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# Memory and Modernity
## Popular Culture in Latin America

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# Introduction

It is a normal condition in late-twentieth-century capitalism to be surrounded by a continuous supply of cultural goods which seem to offer an unbroken horizon. All meanings are available and transferable: from Mozart to Bolivian folk music, from *Dallas* to Brazilian *telenovelas*, from hamburgers to tacos. The tendency for products from different cultural environments to mix on a global scale is accelerating as the century draws to an end. It is a process which has both negative and positive aspects. One of its effects is homogenization, whereby differences either between the objects themselves, or between the experiences involved in their making, or between the ways in which we receive them become eroded. At the extreme this destructive process involves cultural death. On the other hand, the vast increase in channels of communication which flow across cultural boundaries has the effect of dismantling old forms of marginalization and domination and making new forms of democratization and cultural multiplicity imaginable.

The outcome is undecided. New forms of cultural violence and of the monopolization of power are also imaginable, and indeed have been happening for some time in Latin America. For instance, the transfer of new media and information technologies to the region is in the first place unequal: the centres of production and control are elsewhere. And in the second place, it is allowing social and political problems to be treated as merely technical ones, as a result of which values and identities disappear as issues which can be debated. This book is written against homogenization and its deadening effects. But at the same time it seeks to recognize the new possibilities of

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cultural mobility and inventiveness brought about by the proliferation of communications in the late twentieth century.

Popular culture in Latin America is easy to identify, yet problematic to define. It is easily identifiable in the immediate reality of such things as *telenovelas*, salsa, carnivals, folk music, magical beliefs, and oral narratives – all conveying in some measure the idea of the popular as a distinct sphere. The problem lies in the fact that when these objects and practices are placed in their larger context, this distinctness becomes more difficult to define. Although it is a useful starting-point to define popular culture as the culture of the subaltern classes, in cases where the latter is merely a replica of ruling-class culture, the term 'popular' loses its force. To call something popular carries an implied opposition: opposed to what class or group, and opposed in what particular way? It is not enough simply to say that the dominant is what the popular is opposed to, since to do so involves making assumptions about the history of culture.

These assumptions need spelling out. They belong to three main interpretative narratives, each of which construes the history of popular culture in a different way. Perhaps the most familiar is the view, which arose with Romanticism, of an authentic rural culture under threat from industrialization and the modern culture industry – historical processes which in Latin America have tended to coincide. It is assumed that the purity of a peasant culture is degraded or forgotten under pressure from the capitalist mass media. What is lost is most often described as the experience of community. The second interpretation, a twentieth-century response to industrialization, takes the modern culture of the advanced capitalist countries as the inevitable goal towards which Latin American societies are moving. Popular culture can only take the form, according to this version, of a variety of mass culture – either a tragedy or a solution, depending on the viewpoint. The third position, whose history goes back to Marx and beyond, ascribes to popular culture an emancipatory and utopian charge, whereby the practices of oppressed classes contain within them resources for imagining an alternative future society. All three interpretations, which usually overlap and combine, have fundamental flaws. The first involves nostalgia for a static past, and a failure to acknowledge that traditional and modern worlds are no longer separate, and that many people in Latin America live in both at once. The second suffers from a lack of confidence in the inventiveness of the popular classes and in the capacity of traditional and non-Western cultures to bring about a different modernity of their own. The third has the disadvantage of tending to locate the observer in some ideal place from which everything can

be judged as contributing (or not) to an emerging positive future, whereas in reality things are not so clear. It also tends to sidestep the question of how popular tactics could be formulated into a strategy for taking power, and how that power could be maintained without authoritarianism.

Although this book comes closest to the third interpretation, it nevertheless attempts to avoid a programmatic approach, seeking instead to investigate what actually occurs in the conflict of meanings and practices between social groups. We have chosen, on the descriptive level, to keep in mind those ways in which older forms of popular culture change, rather than to present them as frozen and timeless. On the interpretative level, we understand tradition as a word which should not be confined to pre-modern cultures and recognize that the modern too can become a tradition. Latin American modernity is not a replica of US or European mass culture, but has a distinctive character which varies from country to country. A major factor in its difference – probably the major factor – is the force of popular culture. It is a modernity which does not necessarily entail the elimination of pre-modern traditions and memories but has arisen through them, transforming them in the process.

We reject both Manichean and apocalyptic views of mass culture in Latin America: we do not believe either that it is 'pure' and 'authentic', nor that the mass media merely manipulate a passive audience. Nevertheless we believe that it is vital to be aware of the enormous amount of destruction which both preceded and accompanies current developments. The pressure to forget, the force of social amnesia, can be extremely powerful. The issue here is of both genocidal and symbolic violence; of the eradication of social groupings and of 'the gentle, hidden form which violence takes when overt violence is impossible'.[1]

In addition to the three interpretative positions we have outlined, there are two main disciplinary frameworks through which popular culture has been made into an object of knowledge and discussion: the first is associated with the idea of folklore; the second with that of mass culture. Each is associated with particular intellectual traditions and with different political commitments. Neither of the two mises-en-scène is satisfactory, in that popular culture overflows both, but they remain the principal bases for approaching the subject.

When the expressions of pre-capitalist culture are put into a kind of museum, this both makes them perceivable as cultural objects and preserves them. The word 'folklore' arose at a particular moment of European history, when the disappearance of pre-industrial cultures was accelerating. W.J. Thoms proposed the term in a letter to the British journal *The Athenaeum* in

1846. The idea was that it should replace the previous designation of 'popular antiquities'; it continued to work as preservation of the past, but with important new connotations of seriousness, since 'lore' included the meanings of teaching and scholarship and 'folk' covered both people in general and the idea of the nation. The connotation of nation connects with a German tradition, best known through the word *Volksgeist*. Associated with the philosopher Herder, and meaning the stories, songs, customs, rituals and proverbs which shaped the collective spirit of a particular 'people', the notion of *Volksgeist* arose from a Romantic response to the Enlightenment. In opposition to the analytical and generalizing categories of the scientific systems of the Enlightenment, it emphasized identity, in terms of the organic growth of national cultures as territorially specific ways of life. At the same time, it was associated with an idea of community (*Gemeinschaft*) represented by peasant life, in opposition to industrial society and the culture of the learned.

Some of this history of the idea continued in Latin America in the twentieth century, but with a number of important differences. These centre on two main issues. First, Latin American societies were more heterogeneous, in that there have been wide cultural differences within an individual country, differences sometimes so great and involving such large populations that the idea of a unitary nation is not viable. Second, in some regions (such as the Andean) the cultures referred to as folkloric have upheld their own alternative ideas of nationhood and have been capable of challenging the official state. In these circumstances, the idea of folklore breaks down, since the phenomena it refers to challenge the legitimacy of the society voicing the idea itself. Although it is difficult to generalize, it is probably valid to say that in Latin America the idea of folklore has been bound up with the idea of national identity, and has been used by the state, among other things, in order to bring about national unity. Folklore was 'discovered' in Latin America early in the twentieth century, when modernizing states were seeking ways to achieve partial integration of those rural populations which a weak capitalist economy could not fully incorporate. The term is more highly charged politically here than in Europe, both for the reasons we have given and because of the crucial fact that its referent – the cultures thought of as folkloric – can be as much part of the present as of the past. Thus the concept ranges between two extremes of usage: on the one hand, folklore is seen as a kind of bank where authenticity is safely stored; on the other, it is a way of referring to contemporary cultures which articulate alternatives to existing power structures.

It is probably in Brazil that the idea of folklore has most strongly represented a critical alternative to capitalist mass culture. The Brazilian anthropologist José Jorge de Carvalho has argued that folklore is where collective memory is conserved – as opposed to its being destroyed by the mass media, which tend to produce passivity in their audience.[2] However, this utopian view of folklore entails a number of problems. The way in which cultural actions come to be called folklore needs to be understood as a historical process, involving changes in the practice both of its producers and of those who seek to interpret and control it. The action of the state and of anthropologists and other intellectuals, as exemplified in Mexico in the 1930s and later, involved the promotion of peasant handicrafts as symbolic of the nation; this became a stable arrangement which brought economic benefits to the producers. In Peru, state promotion came somewhat later (in the 1940s and '50s) and centred on music.[3] The important difference, however, was that attempts to control the performance of Andean music – in particular to preserve the authenticity of costume in the face of the hybridizing force of the modern urban environment – had to be abandoned: the explosion of rural migration, the proliferation of performance of Andean music, and the migratory drift of styles made such control impossible. For the performers of music and dance, the classification 'folkloric' meant an offer of recognition within the national arena, making it possible for them to give new significance to their products or performances. The Peruvian example of the war-dances from Toqroyoq, which we describe in Chapter 2, shows how a performance from a relatively isolated highland village can become charged with meanings which resonate on a national scale, but can also exceed the frame implied by folklore and challenge the state itself.

Thus the term folklore emerges as part of a wider set of historical circumstances. It needs stressing that whatever implications of uniformity it may have in a European context, its meanings in Latin America differ between countries. In Argentina it has tended to take on a reactionary charge, as part of a paradigm of national culture that stresses the mystical qualities of the land and attempts to ignore the social divisions produced by capitalism; early urbanization, large-scale immigration from Europe and the defeat of recalcitrant rural groups contributed to this process. In Mexico, after the Revolution, it was a key part of an official state policy of integrating rural populations. In Brazil, it has been adopted by intellectuals as a utopian alternative to corrupting aspects of the modernization imposed by authoritarian regimes in recent decades. In Peru, Bolivia, Guatemala and Paraguay, the strength of native and mestizo cultures makes the term folklore and the

approach associated with it (the preservation of rural performances and artefacts by members of the other, modern culture) incapable of containing the phenomena they are supposed to frame.

A critical approach to the notion of folklore would need to include the following points. The term has a built-in backdating tendency, implying a museum made by others in a territory which is not that of the producers. For example, there is a permanent exhibition of Latin American folklore in the Monumento a América Latina, a huge cultural centre in São Paulo which was opened in 1989. Although it is probably the best such exhibition in the world, in terms of the quality of the objects displayed, it does very little to indicate the contexts of their production and use. The result is that differences of use and meaning become lost: the aesthetic aspect is highlighted to the detriment of the practical and the symbolic, giving a superficial impression of similarity between products of different regions. When difference disappears in this way, the popular is made to appear as a single thing rather than a multiplicity. This notion that there is one popular culture is a mark of populism: the long-lasting appeal of folklore in Mexico, Argentina and Brazil needs to be understood, therefore, in connection with the persistence of populism as a force.

The academic study of folklore focuses on local communities and ethnic groups in a manner that isolates them from the broader structural constraints of a society which, with the expansion of capitalism and the culture industry, has altered the characteristics and function of practices traditionally carried out by and for the peasantry. Moreover, the implicit assumption in many such studies that what is being recorded are disappearing customs, prevents one from recognizing that the process of modernization in Latin America does not always, as we shall see, entail the elimination of modes of production, such as the making of handicrafts, which are not part of capitalism but very often retains them in a state of partial integration.[4] Finally, the utopian connotations of 'community' with which folklore has tended to be loaded have encouraged the idea that music and the visual arts are usually collectively created. That this is far from always being the case is demonstrated by a study of panpipe styles in the Peruvian altiplano, where it emerges that a particular well-known style supposed to belong to a whole community was in fact the invention of an individual.[5] The fact that musical pieces and objects of visual art are anonymous does not mean that they were created collectively in the strict sense of the term. The desire that they should be, and the making of collective creation into a positive value, reflect the urge to set up an opposition between the collective as authentic and the individual as alienating.

Mass culture is a term associated with the expansion of cinema, radio, comics, fotonovelas and, above all, television. It has been taken by some to spell the end of any genuinely popular culture and by others to be the only form that popular culture can take in the late twentieth century. The first view can be traced back to Adorno and Horkheimer's influential theory of the culture industry, which argued that the subordination of culture to the capitalist market turns cultural forms into standardized products which reduce the consumer's capacity to think critically or to acquire experiences which transcend the status quo. Elaborated during the authors' exile from Nazi Germany, this is a powerful indictment of the totalitarian potential of the electronic media. However, a problem with this theory is the way it uses the notion of the genuine work of art as a yardstick against which to measure the degeneracy of the mass media: 'genuine art', in this argument, tends to mean European high culture. Also, no allowance is made for the variety of ways the media are actually received, and the fact that they can be vehicles for popular traditions and for resistance to social control by authoritarian capitalism.

The negative view of mass culture and the notion that popular culture by definition means opposition to the mass media is present in many analyses of the mass media in Latin America in the 1970s.[6] The passivity of the public is seen as axiomatic; in addition, popular culture is taken to be that which does not penetrate and is not penetrated by mass culture. It is fairly clear that such purity does not exist. Obviously we are not suggesting that popular culture and mass culture are one and the same, and we would resist the notion that mass culture can be defined as popular because of the sense of sheer scale of its circulation and ratings. Popular culture means something else, but before entering into definitions, certain other issues should be set out.

