Where is Latin American Culture? From the Location of Culture to the Ethics of Culture

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Abstract:

Shifts in global power dynamics, structures of resistance, and critical approaches to thinking through the present indicate that it is time to vigorously confront the ethical questions at the heart of Latin American Cultural Studies as a first step in our theories and practice. This essay argues that a turn to ethics, especially one that derives from a critique of neoliberal biopolitics, reveals a need to move from an emphasis on the location of culture to the ethics of culture. The essay begins by tracing features of this newest phase in Latin American Cultural Studies. Whether we mark its shift along with John Beverley after 9/11 or whether we trace the current moment to the new millennium, it is clear that some of the critical categories that previously shaped the field no longer obtain in an era of globalization, neoliberal capitalism, and shifting notions of sovereignty. I then consider the role that ethics can play in reformulating the debates over identity politics, cultural rights, and struggles for recognition and redistribution. The third section turns to the overdetermined nature of cultural location and asks why location persists in framing so much of the critical discourse about globalization and culture. Despite the fact that much of the local versus global debate has been problematized and discredited, it remains the case that geographical framing of cultural origins continues to be one of the key dynamics at play, even if those frames are understood to be hybrid, glocal, or transterritorial.

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Writing in 1993, Fred Jameson declared that cultural studies was constituted more by desire than by actual practice. That desire, he explained, had two realms: the first was to be politically relevant and the second was to have an impact on disciplinary knowledge (Jameson, 1993). Those twin gestures —to influence political life and to change the ways we think about it— have also been central to Latin American cultural studies. Considering it from the perspective of Latinamericanism, John Beverley (2011) puts it simply: "*Beyond our differences, we share a desire for cultural democratization and social justice*" (21). The trouble starts, though, when we consider the right ways to approach these questions. At times the debates among cultural studies scholars over how best to do the work of the field has overshadowed, if not overtaken, the work itself. Abril Trigo (2004) maps these developments in his piece on the "practices and polemics" of Latin American cultural studies in the 1990s, explaining that ideological disagreements and critical oppositions very nearly imploded the entire field (362).

These ideological battles have been especially intense since the 1990s brought postcolonial, poststructural, and deconstructive criticism into conversation with the more traditional left work of cultural studies. But as Paul Smith points out in his introduction to the edited volume *Renewing Cultural Studies* (2011), the field has also —always had— an ideology and ethos (1). What's of interest here is the fact that while much has been written about the ideologies of cultural studies, both Latin American and otherwise, less attention has focused on its ethics. There are reasons this has been so (some of which I will elaborate on below), but shifts in global power dynamics, structures of resistance, and critical approaches to thinking through the present indicate that it is time to vigorously confront the ethical questions at the heart of Latin American cultural studies as a first step in our theories and practice[1].

What I hope to show is that a turn to ethics, especially one that derives from a critique of neoliberal biopolitics, reveals a need to move from an emphasis on the location of culture to the ethics of culture. After a period of much-needed questioning of epistemic frameworks and of ideas often negatively associated with Enlightenment ideologies, we can note today a return to the discourses of justice, rights, remedies, and ethics, since these put the question of how best to achieve social transformation at the heart of critical work. Every critical po-

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1   Hermann Herlinghaus's recent book, *Violence without Guilt* (2009), is an example of an ethical turn in Latin American cultural studies.

sition connected with cultural studies has its own ethics, but the presence of ethical agendas was often subtended to other more visible markers of cultural advocacy such as those associated with identity categories. The problem is that when one advocates for identity politics without making the ethics of such a move apparent, the position eventually loses its ethical ground. To put it in stark terms, multiculturalism without the ethical push for recognition of the unjustly disenfranchised can lead to arguments about the need to protect neo-Nazi culture. Similarly, a defense of the "local" without an ethical argument about why such a defense is important for a just society and without an explanation of how one determines which local cultures to preserve can unwittingly lead to policies that justify the protection of US culture in free trade agreements. Epistemic and ontological claims (or more precisely anti-epistemic and anti-ontological claims) have been made over ethical ones despite the fact that those gestures carry their own implicit ethical imperatives. But, as I'll explain in more detail, the latency of these corollary ethical positions did more than hide them: in some cases it erased them, allowing them to be too easily coopted into reactionary practices that were all too eager to take advantage of an ethical void.

