Chapter Seven
The Political Reasons for a Disconnection

Starting from the significant ‘absence’ in Marx’s reflection of a region of decisive importance to the coming together of the bourgeois cosmos, we have tried to reconstruct a reading of Latin America by Marx that was apparently not explicit, a reading that, surprisingly, returns us to the dialogue that he maintained with Hegel, sometimes explicit but in general implicit, but never completed. It is interesting to note that behind the surreptitious return to the idea of ‘non-historic peoples’ or the rejection of the state’s role in producing civil society, implicitly present in Marx’s reading, in fact there lies a Hegel that had supposedly been ‘overcome’, an inseparable component of the prejudices that took root in the ideological and cultural formation of Marx’s thought. If, as we have already stated, Marx never grounded the notion of ‘non-historic peoples’ theoretically, and it belonged rather more to the rich and contradictory world of allegories that he so indulged in,¹ and thus his utilisation

¹. Marx’s manifest penchant for using allegories and metaphors even in his youth was a subject of his teachers’ criticism. One of them, Wytttenbach, reproached him for an ‘exaggerated effort to use unusual and picturesque expressions’. Many years later, one of his best-known followers, Eduard Bernstein, levelled a similar criticism against him. Franz Mehring was one of the few Marxists who raised the theme of Marx’s writing style in these years, showing how his allegories represented ‘the sensorily appreciable mother of the thought, which receives from that mother the breath of life.’ See Riazanov 1927, pp. 95–101. The incomprehension of Marx’s allegorical style by bourgeois ‘sages’ curiously also characterised the whole of the socialist movement that based its founding theoretical principles in Marx’s doctrine. Everything that ‘official’ science rejected as the ‘dark mysticism’ of Marxism was directly appropriated as ‘science’ by the socialist movement. Meanwhile, Marx’s great metaphors (‘superstructure’, ‘reflection’, ‘fetishism’, and so on)
of this concept was of a strongly political rather than ideological implication, then what political facts – or better, what prejudiced means of considering them – could have led Marx to again dig up this idea for use in the Latin-American case, when he had so manifestly abandoned it with regard to other scenarios from the 1850s onwards? As we will attempt to demonstrate, it is in Marx’s sharp anti-Bonapartism that we can locate the political motives that led to his resurrection of this notion and the blind-spot to which his thought was consequently doomed.

In the Europe of the second half of the nineteenth century, Napoleon III was the ruler most involved in the Latin-American nations’ attempts to become involved in the European cultural and political scene. The ‘rediscovery’ of America by the French Empire curiously led to the development of an idea destined to hold firm as a solution to the difficulty that European consciousness had long faced in understanding the new reality emerging from the collapse of the colonial order, a difficulty that had also already been sharply identified by Humboldt. If ‘Hispano-America’ was a return to a past that had now largely been overcome, how then to describe this surprising concentration of republics to which the avid eyes of European – particularly French – capitalism were now turned? Where was it possible to locate the historical grounds for this challenge to the unquestioned power of English imperialism? What, then, were the ideological motivations – but also, and perhaps fundamentally, political ones – that led to their being designated ‘Latin’? If there is evidence enough that this adjective was only clearly picked out in the France of Napoleon III, on the eve of the French and European military and scientific expedition to Mexico, there can be no doubt that the thirst for this concept was in large part derived from the need for an ideological coating able to legitimise the foreign policy of ‘protecting

were considered to be complete scientific explanations of certain processes. In taking the ‘superstructure’ metaphor to be a scientific explanation, for example, Marxists converted a figure of speech, designed to illustrate something, into a means of its explanation. They unintentionally turned upside down ‘everything that Marx had worked to stand on its feet’. As such, Marx became an ideologue, namely precisely that which he had sought to destroy through his materialist conception of history. On this theme, which has still been little-explored, it is worth mentioning an excellent essay that Spanish-language publicists of Marxism appear to have made little use of, namely Ludovico Silva’s work on Marx’s literary style (Silva 1971, particularly pp. 52–91).

2. To avoid fastidious circumlocutions, I continue in this study to designate the countries inhabited by Spanish-Americans by the name Spanish-America, despite the political changes that the colonies have undergone. I call the United States – without adding north America – the country of Anglo-Americans, although other United States have formed in south America. It is awkward to speak of peoples who play such an important role on the world scene, but who lack collective names. The word American may no longer be applied exclusively to the citizens of the United States of North America, and it would be desirable if this nomenclature for the independent nations of the new continent could be fixed in a way that would be at once convenient, consistent and precise’ (Humboldt 2011, p. 209).