If the idea of folklore gives popular culture an ontological solidity, that of mass culture appears to empty it of any content. With folk or pre-capitalist cultures the popular can be pointed to as a set of lived practices which include rituals, handicrafts, narratives, music, dance and iconography. This makes it possible to think of popular culture as a whole way of life. With the mass media, however, these specifics no longer hold. Where can the popular be located, as a practice, if one is talking about television? This problem contributes to the tendency to be pessimistic about the effects of the mass media. Whether defined by the technology employed or by their presumed ideological effect, the mass media can appear to involve a one-way process whose manner of reception is predetermined by the built-in 'message'. Such an approach dehistoricizes the media, removing them from the different

historical conjunctures in which they are used. Too often, the particular ways in which the modern nation was consolidated by mass society in the USA are taken as a model for understanding the mass media, as though their relationship with a particular society were inherent in the media themselves. On the contrary, the different historical moments at which the culture industry becomes established give rise to crucial differences. Whereas in Europe the culture industry mainly arose after the consolidation of nation-states, and could thus appear as a threat to high culture, in Brazil, for example, the culture industry created in the 1960s became a means for unifying the nation. It thus took on some of the aura of high culture. Modernity arrived with television rather than with the Enlightenment, and television supplied the cultural capital of the middle classes.

The most important contribution in recent years to rethinking the role of the media in Latin America has been that of Jesús Martín-Barbero, who has laid the groundwork for an understanding of media as 'mediations'. In place of the one-sided view which assumes the manner of reception to be moulded entirely by the medium in question, Martín-Barbero demonstrates the need to pay attention to the cultural characteristics of the receiving public and to see the mass media as vehicles or mediations of particular moments of the 'massification' of society, and not its source: 'the historical constitution of the mass [lo masivo], rather than being a degradation of culture by the media, is actually tied in both with the long slow process of development of the national market, state and culture, and with the patterns [dispositivos] within which this process caused popular memory to enter into complicity with the mass imaginary.'[7] The mass media in Latin America enter societies in which the secularization of popular memory is only partial; societies shaped by the mixing, or mestizaje, of modern Western and traditional native and African groups whose magical beliefs and practices continue to be part of everyday life. The majority of television viewers in Latin America at the beginning of the 1990s, although they are exposed to the mass imaginary of television, nevertheless continue to participate in symbolic systems which combine pre-capitalist and capitalist worlds. Magic may not figure in television pro-grammes, but it does in the site at which they are received. If 'mass culture is not something completely external, is not something which comes to invade the popular from outside but is actually a development of certain potentialities already within the popular itself',[8] what we are dealing with is an intermingling of popular traditions and a mass imaginary (as is shown in the second part of Chapter 2). This does not mean that they are identical. What need investigating are the particular codes of perception and recognition

which specific popular memories bring to the reception of the media, and the particular items of popular traditions which are included – though trans-formed – as genre, style or theme in the media. Thus the telenovela (to take an example), while offering to the majority of viewers the glamour of higher social status, can also be studied in terms of how it includes features of popular memory and how its reception is multivalent; for instance its intense emotionality does not exclude irreverence, parody and the grotesque. The research on these acts of negotiation still has to be done; Chapter 2 offers an outline of entrances to the problem.

The emergence of mass forms of society as a historical process began in Latin America around 1880, and had two main effects: it offered an entry to the advantages of urban life, and access to cultural improvement. It was thus both a mode of enforced integration of the peasantry and urban poor into 'society' and a way of asserting their rights to share goods and services which the privileged minority had previously monopolized.[9] This key ambivalence of the media becomes lost to view if they are assumed simply to be instruments for imposing the ideological messages of ruling groups. It is therefore crucial to keep in sight the fact that media are not mere conveyors of messages but meeting-points of often contradictory ways of remembering and interpreting. To approach the media in this way requires attention to the cultural contexts of their reception, the variety of ways in which they are received and used.

At this point, another approach to the problem of locating the popular in relation to mass culture should be mentioned. This is the use of the notion of a market for symbolic goods, as a means of defining what happens to cultural products in a consumer society. The popular then becomes defined by the unequal access of the subaltern classes to this market. This way of defining the popular, as developed by Néstor García Canclini,[10] combines Pierre Bourdieu's approach with that of Gramsci, and is useful in that its vocabulary permits both the investigation of culture as power and an analysis of the impact of the capitalist market.[11] Any study of popular culture must be indebted to Gramsci's crucial concept of hegemony. It breaks with the crude application of Marx's thesis that the ruling ideas in any period are those of the ruling class, and emphasizes instead the ways in which particular social groups become hegemonic through obtaining consent within the cultural arena to the general direction which they impose on society as a whole. The term hegemony is therefore essential for the study of popular culture in that it highlights the negotiations which take place on a cultural level between dominant and subaltern groups. This means that culture is not simply derived from class, as if it were a crude form of ideology, but on the contrary plays a

primary role in challenging or maintaining given social relationships. The major limitation to the concept of hegemony, with its basis in consent obtained by non-violent means, is its lack of or at least diminished relevance to situations of violence, which have prevailed in a number of Latin American countries.[12]

Gramsci's great contribution to the study of culture is the understanding that culture is inseparable from relationships of power. One way of developing his insights is to take popular culture not as a given view of the world but as a space or series of spaces where popular subjects, as distinct from members of ruling groups, are formed. The stress in this case would be democratic rather than utopian, in the sense of recognizing actual differences between the subjectivity of different classes, rather than creating ideal models which assume that there is – or should be – a single popular identity. On the other hand, it seems likely for the time being that in Latin America popular culture will continue to have utopian connotations. When the variety of popular cultures is unified by using the term in the singular, this expresses in some degree a utopian political programme; if we have in this book used it in the singular as well as the plural, this is in recognition of the transitional state of current thinking.[13] Actually existing popular cultures have an inter-penetrative relationship with mass culture. Historically, the unification of the cultural market, which was vital for the establishment of a national culture industry (Mexico and Brazil are prime examples) has only been achieved by incorporating forms of popular memory already in process of massification, as happened with the Mexican film industry.

When the popular is defined not as an object, a meaning or a social group, but as a site – or, more accurately, a series of dispersed sites – then it generates a principle of opposition to the idea, imposed by authoritarian liberalism or by populism, of the nation as a single body. As the Mexican Ezequiel Chávez put it in 1901, the Mexican people had not yet been 'ground by the mortar of centuries so as to form a single body with a certain homogeneity'.[14] The drive for homogeneity throughout Latin America in the twentieth century meant either the suppression of popular culture or its appropriation by the authoritarian state. The notion of dispersed sites is not the same as pluralism. Pluralism belongs to the liberal theory which allows that society consists in a plurality of interests, but gives to the state the role of mediating them. The study of popular culture is incompatible with ascribing to the state a fictitiously neutral function, since what states have actually done is to seek to homogenize culture in order to consolidate the power of ruling groups.

At the same time, the assumption that the culture of subaltern groups is

necessarily the expression of resistance to state authority creates problems of its own. To place the relationships between dominant power and the popular inside a vocabulary of conformity versus resistance entails simplification and distortion of the issues. To say that something is resistant is often part of a political agenda, usually unspoken: certain cultural forms are taken to represent popular resistance without clarifying what in real terms is being resisted or what alternative notions of sociality the resistance implies. Also dubious is the dualistic thinking which conformity/resistance can generate: each side of the opposition becomes unified, as though a monolithic dominant structure were faced with an equally coherent popular resistance. The problem can be seen clearly if one looks at the processes by which cultural formations arise, rather than abstracting them as finished products. Both resistance and conformity can occur simultaneously, as for instance in popular religiosity, where fatalism combines with the desire for change.[15] Thus, to shift terms but continue the same debate, dominant and subaltern are not already constituted collective subjects, or intrinsic properties, but modes of conflict which link discourses and practices.[16]

However, the problems of vocabulary cannot be resolved by multiplying terms. On the contrary, one must be alert to the different theorizations and constructions of the field which particular terms entail. For example, a slippage tends to occur from subaltern to resistant to emancipatory, whereas the usefulness of the term subaltern is its emphasis upon the straightforward fact of subordination without connotations of an alternative political project. The problems begin with the mythical or ideological assumption built into such words used simultaneously as descriptive and programmatic. 'Counter-hegemonic' is in this sense a more useful term, since it places emphasis clearly and openly on the idea of an alternative power structure. On the other hand, there is no set of 'correct' terms which will solve all the problems. When the field to be described and analysed has shifting boundaries, as popular culture does, then some mobility of terms and concepts is appropriate. One of the priorities is neither to dissolve nor to rigidify the ambiguities of the shifting cultural map. The concepts of reconversion, resignification and resemantici-zation are particularly appropriate to popular culture as ways of handling the constant refashioning of cultural signs which keeps alive the sites of the popular and prevents them being wholly absorbed into the dominant power structures. The types of temporal, spatial and symbolic shifts we refer to can be exemplified by the linking of pre-Spanish Indian war-dances with a modern political project in Peru, or parading the community-based radio station in a Brazilian shanty town as though it were a saint in a religious procession, or

using the iconography of Superman to articulate the demands for adequate housing from the Mexican state by inhabitants of shanty towns.

The investigation of popular culture poses the rethinking of the whole cultural field, from the practices of everyday life to artistic production. Its proper documentation shakes up influential paradigms of cultural history (both folklore and media studies, for example), challenges discourses of identity (populist ones, for example), and undermines literary and art-historical theories (magical-realist ones, for example). Inevitably a multi-disciplinary action, it requires taking the cultural sphere as neither merely derivative from the socio-economic, as a merely ideological phenomenon, nor as in some metaphysical sense preceding it. Rather, it is the decisive area where social conflicts are experienced and evaluated.

Popular culture in Latin America has tended to be ignored by the paternalistic Enlightenment rationalism of the Left but not by the culture industry. In recent years the traditional political parties, relying on pre-modern forms of social communication and social relationships, have lost ground to the mass media. The kinds of issue which seem likely to become particularly important in the 1990s centre on globalization of the media on the one hand, and the defence of cultural multiplicity on the other. The first needs to be confronted without apocalyptic pessimism and the second defended without attempts to preserve 'purity'. Both are traversed by movements for democratization throughout the geographical region. Popular culture is vital in this respect as the recognition of collective experiences which are not acknowledged by the established political culture. In the past decade, a new tradition of Latin American cultural criticism has been emerging; important new theoretical and empirical work has been produced, in which the experience of massive social destruction under the dictatorships of the 1970s and '80s and the study of popular culture have been the key impetus. The redistribution of cultural power and access and the revaluation of popular culture by the Sandinista government in Nicaragua, which drew in turn on the experiences of Cuba and of various radical traditions in Latin America, stands as a major achievement. The New Right rejects cultural nationalism and, in the face of the labour movement's and the traditional ruling groups' loss of prestige, reduces culture pragmatically to the prestige necessary for a given social group to retain power. The cognitive and creative dimensions of culture are abandoned: the only questions are technical ones. Nevertheless, the diagnosis that previous bases of political power are no longer viable seems correct. The discourse of the New Right, now becoming dominant in Latin America, can only be countered by a careful rethinking of

the whole cultural field and its history.

The selection and distribution of material in this book has initially been shaped by the division between folk or rural culture and mass, urban culture. However, in the study of particular examples, we have sought to problematize critically such divisions, especially where cultural forms move across geographical and social boundaries. The ideal goal of a study of popular culture in Latin America would be to create the 'nocturnal map' of which Martín-Barbero speaks: 'We need to have at our disposal something like a ''nocturnal map'' which will allow us . . . to establish articulations between the *operations* – of withdrawal, rejection, assimilation, refunctionalization, redesign – the *matrices* – of class, territory, ethnicity, religion, sex, age – the *spaces* – habitat, factory, neighbourhood, prison – and the *media* – micro like cassette recordings and photography, meso like the record or the book, macro like the press, radio or television.'[17] The map is nocturnal because the terrain has still to be made visible. The present study seeks to establish and explore this new terrain by drawing on history, ethnography, sociology, literary criticism and communications theory. A synthesis on this scale has not been attempted before, and we hope that the gaps we leave will be instigations for future work.

In the present book, descriptive material is concentrated in the second chapter, where a series of examples of different popular cultures is offered. These show something of the exuberant variety of cultures in Latin America, and of the changes they have been passing through in the twentieth century. It has been impossible to embrace all countries and geographic areas. We have not considered the highly significant phenomenon of border culture, where migrants to the USA elaborate inventive responses to their experience, to be within our purview.[18] However, those areas included have been selected because they are paradigmatic in particular ways. The three other chapters take the form of essays which explore the broad issues arising in the study of popular culture in Latin America: its history, the ways it has been appropriated politically, and its relations with high culture. Chapter 1 gives a historical view of the continuities and discontinuities which have marked popular cultures from the time of the Spanish and Portuguese Conquest until the earlier twentieth century. Chronologically, Chapter 3 begins approxi-mately where Chapter 1 left off, and seeks to trace the main uses made of popular culture by populist political movements in the twentieth century. The final chapter tests the validity of differentiations between popular culture and high culture and looks at the part played by popular culture in the work of some major twentieth-century writers.

## Notes

1. Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Cambridge 1977, p. 196.

2. José Jorge de Carvalho, 'Notas para una revisión conceptual de los estudios de la cultura popular tradicional', Ponencia para le Segunda Reunión Interamericana sobre la Cultura Popular y Tradicional, Caracas 1987, p. 6.

3. See Eve Marie Fell, 'Du folklore rural au folklore commercial: une expérience dirigiste au Pérou', *Caravelle*, No. 48, pp. 59–68.

4. See Néstor García Canclini, *Las culturas populares en el capitalismo*, Mexico 1982, and Rodrigo Montoya, *Producción parcelaria y universo ideológico*, Lima 1979.

5. Tomas Turino, paper given at the Institute of Latin American Studies, London, 16 March 1990. The individual in this case was a schoolteacher, indicating the influence of modernization and folklorization. The music, nevertheless, was presented to the outside world as collectively created, in line with the ideology of folklore.