As George Yúdice (2004) explains, "*Cultural analysis necessarily entails taking a position even in those cases where the writer seeks objectivity or transcendence*" (38). In contrast to claims that position-taking leads to normativity, he suggests a Foucauldian version of ethics where what is sought is an ethical basis for practice. Following Yúdice I would add that the new era in biopolitics calls for a move beyond previous approaches to ethics that were centered on such notions as human autonomy and reason. The answer is neither normative nor liberal humanist, but located rather in an appreciation of the ways that life is valued, threatened, categorized, and regulated[2]. Ethical responses to neoliberal biopolitics seek not only remediation —the righting of wrongs, many of which are based in biopolitical racism— but also redistribution and just division of resources.

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2   For more on this see Amy Swiffen (2011).

I suspect that many of the core issues that shape Latin American cultural studies research will not necessarily shift radically as a result of placing ethics at the center of our work. Whether we come at the field from identity politics or from biopolitical ethics, we will still share a concern over the status of disenfranchised populations and over the ways that culture both contests and creates prejudice. Ethics does, though, change the way we approach these issues and the contexts within which we think of remedies. From this view an ethically oriented Latin American cultural studies would be shaped by two key sets of questions. First, what is the collective grievance that needs ethical solutions? And how do we balance the grievances of a particular group searching for justice against those of other groups that may have conflicting claims? As Nancy Fraser and Linda Martín Alcoff teach us, the sense of grievance and the search for justice is much more complex today as groups compete (Fraser, 2005 and Martín Alcoff, 2006). The second set of questions relates to the frameworks of justice. What is the geopolitical frame within which one can remedy a grievance? If the injustice is global, for instance, then a state-level remedy will not be able to fully address the crisis. In tandem is the idea of which critical framework best leads to just decisions since these are always taken in the context of asymmetrical power, prejudice, and an increased fragmentation of rights claims. Fraser explains that today there is a "*radical heterogeneity of moral balance*"—one which threatens to dilute the substance of justice by rendering it incommensurable with any shared common ground. The result is that the very idea of seeking justice can seem incoherent (Fraser, 2009:2-3). She suggests that the current moment has created questions about *what* counts as a bonafide matter of justice and *who* (as in which constituencies) are subjects of it (5).

These questions may seem more a matter of social philosophy than of cultural studies, begging the question of what role culture might play in such a project, but I would counter that such a connection is not simply ancillary to projects committed to social justice, but necessary. Nick Couldry (2011), describing the work of Raymond Williams points out the social justice platform of early cultural studies. He notes that *"(the) project of cultural studies for Williams was the idea that studying culture in the right way might contribute to a widening vision of democracy"* (9). "The right way", in this case, is the subtle code language for ethics. And of course the ethics are not limited only to how best to study culture, but also to how best to understand the role it plays in creating public perceptions of how we learn to value and disparage various forms of human life. As we consider the future of Latin American cultural studies my argument is that addressing the ethical force of the project leads to rethinking its

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location —both in terms of geographic scales and in terms of the places from which we structure our critique.

In what follows I begin by tracing features of this newest phase in Latin American cultural studies. Whether we mark its shift along with Beverley after 9/11 or whether we trace the current moment to the new millennium, it is clear that some of the critical categories that previously shaped the field no longer obtain in an era of globalization, neoliberal capitalism, and shifting notions of sovereignty[3]. I then consider the role that ethics can play in reformulating the debates over identity politics, cultural rights, and struggles for recognition and redistribution. The third section of my essay turns to the overdetermined nature of cultural location and asks why location persists in framing so much of the critical discourse about globalization and culture. Despite the fact that much of the local versus global debate has been problematized and discredited, it remains the case that geographical framing of cultural origins continues to be one of the key dynamics at play, even if those frames are understood to be hybrid, glocal, or transterritorial.

1.   A New Era in Latin American Cultural Studies

It is now possible to see a convergence of a series of core concepts that have shaped Latin American cultural studies. If its earlier moments were guided by three worlds theory, Cold War geopolitics, dependency theory, and a desire to assign value and transformative power to subaltern cultural forms, most of those influences are either exhausted or outdated. In the new era of Latin American cultural studies the structural concepts of the nation-state, state capitalism, and the role of the citizen all shift as a consequence of the combined force of neoliberal market capitalism, post-Westphalian geopolitics, globalization, and the commodification of both culture and the citizen.

