importance of generating own categories for understanding underdevelopment in Latin America (and other Third World regions), as well as the importance of constructing differentiated local, national and/or regional strategies and solutions. In this context, the distinctive and pioneering feature of Hewitt de Alcántara's work is that her studies of the Mexican rural world and the effects of modernization (today we would call it globalization) were based on a productive combination of critical and scholarly readings of the critical literature (Mexican and international) with fieldwork in the most unequal and exploited rural spaces. Hewitt de Alcántara collected the voices of the actors most disadvantaged by modernization: women, children, landless peasants, impoverished *ejidatarios*, cooperatives, and indigenous communities. In her report for Cepal on low-income rural women in Latin America, Hewitt de Alcántara managed to gather this invisible knowledge on the consequences of modernization in peripheral contexts, recommending listening to the voices and needs of those affected when determining and implementing development policy, without pretending to import European solutions for the "emancipation" of women produced outside their contexts, aspirations and cultures. Hewitt de Alcántara's study of the history of anthropological views on Mexico from the perspective of the sociology of knowledge was a central and pioneering contribution to intellectual and science history, based on a profound bibliographical knowledge, as well as on the contexts, networks and national and international institutions involved, in the sense of what is now known as global intellectual and science history. Following previous studies on the international circulation of knowledge (Alatas, 2003; Connell, 2007; Keim, 2009; Gingras & Mosbah-Natanson, 2010; Beigel, 2014; Vessuri 2014), the question then becomes: How can we explain Hewitt de Alcántara's low international canonization within agrarian studies and the sociology of knowledge, despite her pioneering contributions, her production in English, her extensive north-south network, and the prestige of the institutions in which she worked both within the region and in the context of international organizations? Drawing on the gender perspective followed by Pernet (2019) in their study of the case of Emma Reh, invisibilization can be understood to be the result of multiple and intertwined factors:

An empirical, local and multidisciplinary approach to combat mono-disciplinary, universal and theoretical blinkers

In the context of the boom of the dependency theories that marked the development debate with strong theoretical presuppositions, Hewitt de Alcántara's methodological approach was to face the problem of modernization using an unusual strategy, namely direct confrontation with previous studies (read from a historical and critical perspective) combined with local fieldwork. She was highly aware of the blinkers that can be produced by paradigms and theoretical fashions, and as a result, her question of who wins and who loses in modernization – although global in scope – was answered on the basis of local evidence. In the study "Modernizing Mexican Agriculture", Hewitt de Alcántara showed the multiple effects of modernization in an interdisciplinary study that included an analysis of the technological changes of the green revolution (the implementation of seeds, irrigation infrastructures, and machinery) with an analysis of class alliances, institutions, interests and their effects on life styles, cultures, disintegration and resistance. These circumstances are close to Pernet's (2019) analysis of the trajectory of nutritionist Emma Reh working at the FAO in Guatemala, whose work was found to have been rendered invisible as a result of a machista approach in the perspectives of international development policy and modernization. This approach underestimates interdisciplinary, empirical work with strong support in local and community experience, especially with indigenous people, in favor of technical, theoretical and universalist visions that were mostly held by men.

Between consultancy, academy and care

Based on the analysis of her books and an in-depth interview, this reconstruction of Hewitt de Alcántara's intellectual, professional and family trajectory, as well as of her professional and institutional networks, helps us to understand the contexts of production and circulation of her work. The mother of two daughters, Cynthia Hewitt de Alcántara spent most of her career as a consultant or as an official in international development organizations. The first stage in Mexico (1966-1985), began with five years of fieldwork in various regions of Mexico, forming the basis of the book "Modernizing Mexican Agriculture". The two other studies discussed in this article were carried out in the context of a combination of motherhood with sporadic consultancies and a four-year period as a researcher at El Colegio de México. It is interesting to see how this context led her to write a second book, a pioneering history on the anthropological perspectives on rural Mexico, based on her enormous bibliographical scholarship and her personal networks in Latin America, the US and Europe. In a second stint in Geneva (1986-2002), Hewitt de Alcántara held senior positions at Unrisd as a regional and global development policy official.

This eclectic mix of topics and the shifts between professional roles as consultant and official, researcher and academic, and motherhood (which also influenced her choice of topics, contributing to their diversity) may have weakened the sustained reception of her critical studies on modernization, women and the history of science/sociology of knowledge.

The reconstruction of Hewitt de Alcántara's intellectual and professional trajectory and the analysis of her work during the Mexican period (1966-1985) analyzed in this article provides a glimpse of the interdependencies in the careers of women in the field of critical development studies. Thus, as discussed above, the form and subjects of their contributions responded to intertwined factors. Motherhood and family ties constituted a trajectory that required Hewitt de Alcántara to combine consultancy work in international organizations with research, and resulted in periods during which it was impossible for her to go out into the countryside for fieldwork, the space she considered central to understanding the agrarian question. In the in-depth interview conducted in July 2022, Hewitt de Alcántara emphatically recalled the accompaniment, help and support she received throughout her career from her husband, the anthropologist Sergio Alcántara Ferrer. As her "most appreciated critic", translator, corrector, and fieldwork companion, her husband's presence in her career was constantly clear during the interview, as it is in the prologues to her books. This acceptance of "team" work is not very common in male narratives of intellectual history. Likewise, for the purposes of circulation and canonization, the prevalence of the empirical over the theoretical, of the particular local case over universal aspirations, as well as her critical assessments of some development policies, contributed to a framework of rejections and obstacles. The current reading of Cynthia Hewitt de Alcántara invites a recognition of her pioneering examples of critical analyses of globalization from local spaces, which might today be described, with Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, as *friction*.