6. For example, in Armand Mattelart and S. Siegelaub, eds., *Communication and Class Struggle*, New York 1979.

7. Jesús Martín-Barbero, *De los medios a las mediaciones*, Barcelona 1987, p. 95. Cf. Jesús Martín-Barbero's statement at the Symposium on Media in Latin America held by the Centre for Latin American Cultural Studies, London, 25 May 1990: 'mass is a category created by the European Right in the nineteenth century which the Left never revised. And the criticism of communication media in Latin America was anchored in a vision of mass media as a product rather than as part of the massification of the whole social structure: that is, of the emergence and visibility of the masses on the national scene.'

8. See Martín-Barbero, *Procesos de comunicación y matrices de cultura*, Mexico n.d., p. 96. For further discussion of the non-passivity of consumers of mass media, see Michel de Certeau, *The Practices of Everyday Life*, London 1988, pp. xii, xv, 18.

9. Martín-Barbero, *De los medios*, pp. 172–3.

10. Néstor García Canclini, '¿Reconstruir lo popular?', ponencia presentada al seminario 'Cultura popular: un balance interdisciplinario', organizado por el Instituto Nacional de Antropología, Buenos Aires, September 1988.

11. Some caution is needed in using Gramsci's thought, as José Joaquín Brunner's objections to García Canclini's approach help to make clear: if one respects Gramsci's definition of culture as a 'conception of the world', which implies that it must be 'organized' and coherent in its own terms, then popular culture is not something that actually exists in Gramsci's sense of a culture, but is only a project for the future. (See Brunner, *Un espejo trizado*, Santiago 1988, pp. 159–61.) One of the many issues arising here is the possibility that Gramsci's formulations, which belong to a different historical moment, are not necessarily appropriate in an age of simulations and hybridization: perhaps the notion of popular culture as a world view, given the degree of totalization that term implies, is no longer possible or useful at the end of the century.

12. The separation of hegemony from violence is not simple, as is shown by Gramsci's own mixing of a vocabulary of consent with one of warfare.

13. For a critical review of current thinking, see Jean Franco, 'What's in a Name? Popular Culture Theories and their Limitations', *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture*, Vol. 1, pp. 5–14.

14. Roger Bartra, *La jaula de la melancolía*, Mexico 1987, p. 132.

15. Marilena Chauí, *Conformismo e resistencia*, São Paulo 1986, pp. 9–47, 84. Also useful is Michel Foucault's notion of the polyvalence of discourse (in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, London 1974) whereby no discourse is purely dominant or oppositional but is always in some degree both. See Alan Sheridan, *Michel Foucault: The Will to Truth*, London 1980, p. 186.

16. 'Gramsci con Bourdieu', unpublished paper.

17. Martín-Barbero, *Procesos*, p. 135.

18. See Néstor García Canclini, 'Escenas sin territorio: Estética de las migraciones e identidades en transición', *Revista de Crítica Cultural*, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 9–14, and *Tijuana: la casa de toda la gente*, Mexico 1989. See also Harry Polkinhorn, 'Chain Link: Towards a Theory of Border Writing', *La Línea: Ensayos sobre literatura fronteriza México-Norteamericana*, Calexico n.d., Vol. 1, pp. 37–43.

# Breaks and Continuities

The history of popular cultures in Latin America is a subject of vast scope. A full-length overview has not, to our knowledge, been attempted. This chapter offers a chronological view of key processes and moments which may serve as guides to how a more complete map might be drawn. This approach, as opposed to an overall survey, has been chosen in order to draw attention to all the variety of possible perspectives. Another factor is the paucity of research in this field. Excellent new work has been appearing in recent years, but a great deal of basic investigation remains to be done. The account which follows aims to trace some of the historical continuities in the cultural life of the popular classes, from the time of European Conquest to around 1940.

Certain conditions, such as the mixing of European and native American elements, have continued through the whole period; some features, such as magical rather than rationalist ways of thinking and seeing, have remained fairly constant over the long term. Particular forms, such as the Andean dance and song known as the *huayno*, have a continuous presence from pre-Conquest times to the twentieth century, while others, such as the Argentinian and Uruguayan tango, span the past hundred years. These greater or lesser continuities are cut across by discontinuities which break or transform them: the idea that there has been a smooth accumulation of popular traditions is not viable. The discontinuities include changes in communication media (newspapers, radio), social revolutions, industrialization and population migrations; the main break, which includes all of these, has been the effect of modernization. The tango, for instance, coincides with

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the period of modernization, and in the process changes from a rural to an urban form. The *huayno*, under the impact both of immigration to the cities and of the recording industry, has metamorphosed into the hybrid musical form of *chicha*. *Chicha* can be heard in New York, an example of the increasing international migration of styles. In Peru, alongside such hybrid forms, the traditional *huayno* still continues. Old, new and hybrid forms coexist, thus invalidating those approaches which assume that there has been an evolution in which the old is superseded by the new. Latin America is characterized by the coexistence of different histories: this chapter offers an introduction to some of the complexities involved.

Among the key concepts for drawing a historical map of Latin American culture are acculturation, *mestizaje* and transculturation. Acculturation refers to a one-way process of conversion and substitution of native cultures by European ones. *Mestizaje*, a word denoting racial mixture, assumes a synthesis of cultures, where none is eradicated. The difficulty with the idea of *mestizaje* is that, without an analysis of power structures, it becomes an ideology of racial harmony which obscures the actual holding of power by a particular group. Furthermore, debates about cultural *mestizaje* can founder through failure to distinguish between different modes and levels of cross-cultural influence.[1] Transculturation, a term arising out of anthropology, is used to counter critically the assumption that acculturation is the only long-term possibility for Latin America: it is concerned with the mutual transformation of cultures, in particular of the European by the native. Although none of these concepts is adequate to the complexity of the real historical process, they are useful for indicating some of the main ways of seeing it.

While acculturation and transculturation belong to twentieth-century debates, the term *mestizo* dates from the early colonial period. The *mestizos*, born of Spanish fathers and Indian mothers, were held in very low esteem. Their reputed ungovernability and instability mirrors the projected anxiety of the colonial ruling elite at the fact of inter-cultural mixing.[2] Racial purity was an essential symbol for the dominant, an inheritance which continues to affect present-day Latin American societies. However, from the time of emancipation from Spain and Portugal in the nineteenth century there begins a positive re-evaluation of *mestizaje*, and of 'our America' as vitally distinct both from its European colonial metropolises and its increasingly powerful northern 'neighbour'.

## Colonization, Magic and the Limits of Obedience

The definition of the Spanish colonial action as Conquest, with its assumption of the rights of 'just war' and its echo of the reconquest of Spain from the Arabs, was rejected by Bartolomé de Las Casas, the Spanish Dominican friar. For Las Casas, the great defender of the Indians in the sixteenth century, the only appropriate word was invasion.[3] Reversing the terms of the justificatory epic of conquest, he called the Spaniards 'wolves' and the Indians 'lambs', and considered the Spanish actions to be destructive of any basis of law or rationality. For this reason, his account of the atrocities perpetrated by the Conquistadors in *Breve relación de la destrucción de las Indias* (*Brief Account of the Destruction of the Indies* 1552) constantly moves towards the edge of the unthinkable and unspeakable which threatens like a black hole to destroy all meaning.[4]

However, it is to the native and *mestizo* accounts of the invasion that we need to go in order to reconstruct the native experience. These native versions of the Conquest have been given increasing prominence in recent years, for instance by Miguel León Portilla.[5] The first attempt properly to document this other side of history is Nathan Wachtel's *The Vision of the Vanquished*, which makes pioneering use of the continuing historical memory of peasants in Middle America and Peru, particularly in the form of popular plays representing the Conquest, still performed to the present day.[6] Wachtel, however, overemphasizes the 'destructuring' of native cultures. It is true that one can now recognize the decimation of native populations by war, forced labour and disease as perhaps the worst genocidal action of history. And certainly the idea of an 'encounter' between two worlds, now being orchestrated – not without some remnants of imperialist arrogance – by the current Spanish government in preparation for the five-hundredth anniversary of 1492, is a cynical use of the modern fashion for cultural plurality in order to obscure the tremendous destructiveness of the actual events. Nevertheless, mutual transformations of both the European and the native cultures did occur, in different degrees and different directions. In spite of Las Casas's conclusion that the only constant factor was a law of increasing destructiveness, forms of Spanish and Portuguese civilization were established throughout the Indies, as the territories were called, and these were modified to different extents by the surviving native cultures – although in some cases nothing of the latter remained, as in Hispaniola, where within thirty years of the first arrival of the Spanish, the total native population had disappeared.

The main thrust was towards the colonization of native consciousness and this met with varying degrees of success. Colonial Mexico exemplifies very effectively the processes of acculturation, native resistance and *mestizaje*, given the extent to which the native population, except in Yucatán to the South, was successfully acculturated over the three centuries of colonial rule. Up to around the middle of the sixteenth century, the modes of expression of the two cultures combined in a multiplicity of ways, opening up the possibility of a mixed or *mestizo* culture. By the late sixteenth century, the elimination of the native nobility, experts in native script and painting – the most powerful vehicles for native knowledge – and the decimation by disease of the vast majority of the non-Spanish population had aborted the possibility of a free interaction of cultures. Before that, there had begun to flourish a multiplicity of simultaneous practices and expressions, including glyphs; pictographic and alphabetic script; painted images and engraving; pre-Hispanic and Christianized oral transmission; native languages, with Nahuatl as lingua franca, as well as Latin and Spanish; and juxtapositions of native and Christian calendrical and mathematical notation.[7] By 1541, twenty years after the Conquest, some Spaniards were nervous about the number and excellence of native scribes, who were now able to assemble a complete knowledge of the country – an alarming possibility given the assumption that this was an accomplishment 'which previously was impossible for them'.[8] However, the question of how far two entirely different traditions might combine was pre-empted by Spanish campaigns for the extirpation of idolatry, and the weakening of native populations by disease. By the end of the sixteenth century the material basis of native memory had suffered drastically: informants who had memorized 'the words of the ancients' had died; techniques for recording and reading pictographic information had been lost; documents had disappeared, confiscated by the Spanish religious orders, destroyed by the Indians or simply neglected insofar as they had become indecipherable.[9] In fact by this time the speed of acculturation had greatly accelerated due to the effacement of native concepts, of the material supports of information (native screen-folds, 'idols', and so on), and of the human beings themselves. As happened during this same period in Peru, a wave of suicides and infanticides occurred in response to the destruction of the native universe.

Nevertheless, after this first destruction, a number of sites of resistance evaded suppression. Despite attempted effacements by Western mapping, the landscape retained its traditional cosmological meanings, in the form both of place-names which the Spanish could not replace and of the remembered

magical significance of land features. At the same time, Christian ideas were used as disguises for the preservation of native thinking. For example, the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead was reused by natives to express their traditional belief in the continued existence of ancestors as guardians of village tradition.[10] One of the places where an alternative memory of this kind was preserved were the *títulos primordiales*, false land-titles which served as counter-documents to those of the colonial administration. These date from the second half of the seventeenth century and continue even up to the end of the nineteenth century.

The aspects of life most intensely and persistently captured by the Church did not necessarily correspond with the intensities of native life. One of the sites which tended to escape the extirpation of idolatry, the term used to refer to native religion, was the house, the hub of everyday life. Here peasants gathered together bundles of diverse objects, which might include statuettes, bracelets and hallucinogenic mushrooms; although not to be touched, these nevertheless offered a continuity with ancestors, 'a sort of symbolic and material capital'.[11] In a broader sense, idolatry involved a way of thinking which clashed with a Western rationality based on Aristotle's philosophy. The native world was characterized by a non-Aristotelian fluidity of time and space, a permeability of things and beings, a multidimensionality, which undermined the stable categories of Western thinking, upheld by the Church against Satan, who was held responsible for such destabilizations of natural order.[12]

The Jesuits were probably the most determined and inventive of the religious orders in their efforts to emplace a Christian subjectivity which would reduce the multiplicity of the native cosmos to a duality of good and evil. It was Jesuit policy to use native traditions of song, dance and theatre to make acculturation as penetrative as possible; for instance they wrote Catholic hymns in native languages and set them to native music. In the northeast of Brazil they established a tradition of religious plays, which interpreted history as a struggle between God and the Devil, and these became a key feature of *sertão* culture, as in Glauber Rocha's extraordinary film, *Deus e o diabo na terra do sol* (*Black God White Devil* 1963).[13] The film shows how Jesuit ideology has been transformed into popular Manicheism, with its belief in the possible reversal of the social order.