In a certain sense all of the core concepts that governed the field have mutated. Take for example the idea of culture itself. If early cultural studies called for a revalorization of what was considered low or popular culture, that move is no

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3   Beverley describes the post 9/11 moment as post-neoliberal due to the wave of left governments that swept Latin American elections. Writing now in 2013 it seems that that prognosis may have been overly optimistic. For William I. Robinson, the anti-neoliberal rhetoric of many of these governments has not yielded much in terms of income redistribution: "What emerged was an elected progressive bloc in the region committed to mild redistributive programmes respectful of prevailing property relations and unwilling or simply unable to challenge the global capitalist order - a new, post-neo-liberal form of the national state tied to the larger institutional networks of global capitalism. In many Pink Tide countries there has been no significant change in the unequal distribution of income or wealth, and indeed, inequality may actually be increasing. Nor has there been any shift in basic property and class relations despite changes in political blocs, despite discourse favouring the popular classes, and despite mildly reformist or social welfare measures". Available in http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2011/09/2011913141540508756.html

longer needed. Couldry (2011) reminds us that Williams called for a defense of the "low" for political impact, but he points out that today "*after half a century of cultural de-differentiation, it would be hard to argue, even in Britain, that defending popular culture is itself a gesture with political potential*" (10). What's more, the idealization of cultural forms outside of the commodity chain —the popular, the subaltern, etc.— is equally exhausted as a productive tactic. Michael Denning (2011) explains that "with the generalization of the commodity form throughout symbolic production and daily life, the coordinates of culture are now marked by the reign of the commodity form" (137).

As culture changed, so too the citizen. This is why Néstor García Canclini calls for a better understanding of the ties between consumers and citizens since in today's market driven world consumption is a prerequisite for attaining the rights of the citizen. Even grass roots political movements work to interpellate their claims into the language of the market in order to render their agendas legible in a consumer driven political economy. And NGOs often mirror the very market institutions they seek to challenge, as was the case with OXFAM's ad campaign against the WTO[4]. As Yúdice explains, neoliberalism transforms the citizen and generates a new dimension of citizenship rights, especially the development of cultural citizenship (164-5). In this new era, according to Yúdice (2004), we find a cultural ethos "*that serves as a warrant for making claims*" (165). And the spaces for those claims move easily between the market and the public sphere. This means that cultural resources are political resources, a move that "*marks a departure from the individual-based tradition of citizenship rights, but one supported by the targeting of consumer publics*" (Yúdice, 2004:165). If earlier versions of cultural studies advocated for the collective over and against the commodified individual, the conflation between consumer groups and cultural collectivities challenges any proclivity to naïvely idealize the sanctity of the collectively disenfranchised.

But if the force of the market has overtaken many of the structural categories previously used to advocate for the democratizing and empowering gestures of cultural studies, this does not mean that pre-neoliberal struggles are no longer relevant. While the idiom of the field has to adapt, the inequities it addresses are as much in evidence, if not more so. Culture may be a resource and cultural rights may have been mainstreamed in political advocacy, but the groups these cultural products attach to are as precarious as ever. This is why a turn to the biopolitics of neoliberalism offers some useful perspective and critical tools.

4   See examples from the campaign here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9mgPEP8Hass.

Foucault (2003) reminds us that racism under neoliberalism emerges as a powerful weapon of social containment. He explains that race divides life into categories: "*It is a way of separating out the groups that exist within a population (…) This will allow power to treat that population as a mixture of races, or to be more accurate, to treat the species, to subdivide the species it controls, into subspecies, precisely, as races. That is the first function of racism: to fragment, to create caesuras within the biological continuum*" (254-55).

This is why culturally based political advocacy risks constructing the very same social divisions desired by neoliberal racist biopolitics. And it is now possible to see the connection between culture as commodity, diversity as institution, and culture as political position as not necessarily progressive politically. Some critics of the politics of consumption call for envisioning global citizenship as an antidote to the ways that state citizenship has been corrupted by commodification. But, as Yúdice (2004) points out, it is hard to see any pragmatic ways such movements can really mobilize to help the dispossessed in a global arena that still privileges the state as the source of individual rights (183). And yet, in a moment when culture is always, already part of the global market, it is hard to avoid the lure of seeking a globally based answer to the problems of social inequities. One solution, and one relevant for our field, is the notion that the choice is not between state level remedies or global ones. Instead, advocates for cultural rights and the rights of the culturally disenfranchised would do well to look to regional models. Yúdice and García Canclini, among others, have each put forward models that look at the potential for building culturally integrated regional federations.