Two issues begin to emerge. First, there is the question of how far the Christian intellectual grid distorted native thought. A central point in this sense was idolatry, the belief that the sacred is present in objects. By defining native culture as idolatrous, the Spanish were reconstructing native thought in

terms of its magical-religious aspects and intensifying these as markers of evil and of difference. Second, there are the ways in which Christian concepts are changed and in greater or lesser degree reappropriated into native or non-orthodox codes. The distinction is necessarily crude at this stage, and will be refined shortly. The gaps which Christianity could not reach had to do particularly with the individual and domestic spheres, whereas the public domain was more permeable to Christianization. Gruzinski speaks of the 'silences of the Church on illness and birth, on the rapport with nature and the elements, but equally on the domestic group'.[14] Native practices tended to continue especially in relation to misfortune, illness and death. And in this matter of counter-acculturation, women rather than men often played the major role. In divination, for example, the experts tended to be women: 'It is most often women who locate objects and animals which have become lost, find lost companions and re-establish the domestic equilibrium when it has been disturbed.'[15]

Over time, the native practices dubbed as idolatry broke increasingly adrift from the comprehensive context of meanings which they originally reproduced. Idolatry remained a repertory of actions, conducts and ruses capable of giving coherence to the emotional states of the person but at the same time running the risk of no longer being a way of interpreting the cosmos and 'an organized semantic memory' but becoming instead isolated and esoteric formulae. This decontextualization, however, was one of the conditions for the success of practitioners such as *curanderos* (curers, sometimes translated as witch-doctors) among other social groups, including Spaniards. The more they were able to answer the needs of other classes, the more their rituals and symbols became disconnected from pre-Hispanic native knowledge. At the same time, native iconography and religious terminology were becoming detached from their traditional contexts as a result of Western modes of reading. It is perhaps useful to introduce here the distinction made by Soviet semiotics of culture: if a measure of the strength and viability of a culture is its capacity both to store information and to process new information, then what we have described constitutes a reduction of this capacity on the part of native cultures, though by no means their disappearance.[16]

One of the phenomena that occurred as a result of the redistribution of cultural practices was a convergence, which can be termed 'colonial magic'.[17] Arising from a variety of origins – popular European, African, as well as native American – it broke the Church's monopoly of the supernatural and served as a way of getting round the inequalities of colonial hierarchy. 'This cascade of gestures, substances, formulae, these discrete connections . . . just as much as

corruption, give colonial society its dynamism and plasticity.'[18] This was particularly true of erotic magic, which could be used to overcome the numerous barriers of caste in order to gain the sexual attentions of someone who was socially forbidden. Such minor everyday practices occurred within the interstices of the rigid hierarchies of colonial society, and over time formed a key stratum of popular culture.[19] In this sense, the marvellous, on which twentieth-century magical realism is based, has its origins in the colonial period, and was transmitted above all by women. The transmission occurred in the gap between tactical obedience and pragmatic evasion: 'obedezco pero no cumplo' ('I obey but I do not accept'), in the Spanish phrase. Women adapted black and indigenous religion to practical uses and invented new ritual practices. Magic responded to a lack of mechanisms for mediating relationships in colonial society: Spanish women for instance were supplied with herbs by blacks, and with drugs by Indians. Magical practices did not cohere into a body of belief nor fuse into a movement of resistance; nevertheless they were used where there were no social mechanisms for resolving conflict and they fed into a substratum of popular culture which changed little until the onset of modernization. Such historical continuities of popular culture should not simply be assumed to recur automatically, as if they were archetypes. There is always the question of how something was actually transmitted, by whom and in what circumstances. In what we have described above, this body of popular attitudes was transmitted by women, in those spheres of life which most eluded the controls of the colonial institutions.

Native visions of the Christian supernatural, which above all took the form of appearances of the Virgin Mary, began to occur in Mexico very soon after the Conquest. Cultural incompatibilities become diminished in dreams and visions, where elements from different sources can combine more freely than where verbal representations are involved. Visions, a major conduit for the acculturation of natives by missionaries, can also facilitate an opposite native use of Christian iconography within native structures of belief. Doubts about the direction of the process – colonial penetration or native appropriation – form a major part of the early history of the Virgin of Guadalupe, whose shrine was to become the most important of all Christian holy places in the New World and whose image became the most significant icon of emergent Mexican nationalism. 'The Virgin was the standard of the Indians and *mestizos* who fought in 1810 against the Spaniards, and a century later she became the banner of the peasant armies of Zapata. . . . The feast day of Guadalupe, December 12, is still the feast day par excellence, the central date in the

emotional calendar of the Mexican people.'[20] The image, now housed in a church specially built for it, is fronted by a moving floorway, to keep the endless crowd of pilgrims flowing before it.

The eventual power of the symbol resided in its capacity over time to represent a convergence of Indian and creole consciousness. When an image of the Virgin first appeared to an Indian in 1531, the Catholic Church was suspicious. The appearance occurred just north of Mexico City, at Tepeyac, the place of an Indian shrine to Tonantzin, a major Aztec divinity whose name means 'our mother'. For Sahagún, a Franciscan friar committed to the extirpation of native religion, this syncretism of native and Christian belief was very dangerous, 'a satanic invention to palliate idolatry'.[21] However, by the late sixteenth century, the Church had had to bow before the shrine's miraculous powers. In the seventeenth century, the Virgin of Guadalupe became a key icon for growing creole nationalism. As a social group, creoles were people of Spanish descent who had been born in the New World. This increasingly large group was excluded from high public office and their growing frustration made them the source of incipient Mexican nationalism. Metropolitan Spain's view was that New Spain, as Mexico was then called, owed its origin to the Spanish evangelical mission, entrusted by the Pope as God's representative, in converting Indians from paganism to the true faith. For the creoles, it was necessary to counter the claims of Spanish historiography by asserting the originality of Mexico as a country existing in its own right. The Virgin of Guadalupe supplied a basis for arguing both that the Indians were not idolatrous and that God had bestowed great spiritual favours upon Mexico, without the mediation of Spain.[22] Guadalupe could be considered as important as the great Spanish Virgen de los Remedios, invoked by the Conquistador Hernán Cortés.

## Independence: Official Versions and Popular Versions

Guadalupe became an ideal symbol of nationalism because she could serve as an emblem of common identity between creoles and the lower social orders. In this context, Benedict Anderson's insistence upon literacy as the basis for nationalism, not only in Europe but in Latin America, is somewhat misleading.[23] He argues that a national society cannot be fashioned out of traditional local relationships but needs to give its members a new, broader sense of belonging. This, he claims, is supplied above all by the novel, a form which generates a shared space-time whose inhabitants need not know each

other directly provided they share the sense of 'meanwhile', of other similar lives occurring simultaneously. The weaknesses of Anderson's scheme lie precisely in its omission of the role of popular culture. It cannot account for the extent of popular participation in the independence movements; the fact that this participation depended not on literacy but on oral transmission and iconography; and the fact that popular identity did not and does not necessarily correspond with the nation and its boundaries as state but may involve other allegiances of a regional, ethnic or class nature. In some areas of Latin America, these are unfinished struggles, even in the late twentieth century.

Anderson's omissions are highlighted by Yolanda Salas's study of the metamorphoses of Simón Bolívar in popular consciousness. Of all the figures involved in the political emancipation of Latin America, Bolívar is the best known. He was born of creole parents and inherited a sizeable landed estate. His own vivid and succinct characterization of the situation of creoles was that they were neither 'Indians nor Europeans, but rather a species in between the legitimate owners of the country and the Spanish usurpers'.[24] There are a variety of popular traditions in Venezuela which reveal the distance between creole concerns and popular ones. The latter reinterpret the figure of Bolívar and have him born in a black region, and of a slave mother. As Salas points out in her account of these popular interpretations, 'the notion of the hero and saviour originating within the oppressed group elevates the status of that group both socially and ethnically'.[25] These versions rely particularly upon oral transmission, which raises particular issues of continuity and authenticity, dramatized in the words of an informant recorded in the mid 1980s: 'It is still said, there are people who give it voice [that Bolívar was born there], but it is not given any belief, because a person living today cannot say I saw him or not. But everyone living now has had parents, and one's own parents have had grandparents, and those are people who come dragging that secret along with them.'[26] The actual process of passing remembered information from one person to another over time and thus building a history is conveyed in the vivid physicality of the words: vocifera (shout or give voice), escucha (hearing), arrastrando (dragging). The other main way in which the figure became known at popular levels was through the iconography of coins and matchboxes.

Salas also found that in present-day Venezuela, Bolívar is both a shaman with healing powers and a spirit who, when invoked in the correct way, will come down and intervene in the present. A striking feature of the popular versions is how symbols elaborated elsewhere (by the Spanish or creoles) are

resemanticized into counter-symbols. This happens with Bolívar's white horse. In the Spanish historical imagination, the white horse belongs to Santiago (St James), patron saint of the Conquistadors. In the popular Venezuelan historical imagination the white horse of Bolívar had magical powers: it could fly, pass through mountains, or disappear behind white smoke. This was why Bolívar was never touched by a bullet: the horse protected him, making him invisible behind the smoke, or carrying him from one place to another with extraordinary speed.[27] To think in this way is to disperse the sacred, so that it takes the form of magic or 'superstition', as it was called by the Enlightenment – an attitude which clashes with the Church's centralization and monopolization of the sacred. The very disorder which Bolívar sought so persistently to eradicate during his life, with constitutions which enshrined higher moral and civic virtues, here seems to have taken revenge upon him. Programmes to educate the lower social groups about liberal institutions and republican virtues have made little headway among Salas's informants, whose polymorphic interpretations of history are attempts to establish their own power both as actors in history and as recorders of it. Similar phenomena occur throughout much of Latin America.

The first Bolivian constitution was written by Bolívar himself, whose name had of course been chosen for the new republic which was founded in 1825. His proposals included the institution of censors, who would be the guardians of the secular religion of the state: 'the censors exercise a moral and political authority which has some resemblance with that of the Areopagus in Athens or the Censors in Rome. They will be the guardians against the Government to ensure that the Constitution . . . is observed with religion.'[28] Although this measure was not eventually included in the constitution, it exemplifies the discrepancy between institutions and reality which characterizes the majority of post-Independence Latin American states. Bolivia, at the time of Independence, had a majority Indian population. In spite of this, as far as liberal-creole historiography is concerned, Indians have been silent in the republican history of Bolivia.

Indian and creole interpretations of the symbols of the Republic competed with each other. For the creoles, the 'liberation of the Indian is taken as the central ideological justification of the Wars of Independence from Spain'. One of the forms the justification took was a hammered gold sheet, commissioned for display in the new parliament, depicting 'a beautiful Indian girl, symbolizing America, seated upon the remnants of a lion and beneath a canopy, formed by the flags of the continents' countries'. In addition, Bolívar and Sucre (another Independence hero) are 'seen in the act of decorating her

with the cap of liberty'.[29] However, against the creole iconography, in which the virgin to-be-liberated was quickly convertible into virgin (land) to be possessed, there existed an Indian counter-iconography, concentrated around the key image of the Virgin as *pachamama* (literally earth-mother), symbol of reproductive increase. This symbol was deployed by Indians to legitimate their claims to the land, as against such creole representations as for example a medal showing the Liberator (Bolívar) 'at the top of a ladder formed by guns, swords, cannons and flags . . . placing on the Mountain [of Potosí] the cap of liberty'.[30] The designs of liberty upon the Potosí mountain, the richest silver mine of the Americas, reveal their agenda of economic appropriation. The village square is another place of interpretative convergence and collision, where the tree in front of the church can stand variously for the republican tree of liberty or the Indian sacred tree. 'A "sacred tree" growing in front of the church in the central square is today a common feature of many old Indian towns . . . in Potosí. It is rooted in a square which is thought of as an expression of the Virgin (*virjin*), or *pachamama*, thus symbolizing the lands of the local ethnic group. In this way the parish tree becomes a symbol of local regenerative increase.'[31]

## Law, Order and the State

Independence from Spain was secured throughout most of the subcontinent by the 1820s, though Cuba remained a Spanish colony until 1898. The popular classes did not necessarily support the creoles against Spain; they often took the opposite side.

Popular culture, in the post-Independence period, cannot be separated from the process of state-formation. The construction of nation-states, which was the goal of the creole elites, was impeded by the inheritance of colonial forms of society. Among the latter were *caciquismo*, the institution whereby members of native ruling groups had been allowed to retain local power in exchange for loyalty to the colonial regime, a power which tended to keep rural populations in the semi-feudal position of retainees; *latifundismo*, the organization of land into very large estates; and clientelist politics, which were an obstacle to the achievement of national as opposed to local loyalties. Political liberation – from Spain – was not the same as social emancipation, as the great nineteenth-century thinker Andrés Bello pointed out. Republicanism did not necessarily free peasants from feudal landholding institutions; in many cases it reinforced the power of landlords, as with the sugar *usinas* in Brazil or

the *haciendas* (large estates) in the Spanish-speaking countries. The popular classes, whose formation was linked with colonial institutions, or who recognized that the new liberal institutions offered them little benefit, were for the creoles the recalcitrant element which had to be brought into line.

Argentina offers a particularly useful example of these issues. The clash of different social formations is revealed most sharply in the cities, especially in Buenos Aires. 'In matters of form', as one historian puts it, 'this is a modern and near-perfect European metropolis; in matters related to quotidian social and political behaviours, however, the record of Europeanization is checkered.'32 Buenos Aires continued to be 'a terminus of rural and pastoral behaviours, while becoming the hub of South Atlantic trade with Europe'. This highly contradictory situation made it a testing ground for the ideology of progress.33

The Wars of Independence brought a breakdown of authority. Subsequently, the control of the masses (the *gente de pueblo*) became a persistent and elusive concern of the creole elites (the *gente decente*). The principal goal of the latter was 'the institutionalization of stable systems of community, mechanisms by which links could be established that would be capable of binding a public that shared a common space and heritage'.34 However, for the *gente de pueblo*, the bonds of community were not felt towards the city or the nation, but towards the *barrio* (neighbourhood) and the *casa* (house). Moreover, the popular classes consumed little in the way of European goods. 'Women seldom owned more than a couple of shawls and blouses, perhaps as many as three skirts, and one pair of shoes or sandals. Undergarments were similarly few, and most men's clothing was comparably limited.'35 The further one moved away from the Plaza de Mayo, the administrative centre of Buenos Aires, the greater the percentage of people wearing ponchos, *chiripás* and other rural clothing.