Regional solutions respond to one key feature of Latin American culture that remains an ongoing problem: its weak status in the global market and at the political bargaining table. While the model for cultural imperialism may be far more complex than in the pre-neoliberal moment, by almost any measure —whether trade imbalance, cultural value, or cultural identity— Latin America continues to struggle with the legacies of colonial epistemes, economics, and power imbalances. Thus, when Denning signals the end of three worlds theory and the rise in the global era of cultural studies, this does not translate into the end of geopolitical structures that place certain nations and regions at a disadvantage. The difference today is that the structuring logic is not the Cold War and the United Nations but rather the G8 and the World Trade Organization. While the ways we deploy culture as a tool for political work may have changed and while we may be rethinking notions of the collective, the citizen, and biopolitics, the reality that Latin American cultural studies has

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had to look at both inequities within states and across them means that it will always confront multi-layered asymmetries of power and it will always need to seek to challenge them in more than one framework.

2.   Ethics and the Common Good

As I explained at the outset of this essay, Latin American cultural studies has been haunted by a reticence towards clearly postulating the ethics of the project. While this trend affected the field overall, it would be fair to say that it hit those working on Latin America with particular force. One of the reasons for this is the conflation between postcolonial critique, deconstruction, and subaltern studies as critical methods that played a major role in shaping Latinamericanist work in the 90s. The story of the interaction between these critical models is by now well known and elegantly mapped by both Trigo and Beverley so I won't rehearse it here, but I do want to draw out the features of this critical matrix as a way to further explain its impact on the place of ethical inquiry in cultural studies work.

I hesitate to invoke the scholar implicated by my paper title if only because any serious engagement with him will take me off task, but it is necessary to point out the role that Homi Bhabha's *Location of Culture* (2004) had on creating some of the ethical mess caused by overtly connecting a deconstructionist project with a postcolonial one. From the outset, Bhabha's work was about place. It was about thinking through the relationship between power, culture, identity, and resistance. But its overwhelming urge to destabilize every critical category meant that the "location" of culture was nowhere and that the third space was no more than a metaphor. As Bhabha worked to produce an image of culture and resistance that could escape confining structures, he offered ideas like "the beyond", the "liminal", and the "boundary". This relationship, as I'll describe in more detail below, had a deleterious effect on the ways that we think about the ties between place-based political struggles and the ethical grounds for its advocacy.

While Bhabha was not central *per se* to the work of the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group the contemporaneity of his work with that of the group and the shared use of deconstruction as a method signaled an overall affinity between the projects. That affinity emanated from a mutual belief that previous left models demanded rethinking. As Beverley explains it: "*the situation of the deconstructivist intervention in Latinamericanist discourse in both its*

first and second waves depends to some extent on the defeat of the historical Left in Latin America" (55). The result, though, was that these positions have also led to "*a renunciation of actual politics, which means that despite their claim to be 'transformative' they remain complicit with the existing order of things*" (Beverley, 2011:59).

They do more than involve a renunciation of politics, though; they involve a renunciation of ethics since they avoid any clear arguments over ideas like the common good, the public welfare, and the value of critique. The result is that just as neoliberal ideology leads the state to abandon its commitment to the public good —to parks, to schools, to museums, to welfare, to health, to citizens, and so on— the critical left effectively follows suit. And since the ethical stances of these left critiques were subtended, if not absent, the result was an overwhelming success for the right-wing view that public goods should not be regulated, supported, or controlled by the state.

But that's not all. Not only was there a convergence in the demands to abandon the public good from both the neoliberals and the deconstructivists, there was also a strange overlap in calls for diversity. Claims for cultural diversity, when unaccompanied by ethical calls for enfranchisement, equity, and redistribution of unjustly marginalized groups, dovetail perfectly with neoliberalism's desire for market diversity. Both neoliberals and cultural diversity advocates are delighted when consumers feel they need to own the latest in world music, eat the newest trend in international cuisine, and decorate their homes with products of cultural tourism. Beverley writes that "globalization and neoliberal political economy have done, more effectively than ourselves, the work of cultural democratization and dehierarchization" (21). But that is not quite right: they have diversified the market effectively and dehierarchized some of the reigning cultural values, but they have done so without a corollary ethical commitment to justice. Instead the ethics of neoliberal market mentalities has dominated the consumption of culture.

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This is why the rise in the consumption of salsa, which has now overtaken ketchup as the top selling condiment in the United States, does not indicate a rise in respect for Latinos[5]. Or why the increase in public visibility of people of color, most notably in the election of Barack Obama, has not translated into

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5   *The New York Times* reported the shift from ketchup to salsa here: http://www.nytimes.com/1992/03/11/garden/new-mainstream-hot-dogs-apple-pie-and-salsa.html. The recent immigration laws contrast the notion that US salsa consumption has led to greater acceptance of Latinos in the United States.

income equity across the racial divide[6]. Or why more diverse reading lists in college courses have not led to less people of color in prison[7]. On the contrary, despite the success of cultural diversity as a cultural project, these gains have not transformed social inequity in the era of neoliberal biopolitics. The facts are overwhelming, we have more ethnic conflict than at any other time since the turn of the 20th-century, we have greater income disparity across people of color, more anti-immigrant violence, and higher rates of incarceration of blacks and Latinos. Will Kymlicka worries at the increase of ethnocultural conflict concurrent with the rise in identity politics. Working with data on the global rise of cultural violence he contends that, "*Since the end of the Cold War, ethnocultural conflicts have become the most common source of political violence in the world, and they show no sign of abating*" (1995:1). And lest it seem that the Pink Tide has stemmed these inequities in the south, this is not so. Instead we are witnessing the almost complete mainstreaming of the neoliberal ethos. As William Robinson notes: "When we cut through the rhetoric (…) a number of these governments —such as the Socialists in Chile, Kirchner in Argentina, and Lula in Brazil— were able to push forward capitalist globalisation with greater credibility than their orthodox neo-liberal predecessors, and, in doing so, to deradicalise dissent and demobilise social movements"[8]. At best the left governments of Latin America are finding themselves in highly complex negotiations with global capital and with entrenched capitalist elites as they work to balance market interests with social welfare.

Beverley suggests a call to recover for the Left "the space of cultural dehierarchization ceded to the market and to neoliberalism" (23) but this can only be done by foregrounding the ethics of social justice and the biopolitical damage caused by the market. And one effective model for this is offered by Fraser's three-part call for redistribution, recognition, and representation. Each of these indicates a crucial realm for social advocacy: redistribution attempts to rectify economic disparity, recognition attends to the prejudice of cultural valorizations, and representation focuses on political inequity. Fraser explains that

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6   The election of a black president has not improved the income of African Americans (see http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0104552.html). CNN reports that in the recent economic recession, income inequity across race has widened severely (see http://money.cnn.com/2012/06/21/news/economy/wealth-gap-race/index.htm).

7   Despite the fact that almost every college in the United States has a diversity requirement for students, this has not translated into any better life conditions for people of color. Currently one in three African American men will spend some time in prison. And in a startling show of how this affects college campuses The Department of Education reports that 70% of all students arrested on campuses are either black or Latino (see http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/race/news/2012/03/13/11351/the-top-10-most-startling-facts-about-people-of-color-and-criminal-justice-in-the-united-states/).

8   http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2011/09/2011913141540508756.html

the political in this sense furnishes the stage on which struggles over distribution and recognition are played out. Establishing criteria of social belonging, and thus determining who counts as a member, the political dimension of justice specifies the reach of those other dimensions: it tells us who is included, and who excluded, from the circle of those entitled to a just distribution and reciprocal recognition (Fraser, 2005: 6).

It offers us a biopolitics of social justice.

And as Yúdice points out, culture plays a key role in these processes —one that is always ambivalent— since once culture is recognized as a resource it functions as a device of profit, of politics, and of identity formation. Yúdice explains that culture as resource signals a new episteme where culture becomes "*expedient as a resource for attaining an end*" (29). But culture's expediency signals its functional neglect of what is just or right. This means that it becomes incumbent on the practitioner of cultural studies to articulate some purpose or goal, some value or end, some interest or desire. Those ethical goals are not inherent to culture and they can never be. Cultural ethics become apparent when culture is mobilized unambiguously for political purposes aimed at redefining the inequities that govern human life. For Fraser such a move means making explicit a project of justice committed to rectifying maldistribution, misrecognition, and misrepresentation. Thinking through those three entwined realms of injustice and considering the role that culture might play in an ethical response to them is an obvious next step for any Latinamericanist cultural studies committed to social justice.

## 3.   Moving Beyond the Location of Culture

In a certain sense all cultural studies work has thought through the connection to culture in terms of a geography and a constituency. In most cases the "who" of culture was a disenfranchised group within a state. The culture that mattered was "where" the people that mattered lived. This framework takes on another layer for cultural studies scholars dealing with postcolonial societies in the world system. For those scholars there are at least two important spatial frames that have tended to shape the ways we think about culture and its potential role in transformative justice. The first of these is the global-local dynamic, which privileges the local, the authentic, the diverse over and against the homogenously global. The second of these is the intersection between Westphalian notions of state sovereignty and postcolonial notions of neo-imperialist geopolitics. What I want to suggest is that each of these frameworks offers

wholly inadequate structures within which to address the social grievances at the heart of politically motivated Latinamericanist cultural studies critique. This is so because these frameworks, even when nuanced and troubled, become overdetermined, reified categories of containment that eclipse the ethical dilemmas and political problems they are meant to address.