Consolidation of the power of the state required the legal and bureaucratic regulation of the population. Mobility of population was severely restricted and those authorities who failed to carry out regulations were threatened with condemnation as enemies of the fatherland. The use of criminalization as social control is revealed in the fact that, after robbery, the most common crime was insult and insubordination, in other words offending social superiors.36 Lower-class vagrancy was a repeated worry voiced in the newspaper editorials read by the *gente decente*. 'The streets swarm with vagrants and the billiard halls are crowded with boys'; 'boys... roam through the streets, engaging in indecent games and annoying passers-by'.37 In the provincial cities, the *gente decente* and the lower classes tended to share the

same pastimes: 'walks in the plaza, patriotic and Church holidays (especially the pre-Lenten festivities of *Carnaval*), the theatre and special visiting attractions, horse races and equestrian competitions, cockfighting, public dances, billiards and cards, and bathing in the river'.38 Nevertheless, as the cities grew larger, the separation of activities along class lines increased. The *gente decente* began to build their own race tracks and cockpits at the edge of town, and to establish clubs for their own use, leaving heavy drinking as an exclusively lower-class pastime.

Laws against vagrancy and the systematic marking of class distinction were among the preconditions of the formation of the modern Argentinian nation-state. Another essential step was the elimination of the Indians, not just from the lands to the south of Buenos Aires, but from the national consciousness – or perhaps it would be more accurate to speak of the consolidation of a national consciousness through a process of exclusion. The Indians of Argentina, proportionately a much smaller part of the population than in Bolivia, are also absent from official history. But their absence takes on an entirely different kind of importance. In a nation where ruling groups have repeatedly made use of popular voices in order to build a national identity, they are a reminder of what the official use of the popular excludes, in fact violently eradicates. In this sense, David Viñas's powerful book, *Indios, ejército y frontera* (*Indians, Army and Frontier* 1982), is written against the grain of liberal history. Viñas documents how the formation of the modern Argentinian state was completed with the military campaign of General Roca in 1879, which drove the Indians south of the Río Negro and opened up the pampas for capitalist exploitation. Within thirty-five years the pampas region was 'markedly more advanced than the rest of the country. It was covered by a dense network of railways. Its landed estates were clearly demarcated by barbed wire, its landscape dotted with small towns.'39 It was also the source of over half the subcontinent's foreign trade. Roca's campaign brought about a new rigidity of geographical and cultural frontiers. The old frontier, based on a series of small forts, had permitted a multiplicity of identities, an interchange between Indians and non-Indians without imposed assimilation: 'these forts, rather than opposing the Indians, served as authentic market fairs where feathers, blankets, ponchos and skins were exchanged for herbs and sugar'.40 The new frontier was based on genocide. The new mobility of the army, purchased by the 'Holy Trinity' of telegraph, Remington rifle and railways, immobilized cultural flows and meant that movements of population would in future be those of immigration to the capital.

Viñas's study highlights a characteristic of the ruling classes of most of Latin

America to this day: their continuing use of a vocabulary reaching all the way back to Columbus, which justifies the elimination of those elements believed to be a danger to the body politic. The Indians are the unassimilable-to-be-eliminated, they are the disappeared, as opposed to the gaucho who is always there as official voice of the popular. The gaucho would be remembered, the Indians forgotten. Viñas points to the ways in which the military government of 1976–85, responsible for the disappearance of some 30,000 people, saw itself as fulfilling the same providential history.[41] Having become in the nineteenth century the core institution of the state, its 'hidden god',[42] the army in its most recent period of rule was able to place its policy of mass extermination inside a language which enshrined the need to purify the body of the nation of 'subversive' elements, giving the nation the aura of the mystical body of Christ.[43]

By the 1880s, the speed of technological modernization was increasing. This period also serves as an approximate marker for major changes in popular cultures in most of Latin America, as a result of urbanization and massification. The lives and attitudes of the popular classes show considerable continuity from the seventeenth century, once the colonial regime was consolidated, until the late nineteenth century, which brought changes greater than those occurring with Independence early in the same century. At the level of habits and mentalities, the 1880s mark a major division; to give the same meaning to Independence is to accord 'explanatory power to the constitutionality of the political state', a flawed position given that the state represented a small proportion of the population.[44]

The term 'modernization' has implications wider than technological change. One of the difficulties involved in its use has to do with the frequent assumption that the updating of certain sectors of the economy will, by some trickle-down effect, improve the situation of the whole population. On the contrary, the effect is often to reinforce the partial marginalization and super-exploitation of pre-capitalist sectors of the economy, especially those involving the peasantry. Moreover, modernization of the economic infrastructure does not necessarily bring social modernization with it, but often proceeds alongside feudal and paternalistic features. Overall, modernization in Latin America was uneven (affecting mainly the coastal regions), partial (benefiting the landed elites and their successors rather than the majority) and distorted (with inadequate infrastructure and the continuation of monocultural production). It was under these conditions that the phenomenon of authoritarian liberalism, the combination of economic liberalism with social authoritarianism, came into being in nineteenth-century Latin America,

especially in Argentina.

We therefore use the term modernization to refer to technological and economic changes without the assumption that these necessarily lead to modernity, itself a much-debated idea.[45] The most useful deployment of the term modernity is Beatriz Sarlo's notion of 'peripheral modernity', where 'peripheral' is used ironically, to expose the paternalistic assumption that Latin American countries are incapable of a proper modernity – like that of the 'advanced' countries – and to assert that Buenos Aires did achieve its own, a distinct Latin American modernity, with a specific character of its own, the nature of which will emerge in later chapters of this book.

Argentinian history is characterized by the state's employment of a 'popular' voice, purportedly that of 'the people'. The major manifestation of this phenomenon is Peronism, to be discussed in Chapter 3. For the present let us consider briefly what in some ways was its prelude: the use of the gaucho as a vehicle for the construction of a national consciousness. The gauchos were a nomadic group of mestizos who lived off the herds of wild cattle on the immense grassy plains of the pampas. Their lifestyle collided absolutely with any notion of capital accumulation. When hungry they would kill an animal, cut out the best part, the tongue, roast it on the spot and move on, leaving the carcass to the vultures. During the Independence struggles, the gauchos were recruited into the patriotic armies. But from the point of view of the landowning elite who were attempting to fashion a modern nation and for whom the pampas were the basis for the expansion of capital, which required land enclosure, the gaucho was an anomalous social element who had to be disciplined by the law. Those who failed to acquire employment as peons (labourers on the landed estates) – that is, to become sedentary – were condemned as vagos or delincuentes (vagrants or delinquents).

In an important recent book, Josefina Ludmer investigates the ways in which the gaucho was used in gauchesque literature, a genre which made use in written texts of the oral forms of gaucho song. The most famous books in this tradition are José Hernández's Martín Fierro (Part 1 1872, Part 2, 1879) and Ricardo Güiraldes's Don Segundo Sombra (1926). The genre is built within the semantic opposition between the gaucho as 'vagrant' and the gaucho as 'patriot', terms which dramatize the process of nation formation.[46] While the gaucho's body is used by the army, his voice is deployed by the gauchesque writers, a voice within which 'imported' words such as liberty and patria – the universals of the European Enlightenment – can be enunciated and generalized as a genuinely 'popular' national consciousness. At the same time an exclusion

is operated, against the 'bad' gaucho, for example in the figure of the deserter from the patriotic armies.

The gauchesque is one strand in the making of a popular urban culture. While Part I of *Martín Fierro* was phenomenally successful, it was mainly sold in the countryside, and read aloud in the *pulpería* (a cross between a bar and a general store), as earlier gauchesque poetry was read, to groups of peasants. Part II, however, was a success in Buenos Aires. This change corresponds to two main factors. In Part I (1872) the hero, conscripted to fight the Indians, deserts, becomes an outcast and goes to live with the Indians. Part II (1879), however, has Fierro return to civilization and express a programme of social reconciliation. The second factor has to do with major technological and social changes in the pampas, which brought about the disappearance of the gaucho as a distinct cultural entity and his integration into national society.

The speed of change in the pampas was considerable: from 1860 British capital began to build an industrial infrastructure, particularly in the form of railways; by the 1870s over a thousand miles of track had been laid. Beef was at the core of these developments: salt beef had been the first industrial product of the region; made from the meat of free-roaming native herds, it was not acceptable in Europe, even to the proletariat, and so the market, limited to the crews of sailing ships and Brazilian slaves, could not be expanded. From the 1880s, a series of major changes occurred: from stringy native breeds to imported shorthorn stock, from free-roaming herds to enclosed land with wire fencing, from pampas grass to cultivated alfalfa, and from the salt-meat plant to refrigerated exports. At the same time, a massive flow of immigration was taking place, from Europe to Argentina, and from the countryside to Buenos Aires. Argentina's population figures are as follows: 1869, 1,800,000: 1895, 4,000,000: 1914, 8,000,000. By the last of these dates, the population of Buenos Aires had risen to one and a half million.

The rapid expansion of Buenos Aires, making it the first modern city in Spanish America, coincided with the eclipse of the gauchesque genre. With the linguistic unification of the nation-state, the non-standard language of the gaucho could no longer function as the voice of the *patria*. And the materials of nineteenth-century rural life passed into new forms, which included the tango. Although histories of literature emphasize *Don Segundo Sombra*, far more widely read at the time were the popular novels produced by writers such as Eduardo Gutiérrez for what was becoming a mass urban public.

Between 1880 and 1910, a massive literacy programme reduced illiteracy to some 4 per cent, although the number without an effective capacity to read was clearly higher.[47] A measure of the scale of rural immigration to the capital

is given in the fact that, in 1892, one fifth of the population had recently arrived from the provinces. These lived in some 2,192 *conventillos*, tenement buildings with one room per family. At the same time, over a third of the population of Argentina were foreign immigrants, the greater part from Italy. Nevertheless, it was the voices and images of rural culture which offered a model of community, not only for the internal immigrants but also for the foreign ones.

The plasma which seemed destined to unite the various fragments of the racial and cultural mosaic was constituted from a particular image of the peasant and his language; the projective screen upon which the various components sought to symbolize their insertion into the society was intensely coloured by all the signs and paraphernalia of the creole lifestyle, even though at that time this style was losing its specific supports: the gaucho, more or less free roaming herds. . . .[48]

The period spanned by this literature is approximately 1880 to 1910. By the 1920s, with the loss of links with the old style of peasant life and the increasing social weight of the working class, it was definitely in decline. Its role, therefore, had been a transitional one, offering an imaginary continuity.

If one broadens one's gaze to other forms and to other Latin American countries, the transition towards modernity passed principally through the following: newspapers, the *folletín*, the circus, popular theatre, and photography. One of its best exemplifications of this transition is the work of the Mexican engraver José Guadalupe Posada (1852–1913), whose prints were published in newspapers and as broadsheets. They combine a traditional iconographic style with modern printmaking technology; the appearance of pre-industrial woodcut technique is deliberately created without actually being used: Posada in fact used more modern, industrial procedures. The prints are accompanied by texts in ballad form, a form which had not changed since the colonial period. The traditional is thus resignified inside the modern – or, equally, the modern is arrived at through tradition. At the same time, Posada was engaged in the construction of the popular as a social space which was not rural, or proletarian or middle-class. This is shown particularly well in a print entitled 'Project for a monument to the people', which reuses the classical motif of the figure of Laocöon. There are three figures in it: on the left, an Indian representing 'the indigenous race', on the right a man wearing a cap, representing 'the proletariat', and in the centre 'the people', a man who looks like a peasant but is wearing black trousers rather than the white trousers worn by peasants in Mexico.[49]

The new urban popular culture differed both from rural traditions and

from high culture. It was assumed by the educated elite to be degraded. For instance the literary establishment was intensely scathing about the novels of Gutiérrez and others; 'this is the most pernicious and unhealthy literature ever produced in this country'.[50] The objection was not just to vulgarity, to a vocabulary drawn 'from conventillos and prisons', but to the fact that all the protagonists were 'drunks, criminals and killers' – that is, they represented the gaucho malo, the bad, anti-social gaucho, not the good gaucho, the patriot. There was also a vast gap between the very small print-runs of 'serious' literature, a thousand copies being not unusual, and the tens of thousands of copies sold of popular criollista (creolist) literature. The new readership had been shaped by the rise of mass circulation newspapers. In 1882, for a population of some three million, the total number of copies produced per day seems to have been over 300,000.[51] Gutiérrez's most successful novels, the best known of which was Juan Moreira, were all published in folletín (serial) form by the newspaper La Patria Argentina and immediately thereafter as books under the imprint of the same newspaper. At the same time, the gaucho malo entered into other circuits: Juan Moreira was presented as a pantomime in Buenos Aires in 1884, and the eponymous hero became a key figure in the creole circus – where it was not uncommon for spectators to jump into the ring in order to defend him from the police. Moreira also figured in the Carnival, the main popular celebration in the streets of Buenos Aires at the turn of the century. The most fashionable disguises were gaucho ones, and the favourite seems to have been Moreira. The wearers of the disguises were compadritos, the term for peasants newly arrived in the city. These were men with a reputation for macho courage and violence, living at the edges, both cultural and geographical, of the city. But by the early years of the twentieth century the Moreiras in the Carnival processions had become permissive masks for office employees, whose lives took place in the city centre and were disciplined by work hours, leaving no place for knife-fighting, the traditional expression of the gaucho malo.