Scholars working in postcolonial cultural studies were all influenced at some level by the global-local framework for considering relations of culture and power. Almost all of the main theories of culture and globalization relied on the organizing idea that culture is either local, global, or some hybrid thereof (Robertson 1992; Scholte, 2000; Appadurai, 1996; Barber, 1996). And the distinction between global/unified and local/diverse was often drawn along party lines. As Yúdice (2004) puts it, "*conservatives and cultural leftists are locked in a reciprocal fantasy, with the right presumably seeking to reimpose a common culture and the left brokering the validation and enfranchisement of diversity*" (163). But, of course, that is not all, since the neoliberals are not opposed to diversity when it is of the market and when it leads to more varied patterns of consumption.

Despite the fact that the reality of local versus global does not necessarily demarcate oppositional political positions, leftist scholars working on cultural globalization have largely focused on the degree to which a cultural product embodies a local, minority culture, or reflects a dominant, globally powerful one. But if we think about this through the example of Latin American cinema, one of the most globally powerful forms of Latin American culture, we find that the global-local dynamic no longer works as a useful model for two reasons. First, if the goal of cultural studies is to question relations of power, then the geographically complex nature of filmmaking and film consuming reveals that to adequately study cultural domination and cultural resistance requires moving away from a focus on categories of identity and geographic markers. Media globalization scholarship generally argues that the local is threatened by globalization and in need of protection, whereas the global (code for US/Hollywood products) dominates in the world market, offering viewers little, if any, chance to consume culturally diverse films. This framework does not work, though, when we analyze commercially successful films that come from small national markets, like that of Brazil, and when we note that each major film production company has a subsidiary that markets itself as independent and that often co-produces films considered to be "international". The positions of power are muddy and the "location" of the film does not always explain its content or its stance on global neoliberalism.

My second reason for suggesting a retreat from the global-local paradigm is that almost all scholars of globalization and culture worry about the power structure of the global market and its implications for less commercially viable cultural forms. And yet rather than explicitly focus on globalization as a problem of access, equity, and power, they have framed their debates in terms of the local versus the global, understanding the local to stand in for the less powerful. But this corollary does not always hold. For instance, Mexico may be dominated by US media, but within Latin America it functions as a major cultural exporter, serving as a prime source of television and other media to a number of Latin American nations. Rather than the local-global paradigm, a better measure of resistance to or ratification of global cultural hegemony is the degree to which a given cultural product reinforces or challenges global relations of power. In this way, questions of power, access, and cultural rights are disentangled from an emphasis on identity struggles as antidotes to global inequities.
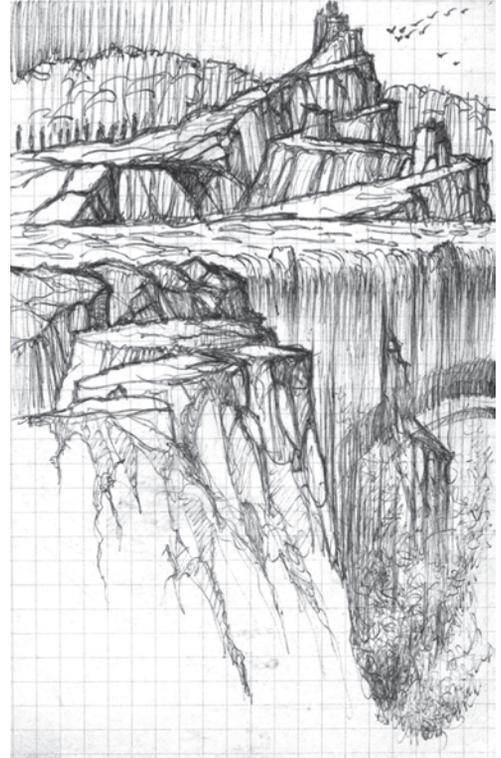
J. C. Calderón

As of yet, though, location still is the primary critical category used to think about culture and globalization. This practice yields two key observations. First, despite the fact that there is overwhelming evidence that the local and the global can no longer be understood in pre-globalization terms, that is in terms that allow them to remain as discrete oppositional categories, they still remain the operative categories that describe global tensions over globalization. In other words, the recognition that homogenizing forces and heterogenizing forces are equally at work in global society coupled with the fact that these forces can equally serve big business —as in the marketing of McDonalds— or can serve progressive politics —as in the global environmental movement— has not managed to keep cultural theory from continuing to focus on homogenization and heterogenization as the key sources of conflict in global society.