The compadrito figure, transitional between the rural and the urban, the traditional and the modern, has his equivalents in other Latin American countries. In Mexico, there was the pelado, 'a type of urban peasant . . . who has lost the rural Eden but has not found the promised land'.[52] At the same time, in early-twentieth-century Buenos Aires a different cultural stratum was being formed, without reference to gaucho or compadrito traditions. Explored by Roberto Arlt (1900–1942) in his urban novels, its repertory included science (aviation, guns, the chemistry of explosives) and urban crime, as well as spiritism, classical mythology, European history and the

Bible.[53] One of Arlt's central concerns is 'the unequal distribution of culture' and his response is to display a 'modernization from below', an alternative to the imposition of modernization from above.[54] There are similarities here with anarchist ideas of education, anarchism having exerted a major influence upon working-class organizations. But there is also something less programmed: the formation of a new cultural archive, of the working class and those parts of the petty bourgeoisie living at its fringes. The criollista repertory to some extent overlapped with it; for instance, socialist and anarchist publications used creolist symbols.[55] However, by the 1920s criollismo was losing its power as a bridge between rural and urban experience. The centros criollos (creole centres) set up from the 1890s by rural immigrants as meeting places where traditional rural music was performed, were in decline. There had been at least 268 of them, named after the regions their members had originated from, or inspired by Gutiérrez's characters (for example, 'The Desert Bandits' ['Los matreros del desierto']), or – and these were the majority – invoking their legitimacy in the language of nationalism, with titles such as 'The Patriotic Gauchos' ('Los gauchos patriotas') or 'Glory, fatherland and tradition' ('Gloria, patria y tradición').[56] From the 1920s the centros criollos were also places where the tango was played, an indication of the rise of a more restrictedly urban popular culture.[57]

Up to around 1917 the tango had been predominantly a dance performed in the suburbs (orillas), where the rural presence was strongest. During this orillero stage it retained a connection with the rural musical and song forms of the payada and the milonga. Where emphasis was given to the song element, this included the denunciation of conditions in the overcrowded conventillos and expressed the hostility of the orillero to the cajetilla (the city dandy or dude associated with the centre of town) or to the industrialization and proletarianization of the city:

Where is my barrio, my cradle of rogues?
Where is the nest, the refuge of yesterday?
Asphalt has erased with one stroke of the hand
The old neighbourhood where I was born. . . .[58]

A variety of elements converged in the tango. Musically it was a combination of the Argentinian milonga, the Spanish-Cuban habanera, the Spanish contradanza and the black African music played by ex-slaves in Buenos Aires.[59] It was danced by couples, closely embraced, and replaced the older more polite dances, which were performed in groups. It permitted a display of male sexual domination, both contained and provocative, associated with the

machista code of the *compadrito* and with an ambience of prostitution and knife-fighting. Thus 'to accept the tango was a form of rebellion against civic virtue and morality'.60 However, once the tango migrated from the suburbs to the city proper, it left behind the *compadrito*, the prostitute and the knife, and the social themes were replaced with a new repertory based in individualized emotion. Through radio and sound-films it became part of mass culture, and through figures like Carlos Gardel, who took the tango to Paris and New York, it entered the middle-class cultural repertoire. From around 1920 to the 1940s, the tango became popular in the three main senses of the word: quantitatively, it reached a mass audience through the mediation of the culture industry; qualitatively, it still retained some remnants of the popular as oppositional, a claim made by Humberto Solanas's films, *Tangos: el exilio de Gardel* (*Tangos, The Exile of Gardel* 1985), and *Sur* (*South* 1988); it had also, however, become a populist form, as in Fernán Silva Valdés's nostalgic composition, 'El tango':

Tango of *milongas*,
tango of *compadritos*
which you dance with intensity
but as if without intensity,
as if on slow rails:
you are a state of mind of the masses.61

## Popular Culture and the State

In Brazil the struggle over the course of modernization was intimately connected with the ruling elites' attempt to control and define the role of the subaltern groups in this process. Despite a series of republican conspiracies, Independence reflected primarily a power conflict between creole and Portuguese elites which was resolved through the establishment of a constitutional monarchy in 1822. During this period a number of European ideologies were adopted and articulated in order to reconcile the contradiction between the liberal aspirations of the modernizing elites and the anachronistic nature of a slave-owning monarchy.

Social Darwinism, which had emerged in Europe and interpreted European predominance as an example of the superiority of the white race, was used in Brazil as an explanatory framework to account for Brazil's backwardness in terms of its black and Amerindian racial inheritance.62 The transposition of European evolutionary thinking to the Brazilian context gave rise to a peculiar

ideology of whitening, according to which the pattern of racial miscegenation was gradually producing a whiter population, genetically better endowed with the capacity for the building of civilization. The possibility that the tendency to generate mulatto offspring reflected sexual exploitation by white upper-class males or the attempt by free blacks to achieve social mobility by marrying a person with lighter skin was conveniently ignored by evolutionary determinist theories.63

The ambiguities and ironies of a society simultaneously slavist and liberal are brought out by the great Brazilian novelist, Machado de Assis. In a key essay for Latin American cultural history, 'As idéias fora do lugar' ('Ideas Out of Place'), the Brazilian critic Roberto Schwarz explores the dislocations between liberal ideology and a slave-owning monarchy; 'although it was the fundamental relationship of production, slavery was not the effective nexus of ideological life'.64 The latter took place within the relationship between the free population and the large slave- and landowners, a relationship dependent on *favor*, the paternalistic favours granted by the powerful through which access to social status and material benefits was gained. Although a product of the colonial period, the system of *favor* has in Schwarz's view continued to permeate Brazilian society to the extent that it 'is our virtually universal mediation'. *Favor* creates dependence within all the social strata and is a flaw in the whole modernizing project. It contradicts the central ideas of liberalism – individual autonomy, equality before the law, the authority of reason – and evaluates persons on the basis of particular characteristics and personal relations rather than impersonal standards of achievement and efficiency. In this context, liberal ideas have not been lived as expressions of the Adam Smith model of a free market society but ornamentally, as a decorative screen behind which relationships of patronage have continued.

This juxtaposition of a modernizing ideology and a 'backward' milieu has had important consequences for the analysis of culture, relevant not only to Brazil but also to other Latin American countries. The discrepancy between representation and reality generated in Schwarz's terms an 'improper discourse', a form of thinking which is dislocated. However, far from being a merely negative fact this discrepancy allows for critical distance from forms of thought claiming dubious universality, appearing as 'one dress among others, very much up to date but unnecessarily tight'.65 As will become clear in the following chapters this incongruity finds expression in popular culture in the form of a keen sense of the absurd and satirical irreverence towards the pre-tensions of the ruling group, while also potentially creating a basis from which to elaborate alternative representations of reality and models of society.

In 1888 slavery was abolished, followed a year later by the declaration of the Republic. However, as in the case of Brazil's Independence, the republican regime was established from above with a coup d'état, favouring primarily the new coffee-planter class of the South at the expense both of the sugar-owning landowners in the North and of the emergent urban middle classes who wanted to create an industrial base and a larger internal market. This entailed in effect abandoning the path of independent economic development and accepting neo-colonialism, whereby Brazil embraced economic liberalism by exchanging primary products for imported European manufacturers. Nevertheless, although the patrimonial social relations inherited from the colony and empire prevailed, Brazilian elites became receptive to European cosmopolitanism and the current belief in progress and enterprise. This new attitude is clearly revealed in the transformation of the capital, Rio de Janeiro. The old colonial houses, narrow streets and alleyways were demolished and replaced with sumptuous avenues, statues and even nightingales imported from Europe. As Nicolau Sevcenko points out, this metamorphosis was based on four principles: 'the condemnation of the habits and customs connected to the memory of traditional society; the negation of any element of popular culture which disturbed the civilized image of the dominant society; a strict policy of expulsion of the popular classes from the centre of the city, available now for the exclusive use of the bourgeois strata; and an aggressive cosmopolitanism, profoundly identified with the Parisian lifestyle.'[66] With the new emphasis on time as money, the alleged laziness of the rural population, popular religiosity and popular festivities came under attack from the state. This is the historical moment in which the binary opposition of tradition versus modernity becomes a cornerstone of intellectual debate reinforcing the earlier proposition propounded in Argentina by Sarmiento in The Life of Juan Facundo Quiroga: Civilisation and Barbarism, that Latin America must overcome its 'barbaric' past and become civilized through adopting European models.

The attempt to extirpate the unsightly 'barbarian' elements – forms of social life and culture connected to blacks, mulattoes, Indians, peasants, illiterates – from the fabric of Brazilian society is manifested in a set of ideas, policies and state actions. Immigration policy between 1890 and 1920 aimed at recruiting Europeans, in particular North Europeans, to work as agricultural labour. This policy was based on the belief that immigrants of European stock were abler than the descendants of former slaves and that this would contribute to the gradual whitening of the population.[67] At the level of ideas, positivism with its emphasis on science and authoritarian social

engineering provided a rationale for economic development without popular participation or change in the land tenure system. The positivist motto of 'order and progress' emblazoned on the Brazilian flag encapsulates the view among governing elites that modernization from above would establish Brazil as a civilized nation.

While the expansion of commercial agriculture and the process of urbanization in the South may have justified the belief that modernization was indeed advancing, social life in the backlands exposed the gap between the 'classical' model of European development and the 'barbarian' reality of Brazil all the more glaringly. This discrepancy was painfully laid bare in 1896 when a key conflict arose; it was caused by the totally unexpected resistance on the part of the rural backlands, where concepts of the political were still religious, to the intrusion of the modern secular state, and revealed clearly the manner in which the 'popular' and 'the people' as an element to be civilized were being constructed. However, in order to grasp fully the significance of this conflict, it is necessary to look briefly at some of the essential features of the social structure of the Northeast.

During the period of colony and empire, and to a large extent even today, the system of land tenure in the Northeast was characterized by large estates, or latifundios, producing primary products for export abroad. These were located in large part in the coastal regions and a vast territory of land stretching into the hinterland – the sertão – sparsely populated by groups of semi-nomadic peasants living within a subsistence economy. The social relations which emerged in this context centred around the large and self-sufficient engenho or fazenda, the sugar-mill or cattle-rearing estate. These belonged to a few powerful families, organized around a patriarchal figure who ruled over his domains and dependants in the manner of a feudal lord. Given the export-oriented nature of agriculture, large tracts of land remained uncultivated when demand on the world market fell. The concentration of property made technological innovation in order to increase productivity unnecessary, while also preventing the growth of subsistence crops and medium-sized landholdings. Together these factors created profound social inequalities: power and wealth in the hands of a few landholding families and a mass of peasants and landless labourers living in extreme poverty and servile subordination to the landowner. With no secure claim to the land, and threatened with hunger and destitution during recurrent periods of drought, the rural poor formed semi-nomadic groups of migrants wandering through the vast expanse of the Northeast in search of shelter and food.

In 1896 during a particularly severe drought, Antonio Conselheiro,

religious and political leader of the rural poor in the backlands of the state of Bahia, brought together a number of peasant communities who were resisting the measures introduced by the republican regime, among them the collection of taxes and the imposition of the metric system of measurement. In Canudos, the site of an abandoned cattle ranch, Conselheiro and his followers founded a city of roughly 25,000 inhabitants based on a form of primitive communism, with its own administrators, warriors, doctors, internal commerce, fields of subsistence crops and pastures for cattle.[68]

Between January and October 1897 over 5,000 men were dispatched to impose the authority of the Republic. Field Marshall Floriano Peixoto, dictator from 1891 to 1894, declared, 'as a liberal, which I am, I cannot want for my country the government of the sword; but, and there is no one who does not know this, because the examples are there for everyone to see... this is the government which knows how to purify the blood of the social body, which, like our own, is corrupted.'[69] As in Argentina with General Roca, the military granted itself the sacred role of fulfilling a sacrificial mythology. The expeditionary force sent to put down the Canudos rebellion was an expression of this programme. Euclides da Cunha, sent to report on the campaign, wrote in one of his first articles, 'We shall soon be standing on the earth where the Republic will surely give the final shock to those which perturb it', interpreting the conflict in terms of a paradigm derived from the French Revolution, whereby the new Republic was facing a final monarchist revival, as in the French Vendée.[70] What followed changed his life, and provided the material for one of the greatest texts of Latin American culture, *Os sertões* (*Rebellion in the Backlands* 1902).

Military engineering became the leading edge of enforced modernization from above, its ability to establish rectilinearity in the desert, as da Cunha puts it,[71] making it the protagonist of rationality against chaos. The adversary, who practised communal ownership of the land, was 'an unconscious brute mass, which, without organs and without specialized functions, continued to grow rather than evolve, through the mere mechanical juxtaposition of successive layers, in the manner of a human polyp.'[72] As well as recognizing the destabilizing threat of the body without organs,[73] da Cunha's writing also reveals how the state projectively constructed this popular force as its own adversary. Spontaneous, purposeless growth, without evolution, is the nightmare of the positivist; for the state, it must be expunged from the national territory.