Second, despite the fact that most theories of cultural globalization are intensely concerned with the ways that cultures are changing and adapting to new forms of social interaction and despite the fact that many of these theories are concerned with social politics, most theorists have failed to seriously engage

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with the ways that identity construction does not necessarily challenge the capitalist ethos of big business. As described above, it is culture's role in the production of meaning and identity and its role as a commodity and source of profit that has most vexed discussions of its function. What I want to suggest is that the focus on identity as an ontological category rather than a biopolitical one and the separation of identity from economic practice has served as an alibi for avoiding consideration of how these two aspects of globalization coalesce around questions of power that are not always able to be mapped according to issues of cultural and especially national identity. A central part of my argument is the idea that the political possibilities for identity politics have changed since identities resist easy mappings and since the preservation of difference has served to maintain economic inequities rather than challenge them. At stake, then, is the urgent need to rethink identity categories along lines that can more meaningfully engage with the problems of globalization.

We have arrived at this impasse in part because of the ongoing influence of two earlier critical moments for discussing cultural globalization —the 60s and the 90s. The impact of these two moments on debates about cultural globalization deserves tracing out in detail —but, to briefly summarize— we have held on to the 60s idea that progressive politics requires resisting cultural imperialism except that the 60s era divisions between cultures no longer exist. To cultural imperialism and its resistance we have now added the 90s call for diversity as a good in itself without sufficient attention to the way that the 90s heralded a major change in the role of the state, the notion of sovereignty, and the relationship between culture and business. If we think of Arjun Appadurai's statement that "*(the) central problem of today's global interactions is the tension between cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization*" (49) or if we recall that Roland Robertson argued that the problem lies in understanding "*the ways in which homogenizing and heterogenizing tendencies are mutually implicative*" (27), we can begin to perceive how these critical interventions have effectively disconnected culture from politics and have unwittingly offered no real resistance to neoliberal practices that structure categories of life according to a biopolitics of disposability and value that are only sometimes linked to national cultures. It comes as no surprise when states like France or Mexico during negotiations for GATT or NAFTA attempt to protect their culture industries via arguments that culture is a service. The fact that these negotiations take place at the same time that these very states sell their cultural patrimony, such as museums, to private businesses proves that these debates are not about opening up spaces for meaningful cultural diversity; they are simply about protecting

corporate and national interests. But when cultural theorists, like Appadurai or Robertson, operate within the local-global, homogenous-heterogeneous identity-oriented paradigm, they unwittingly distract us from the real "*problem of today's global interactions*" (Appadurai, 1996:32).

Within the specific context of Latin America, the local-global paradigm has taken a variety of turns. And while a number of theorists have tried to problematize the stark position between global (as bad) and local (as good) or global (as strong) and local (as weak), the problem thus far has been in the overdetermined nature of the paradigm. Thus, when Walter Mignolo (2000) tries to create a more sophisticated assessment of the dynamic in *Local Histories/Global Designs*, his framing of the debate within the local/global dialectic means that the ethics of the project submits to a metaphor of geography. Similarly, García Canclini's (1990; 1995) work on hybridity may complicate the tension between local and global, but it still revolves around the idea that figuring out the origin of cultural markers is the important task in a moment when the local is on the verge of extinction. In the same vein work by Jesús Martín Barbero (1993) on mediation may reverse an obsession with the origin of culture in favor of thinking through its reception, but the result is still an overemphasis on the place of culture —even if it is a place of complex reception.

In response to these trends I would like to suggest that cultural globalization is best studied in terms of ratification of and resistance to global neoliberalism and its production of biopolitical categories rather than the ontologies of the local and the global. If we think about culture and globalization through a critical framework attentive to the ways that identities either support or challenge global power structures, we are then able to perceive wholly different lines of connection across communities. If we think this way, then films like Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Babel*, Alfonso Cuarón's *Children of Men*, and Guillermo del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth* —which were each directed by Mexicans outside of Mexico— become cultural products that can offer us a new model for thinking about how culture engages with globalization. Each of these films has participated in global economics at the same time that their content and their modes of delivery offer interesting challenges to the current ideologies of neoliberalism, militarization, and the global war on terror.