However, witnessing the conflict changed da Cunha and diminished his faith in positivism. The army degenerated: 'The last remnants of a

meaningless formality were now abandoned: deliberations on the part of the commanding officers, troop manoeuvres, distribution of forces, even bugle calls; and, finally, the hierarchy of rank itself was practically extinguished in an army without uniforms which no longer knew any distinctions'.[74] At the end, as the last defenders fall into the ditch they had dug to die in, the soldiers' gaze is paralysed as they stare at their own destructiveness. This genocidal campaign, which da Cunha sees as an act of madness on the part of the government – or the nation – can be understood in part in terms of a necessity to destroy the uncontrollable. In some of da Cunha's descriptions of the settlement, 'a Babylon of huts', the adobe walls which could so easily be penetrated take on a malign elasticity: 'Canudos... possessed the lack of consistency and the treacherous flexibility of a huge net. It was easy to attack it, overcome it, conquer it, knock it down, send it hurtling – the difficult thing was to leave it.'[75]

For a consciousness shaped by reasons of state, the people of Canudos could only be understood as fuelled by mysticism or fanaticism. In this sense, Vargas Llosa's novel, *La guerra del fin del mundo* (*The War of the End of the World* 1981) merely prolongs da Cunha's account. The defence of land rights, and of a particular way of life, disappear as motivations. And the Brazilian army, for its part, immediately overcame its moment of paralysis, without acknowledgement or memory. The memory of Canudos, now submerged by an irrigation scheme, is available to us mainly thanks to da Cunha's book. What is preserved is invaluable evidence of what modern states have destroyed, and therefore of those necessities of capitalist state formation with which popular culture has come into collision or found accommodation. Da Cunha discovered that paradigms of universal history could not simply be applied to interpret local history. The fissures in the European model of explanation, those things which it could not account for, created a problematic sense of identity: 'there occurs, in the consciousness of the ex-colonized person, a simultaneous *identification* and *rejection* of the identity both of the former colonizer and of the original native, revealing the tension between the project of integration into civilization and the differential construction of the idea of nation'.[76] This space between European models and local contexts would over time be opened up by anthropology and by the modernist movement in the 1920s and 1930s. With the First World War Brazil's export economy was disrupted and capital investment was directed towards the creation of an industrial base. The preconditions for the growth of an independent national identity had emerged. This sense was articulated above all by the modernist movement which called upon the intelligentsia to 'discover Brazilian reality',

to recuperate those elements categorized by official culture as barbaric: Brazil's black and Amerindian cultures, the syntax of spoken Portuguese, the social conditions of the rural hinterland, the tropical landscape.

One solution to this problem of identity was put forward by Gilberto Freyre in *Casa Grande e Senzala* (*The Masters and the Slaves* 1933). In Freyre's account, the free sexual relationships between white masters and black slaves brought about a new *mestizo* race which transcended the old racial divisions and made possible the cultural integration of the nation. Shifting the debate from positivist racialism, which had stressed the inferiority of the blacks, Freyre introduced an anthropological orientation, which emphasized culture not race as the marker of distinction. He thus has a major responsibility for the myth of Brazil as a 'melting-pot of races',[77] which in the Getulio Vargas's regime (1930–45) became a key feature of a populist programme of national integration.

Freyre transformed the *mestizo*, previously seen as tainted by black blood, into a positive member of the nation. 'The ideology of *mestiraje*, which had been imprisoned in the ambiguities of racial theories, could now be propagated socially and become common sense, ritually celebrated in everyday relationships, or in the great public events such as carnival or football. The *mestizo* becomes national.'[78] This version of cultural syncretism was ideological. It offered a picture of Brazilian society which transcended class boundaries just at the moment when a large industrial workforce was being created. Freyre himself recognized, not long before his death in 1987, the incompatibility of his vision with the working-class movement: 'what wrecked everything was the factory'.[79] Thus although Freyre's anthropological approach and his positive evaluation of Brazil's ethnically mixed civilization superseded the racialist determinism of the nineteenth century, his view that Brazil was characterized by 'racial democracy' reinforced the ideal of whitening because it led to the widespread notion that Brazil's racial problems were being resolved through ethnic integration, whose goal remained white civilization. The black playwright Abdias do Nascimento points to a crucial consequence of the persistence of this ideal, namely the absence of a significant black consciousness movement: 'the underlying objective of this ideology has been to deny blacks the possibility of self-definition by depriving them of the means of racial identification'.[80] In his view concepts such as miscegenation, acculturation and assimilation are in fact euphemisms for the sexual exploitation of African women and the gradual annihilation of African culture. Taking Nascimento's critique into consideration, it is therefore necessary in analysing forms of black popular culture in Brazil and indeed in

Latin America as a whole, to avoid a culturalist approach which regards these forms merely as a continuation of African culture. Such an approach overlooks the profound alterations they suffered as a result of which they became part of a society founded on slave labour as a result of which they were transformed – to use Bastide's definition – into a class subculture.

The slave trade destroyed clans, villages and lineages; it brought together groups from diverse civilizations settled along the western half of Africa. In the boats in which they were transported and in the markets in which they were sold, forest peoples mingled with farmers, matrilinear with patrilinear civilizations, members of kingdoms with members of tribes and totemic clans, all reduced to a single common denominator by slavery. With all the original forms of ethnic solidarity destroyed, it was not possible to reproduce the African cultures in their new social habitat. Instead, residual and new configurations developed in the few interstices in the new social system through which black cultures were able to manifest themselves, becoming in the process a class subculture. African culture thus 'ceased to be a communitarian culture encompassing society as a whole, in order to become exclusively the culture of a social class, of a single group in Brazilian society, of an economically exploited and socially subordinate group'.[81]

In Chapter 3 we will focus in greater detail on the main devices through which black culture was articulated with Brazilian society. For the present discussion of continuities and discontinuities in the formation of popular culture it is important to note that although the abolition of slavery and the declaration of the First Republic changed the formal status of blacks, the continuing prevalence of the past economic structure meant that 'slavery's terms permeated, and corroded, all social relations, and extended to free persons'.[82] This explains partly why despite the emergence of an urban trade union movement and political parties demanding greater participation in the formation of the new society, the subaltern groups – *mestizos*, Indians, blacks, peasants, workers, domestic servants – did not acquire the status of citizens. The phrase 'the social question is a question for the police' was frequently used to describe the attitude of the state to the popular classes and their culture.

As indicated earlier, significant social changes took place in the 1920s, the most important being the development of industry and the emergence of new social classes – in particular an urban middle class – who would eventually break the great landowners' monopoly of power and witness the emergence of a state favourable to their interests. In 1930, following an uprising against the republican regime, the populist leader Getulio Vargas became president and began a programme of state-led industrialization.

The year 1930 is regarded by historians and sociologists as a watershed in Brazilian history, marking the emergence of an urban-industrial civilization often referred to as Brazil's 'bourgeois revolution'. It is important to note, however, that these developments differed quite considerably from their European counterpart in a way which would have significant repercussions for the formation of popular culture. Given that industrialization was in part achieved with capital no longer used to grow coffee, due to the fall in demand during the First World War and subsequently during the Depression, the new class of industrialists belonged in part to the landowning strata. Moreover, since the foreign currency needed to support industrialization was obtained through selling primary products abroad as before, the colonial *latifundio* system prevailed as did the extreme poverty of the rural population who tried to ameliorate their situation by migrating to the city. While the acquisition of urban worker status was considered a form of social mobility, its effect in fact was to attenuate the growth of class consciousness. Thus in contrast to Europe, <mark>in Brazil the development of a modern capitalist society was not accompanied by the formulation of a distinct urban-industrial ideology or a radical programme of social transformation.</mark> In a manner which has come to be seen as characteristically Brazilian, social change was achieved less through a radical break with the past than through a conciliatory accommodation of divergent interests and moderate social reforms introduced by the state. Capitalist development and modernization in Brazil went hand in hand with the creation of a heterogeneous mass society, an urban population with fluid class, regional and ethnic identifications whose participation became essential for the legitimacy of the state but which was nevertheless carefully controlled from above.

In this period 'the people' became a major political, literary and ideological category. Popular cultural forms became important sites where, on the one hand, traditional, ethnic and local identities were articulated by the state within the project of national integration and development, and, on the other, they became a means through which the subaltern groups struggled to participate in the formation of the new urban social order, using popular cultural forms to represent their new identity, to make their presence as citizens felt. This two-way process will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 3. At this stage it is important to keep this constellation of forces in mind because it enables one to make sense of the fact that modernity in Brazil – and to some extent in other Latin American countries where parallel processes have occurred – contains, as Octavio Ianni points out, 'a multiplicity of concepts, themes and national realities which are both new and old and in

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which the different cycles and periods in Brazilian history intermingle as in a unique kaleidoscope of realities and imitations'.[83] Popular culture, it is suggested, is a privileged vehicle through which this kaleidoscope of multiple intermingled realities, rural and urban, pre-modern and modern, local and non-local can be fruitfully studied.

## Notes

1. In this connection, Serge Gruzinski's study of Mexico between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, *La colonisation de l'imaginaire* (Paris 1988), is extremely valuable for the comprehensiveness with which it distinguishes between different levels and modes of interaction without reducing them to the binary of dominant versus subordinated.
2. Roger Bartra, *La jaula de la melancolía*, Mexico 1987, p. 131.
3. 'What they [the Conquistadors] call conquests, being violent invasions on the part of cruel tyrants, condemned not only by the law of God, but by all human laws.' Bartolomé de Las Casas, *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias*, Madrid 1987, p. 105.
4. See Bartolomé de Las Casas, The Devastation of the Indies, New York 1974, with Introduction by Hans Magnus Enzensberger.
5. Miguel León Portilla, *Visión de los vencidos*, Madrid 1985. See also Gordon Brotherston, *Image of the New World*, London 1979.
6. Nathan Wachtel, *The Vision of the Vanquished*, Hassocks 1977.
7. Gruzinski, p. 90.
8. Ibid, pp. 80–81.
9. p. 108.
10. Ibid., pp. 144–5.
11. Ibid., p. 199.
12. Ibid., p. 214.
13. Cf. Virgilio Noya Pinto, *Comunicação e cultura brasileira*, São Paulo, Editora Ática, 1986.
14. Gruzinski, p. 197.
15. Ibid., p. 203.
16. Jurij M. Lotman and Boris A. Uspenskij, 'Sobre el mecanismo semiótico de la cultura', in Lotman, *Semiótica de la cultura*, Madrid 1979, pp. 67–92.
17. Gruzinski, pp. 257–9.
18. Ibid., p. 259.
19. This point was made by Jean Franco in 'Women and the Vernacular', paper presented to the 1989 Congress of the Latin American Studies Association, Miami. In what follows, we are indebted to this paper.
20. Octavio Paz, Introduction to Jacques Lafaye, *Quetzalcoatl and Guadalupe*, Chicago 1976, p. xix.
21. Lafaye, pp. 211–16.
22. Ibid., pp. 62–3.
23. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, London 1983.
24. Simón Bolívar, *Escritos políticos*, Madrid 1969, p. 69.
25. Yolanda Salas de Lecuna, *Bolívar y la historia en la conciencia popular*, Caracas 1987, p. 46.
26. Ibid., p. 42.
27. Ibid., pp. 59–61.
28. Simón Bolívar, p. 130.

subject to manipulation and domination. It has been claimed that the mass media do provoke a form of amnesia by destroying the collective memory characteristic of peasant life. José Jorge de Carvalho has argued strongly that the mass media, because of what he sees as their immediacy and apparent transparency, exclude the possibility of collective memory. The culture industry 'is essentially amnesic: it offers the illusion of total and immediate participation between producer and consumer . . . but without the possibility of accumulation. It lacks an interpretative dimension' whereby everyday life can be transformed into experience.[142] By contrast, the products of folklore continue to offer that interpretative power, and in fact continue to be the predominant source of symbols for communality.[143] The rituals and symbolism of harvest would no doubt exemplify what de Carvalho has in mind.

While it is useful to contrast the different interpretative modes of rural and urban cultures, the problem with de Carvalho's position is that it leaves out of count how the mass media are actually received and used by their audiences, and fails to allow for the multi-layered, ambiguous and irreverent responses of popular audiences. Consider, for instance, what Carlos Monsiváis reports of the Otomí Indians of the state of Hidalgo: when the government decided to give them technology to help them organize themselves, it transpired that there was more interest in watching the videotapes of their meetings than in attending the meetings themselves: the whole community came to watch the tape.[144] Or there's the case of the Otomí women who had worked in the USA and whom people called 'Marías': they were asked 'why their daughters were called Jeanette, Yvonne, Deborah, Pamela instead of traditional Mexican names. The answer was that this was the only way they wouldn't be called 'Marías', which they'd had enough of, and this was why they looked for the most unfamiliar names in order to make sure their daughters were seen as individuals.' This makes plain how far certain features of popular rural cultures have been made into fixed images which no longer correspond to reality.[145]

### The *Telenovela*: From Melodrama to Farce

Media are technologies which alter the cultural field they enter: this is the manner in which they mediate.[146] Therefore resistance, where it occurs, cannot be resistance to new media as such, but only to their control and reception. Discussion of the media in Latin America in the 1970s was

dominated by the concept of cultural dependency, the classic text of this debate being Dorfman and Mattelart's *How to Read Donald Duck*.[147] While being a very valuable study which brings out the blatantly imperialist tenor and hardly less blatant social chauvinism masked by the innocence of the characters of the Disney Corporation, it nevertheless makes a closed circuit between the ideological messages and their reception. The gap between ideology and everyday life also tends to be short-circuited in Mattelart's studies of the media in Chile in the early 1970s. He points, for instance, to the alienating effect of advertisements for consumer goods which the majority of Chileans could never hope to purchase. Nevertheless, he seems to assume that the receivers of these images have no choice but to receive them passively, that they have no alternative representations available to them. Here social modelling and ideology have been collapsed into each other, as if people were unconscious of the disjunctures or had no way of negotiating them. The novels of Manuel Puig, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4, tell a different story. Puig's characters are addicted to the stereotyping of radio serials and films, but actively collude in being manipulated, and know very well how to negotiate the gaps between the ideal and the actual: the responsibility is not solely that of the media. Puig's novels introduce desire into the equation.

In the light of this, the notion of a distinctively popular urban culture requires investigation in three main directions. In the first place, there is the question of how far earlier forms of mass culture have left traces in the contemporary culture industry, and therefore how far the latter does include a dimension of social memory. Second, there is the issue of the receiving public as actively participant in the constitution of messages, and therefore of the messages themselves as not univocal, not imposing a single or fixed interpretative key. Third, the popular is perhaps above all a space of resignification, in that the culture industry's products are received by people who are living the actual conflicts of a society and who bring the strategies with which they handle those conflicts into the act of reception. We will explore these possibilities in terms of the most famous Latin American form of mass culture, the *telenovela*. This is also the form which most extensively crosses national boundaries.

There have been many negative judgements of the *telenovela*, but one example will be enough. In his essay 'Be Happy Because Your Father Isn't Your Father: An Analysis of Colombian *Telenovelas*', Azriel Bibliowicz discusses *Manuela*, whose plot combines romantic intrigue with a social message about the nineteenth-century peasant-landlord struggles. He calls

it a 'Manicheistic construction' on the grounds that 'the "notables" who have "bad intentions" are cruel to the peasants while the mayor who is from the same social class as the "notables" has "good intentions" and wants to help them. The *telenovela* offers a simplistic analysis of the problem which is posited on the character of certain individuals and not the socio-economic reality of the country which is the real issue.'148 But foregrounding the ethical and the emotional is precisely a characteristic of the popular forms (the melodramatic tradition in the theatre and the *folletin*) which historically passed into the *telenovela*. It is also a characteristic of the nineteenth-century novels, such as *Aves sin nido* (*Birds Without a Nest* 1889) which have been used for *telenovelas*. The fact that emphasis on the moral and emotional levels is a popular tradition clashes with Bibliowicz's univocal ideological reading.

We will look first at some of the relationships between the form of the *telenovela* and history, drawing mainly on Martín-Barbero's argument. The first *telenovela* in both Mexico and Brazil, the two main producing countries, was *El derecho de nacer* (*The Right to Be Born*). Transferred to television in the mid 1960s, it had originally been a radio serial produced in Cuba in 1948. The plot concerns a young lawyer trying to find out who his parents were. The connection here between melodrama and the history of this subcontinent? Certainly melodrama's non-recognition of the "social contract" speaks loudly of the weight which that other *primordial sociality* of kinship, neighbourhood solidarity and friendship, holds for those who recognize themselves in melodrama. Must there not be some sense in raising the question how far the success of melodrama in these countries speaks of the failure of political institutions which have given no recognition to the weight of that other sociality?'149

Between the time of history, time of the great agglomerations such as the Nation, and the existential time of the individual life, family time enters as a mediation, deploying the markers of generations and differing degrees of affiliation within the extended family. The time of the family is already anachronistic, given the regulation of everyday life by work and the market ('time is money'). Nevertheless this memory of another time is essential to the reception of the *telenovela* in Latin America, since it charges plot intrigue with

Melodrama involves a drama of recognition: of son by father, mother by son. Playing a major part in the intrigue is the struggle against a world of appearances and evil actions which prevents true identity being recognized. When melodrama emphasizes recognition of kinship as social being, by the same token it ignores the idea of society as a 'social pact' between rulers and ruled, that goal of liberal regimes from Bolívar onwards. 'Is there not a secret

a sense of the social in opposition to the dominant.150 As well as its links with the *folletin*, the television melodrama also retains connections with the narrative mode of folktales, Brazilian *cordel* literature, and the chronicle of events in *corrido* and Colombian *vallenato* songs: these connections have to do with a constantly elongated narrative flow and a porousness to what is going on outside the text. A Brazilian critic has taken these claims further, with the suggestion that melodrama is a carnivalesque genre, in which author, reader and characters constantly exchange positions.151

Interviewed for a British television programme about their attitude to *telenovelas*, a group of women in Mexico City said they preferred to watch the lives of rich people, because rich people have less problems. These viewers were obviously quite aware of the distance between everyday life and the world on the screen. It is also worth mentioning that one of the older Mexican *telenovelas* was called *Los ricos también lloran* (*The Rich Also Cry*), an indication of how the classic 'rags to riches' plots, which engage a desire to resolve economic problems, combine with an effect of emotional democracy.152 So although there is an undoubted emotional self-indulgence in *telenovelas*, they have another, potentially more political, side. The dynamics of popular uses of the *telenovela* are sketched out as follows by Monsiváis:

collectivities without political power or social representation... sexualize melodrama, extract satirical threads from black humour, enjoy themselves and are moved emotionally without changing ideologically.... The subaltern classes accept, because they have no alternative, a vulgar and pedestrian industry, and indisputably transform it into self-indulgence and degradation, but also into joyful and combative identity.153

To this should be added the pleasures of memory, and of sharing that memory with others – since television is not received in silence or a rapture of total possession – in the face of extraordinarily complicated plots.154

Popular reception thus already implies a tendency to resignification, which by mobilizing popular experiences and memories produces a margin of control, not over the ownership of media (this is the province of alternative media), but over their social meanings. One type of reappropriation is indicated by the *barrio* circuses in Brazil, where television characters are incorporated into older forms of entertainment which include burlesque, conjuring and acrobatic display. But mostly forms of entertainment other than television are increasingly unavailable, and it is in the changing styles of the *telenovelas* themselves that the pressures of changing contemporary social history are manifest.

Let us consider two recent productions by Televisa, the Mexican national television monopoly.[155] *The Strange Return of Diana Salazar*, broadcast in 1988, has as its basic plot the reincarnation in 1988 of a seventeenth-century aristocratic woman, burnt by the Inquisition as a witch. It includes the customary elements of good and evil and their misrecognition, plus a love story, but it also has the special powers of the heroine transferred to computers, thus acknowledging the growing fetishism of information technology but reappropriating it into the erotics of melodrama. This is a more complex and modern plot than the usual ones inviting the poorer sections of society to watch the moral and emotional dramas of the rich. The double historical identity of the heroine and hero, both modern and seventeenth-century, can be taken as a device to reglamourize the bourgeoisie, whose aura has drastically faded in the past decade. Monsiváis stresses that 'the current move of the *telenovela* towards the spectacle of the degradation of the bourgeoisie is connected with the impossibility of continuing to base plots on the credibility of honour and family sentiments'.[156] The shift reaches an extreme in *Cuna de lobos* (*Cradle of Wolves*), whose heroine is the incarnation of evil. She wears a black patch over one eye and ruthlessly murders those who get in her way, for instance by putting sugar in an aeroplane engine. But the outlandishness is a way of doing commerce with reality, with a social crisis in the real world marked by a lack of confidence in authority and higher values: in one of the murders she puts a whole phial of digitalis in a glass of orange juice, exactly the way in which the last Pope is reputed to have been murdered.

Until the early 1980s, the expanding Mexican economy had been able to offer a prospect of more or less continuous social mobility. The devastating economic crash of 1982, whose effects were compounded by the very serious earthquake which hit Mexico City in 1985, unleashed profound changes whose impact can be seen in the form taken by recent *telenovelas*. These changes have to do with increased social violence, sharpened perception of official corruption, and the crisis of the political populism which had ruled Mexico for fifty years. 'The populist State is no longer able to respond to the excessive popular demands, and is abandoning attempts to represent them. . . . Social struggles and movements no longer find a way out by looking upwards', as Sergio Zermeño puts it, in an article entitled 'The End of Mexican Populism'.[157] The Director of *Cradle of Wolves* comments that in the current crisis 'people want to identify with someone decisive with a will of iron; this is what produced the strange phenomenon whereby people identified themselves with evil, not with good'.[158] It was watched by the

largest audience ever known for a *telenovela* – 40 million people, that is, half the population. When the last episode was shown, the city came to a standstill; the underground drivers refused to work and everyone stayed at home. According to *Cuna de lobos*'s writer, Carlos Olmos, 'melodrama is now a farce, we can't take seriously any more the melodramatic contrasts of good and evil'. For Monsiváis, it marks a change of perception: anger at class relationships has displaced the old moral thrill, and the only future possibility is parody of the genre.[159] The only other thing that remains from the old *telenovela* is the pleasure in unravelling a baroque plot.

Before leaving the *telenovela* it is worth enumerating the variety of threads which converge in the process of its reception. There is the ethical emphasis, characteristic, it has been argued, of popular aesthetics. Then there is the democratic world of the emotions, where everyone is capable of the same intensity and in this sense class distinctions disappear. The emotions provide motivations for plots based on the drama of recognition. The complicated plots require considerable prowess of memory, one of the response mechanisms which is exchanged in the shared experience of viewing. Finally, the episodic structure, drawn out over several months or more, generates an interplay of completion and distension. Each episode offers a promise of the kind of finality and completeness which is lacking in actual life, a sensation heightened by the fact that the viewer knows that some inevitable alteration will occur in the next episode. In these senses, it is an error to separate out the Manichean moral element as if it were the one controlling level.

We have already seen how the *folletín* passed into the *radionovela* and later the *telenovela*. The most widely read material in the contemporary context is the *fotonovela* (photoromance) and the *historieta* (comic), sometimes published in editions of more than two million a week. Like the *folletín*, this material corresponds to situations of fragmented reading time and limited literacy. However, its immediate affiliation, in style of imagery, is not with radio or television but with cinema. Cornelia Butler Flora distinguishes three main types of *fotonovela*: the *rosa* (pink), whose themes are of the middle-, upper-middle-class or old-fashioned variety, which offers Cinderella-type plots; the *suave* (soft), whose theme is middle- and upper-middle-class life; and the *roja* (red), distinguished by its violent subject matter, such as rape or incest. Throughout, however, a particular outlook tends to predominate: 'the individualization of problems and their solution is the overwhelming message presented'.[160] The suggestion, in other words, is that the demands of integration into a modern capitalist economy are being articulated through plots which nevertheless allow the reader the expected ingredients of the genre.[161]

Comics are less affected by the transnational culture industry (for example, Disney) than might be expected. In Mexico, for instance, some 80 per cent of production is national. One particular variety is the *libros semanales* (comic-strip novels) and these raise the question of how women negotiate the transition between traditional and modern structures. Unglamorous in comparison with the older types of escapist romantic fiction (such as the Corín Tellado novels), they are 'clearly intended for women who are integrated or about to be integrated into the work place', as Jean Franco argues; they 'require a different kind of modernization plot, one that cannot simply hold out the carrot of consumption'.[162] The process of modernization requires a readjustment of attitudes to the family, that nexus of controls of the present by the past.

Mexican postrevolutionary policy had encouraged the secularization of public life while leaving the traditional patriarchal family untouched and absorbing machismo into its national image. The Mexican family is thus an extremely complex institution, not only a source of considerable tensions, especially among the poor, but a source of support and daily communication that the state and its institutions cannot replace.[163]

The stories in the *novelas semanales* include an invitation to women to distance themselves from the traditionally male-dominated family: 'women are invited to see themselves as victims of a plot, the plot of old Mexico that has passed on the tradition of machismo and thus harmed them. If, instead of reading themselves into the plot as helpless victims, they turn their resentment against the older generation of men and separate themselves from this influence, they can expect to succeed.'[164]

Here is a summary of the plot of *Una mujer insatisfecha (An Unsatisfied Woman)*, an example dating from 1984:

the heroine is married to a boring and impotent businessman who believes in patriarchy and the traditional values of family life. Luisa is repelled by his puritanical attitude to marital relations and quarrels with her Italian mother-in-law, whose ideas on marriage are strictly traditional. She sets up her own consultancy as a designer and meets another man but refuses to enter into a relationship that promises to be as oppressive as the one with her husband. Back in her mother's home, she hangs up the telephone when her new lover calls, feeling 'free, happy and without ties'.[165]

Once again, as with the *telenovela*, the family emerges as a crucial mediator of reception. As far as we know, no one has yet written a comprehensive history of the family in Latin America.[166]

Another key effect of the modern urban environment is the disconnection of social classes and cultural strata. Increasingly, all social groups have at their disposal the same cultural repertory. As opposed to a minority being able to understand literature or art, now everyone is able to draw on a stock of recognitions which make up the ability to decode the media. Television series use an archive of allusions from film and television, and these are now part of a common culture in the same way that the great works of literature were previously.

The different repertories become mixed in such a way that it is no longer possible to be educated [*culto*] by knowing the great artistic works or to be popular because of being able to understand the meaning of the objects and messages generated by a more or less closed community [ethnic group, *barrio*, class]. Nowadays these collections are unstable, they renew their composition and their hierarchy as fashions change, they intersect all the time, and above all every user can make their own collection.[167]

This situation, the so-called postmodern, is important for present purposes because it prevents one from equating the deterritorialization of cultural practices with their degradation, and from proffering nostalgic returns to a time when membership of a social elite could be equated with some guardianship of culture (or vice versa). The latter attitude is in fact more typical in Western Europe than in Latin America, where the utopianization of rural authenticity has more symbolic power. The increasing migration of rural cultures and their retransmission through new urban-based channels mean that popular cannot mean purity nor the culture industry its loss. A different definition of the popular becomes necessary, in terms of the possibility of a counter-hegemony.

## Alternative Media

Alternative media represent a deliberate attempt to give a counter-hegemonic force to mass communication practices, by exploring the use of media technology outside the control of the culture industry. Alternative media embrace audiotape, radio, television and video, film, and newspapers. We will refer only to radio, but the issues that emerge have a bearing on the whole range of media. Certain characteristics facilitate the use of radio as a medium for popular reappropriation: relatively low cost, wide outreach, and the accessibility of recording technology. Rosa María Alfaro's account of the