While the local-global dynamic is outdated, it is not the case that there should be no consideration of the place of culture. Instead, if we focus on the idea that the ethics of culture ranks primary, then it follows that its politics requires a venue. This returns us to the role of the state since it is the bargaining agent

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that signs trade agreements and it is the legislative unit that sets state policy. Beverley, too, suggests a rethinking of the state as a necessary next step in Latinamericanist work, but where we differ is in his focus on state level remedies and my interest in layering these within a post-Westphalian framework (Beverley, 2011:24). While a redefined and reinvigorated theory of the state is essential for any Latinamericanist left project today, a state-focused solution will not be able to account for the extra-national factors that contribute to inequity. Fraser argues that

> the idea that state-territoriality can serve as a proxy for social effectivity is no longer plausible. Under current conditions, one's chances to live a good life do not depend wholly on the internal political constitution of the territorial state in which one resides. Although the latter remains undeniably relevant, its effects are mediated by other structures, both extra- and non-territorial, whose impact is at least as significant (Fraser, 2005: 14).

The answer lies in returning to the biopolitical factors at work in structuring global inequity and human disposability. The state —especially if it is a Latin American state— does not encompass the territory in which these injustices begin and end. As Fraser explains, "*the structural causes of many injustices in the globalizing world*", including financial markets, "*offshore factories*", investment regimes, global media, cybertechnology, bioethics, global health, and the climate, are not confined to the territory of the nation state (Fraser, 2009:23-24). State borders often serve to divide members that share grievances, further frustrating any potential for them to be adequately represented by any political process. Such a redefined location for political action, though, should not conjure up images of an amorphous "multitude", but rather should frame a practical, layered view of the spaces within which biopolitical struggles must be fought and won.

This dynamic has always been a subtext to struggles for rights in Latin America. Cultural studies projects in and of the region have consistently noted that the disenfranchised within a nation are doubly mis-represented having no access to state remedies and at the losing end of their nation's status in the world hierarchy. Thus far though, these territorial dynamics have too often returned to a reified notion of the local as the solution to national and international assaults on life. If an ethical challenge to neoliberal biopolitics is the primary struggle, though, then the place in which it will be waged will be adjusted to the task, leading to a retreat from the over-emphasis on location as the primary concern of Latinamericanist critique. It has been the success of globalization, or neoliberalism, and of arguments for cultural diversity, that

now make it possible to see these frameworks as outdated and in need of adjustment. Fraser notes that, "*Just as globalization has made visible injustices of misframing, so transformative struggles against neo-liberal globalization are making visible the injustice of meta-political misrepresentation*" (Fraser, 2005:17).
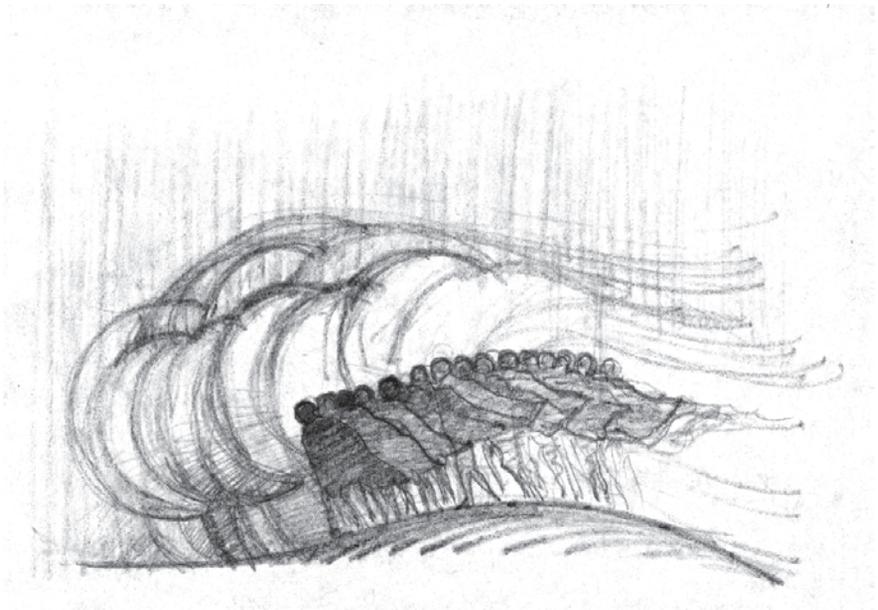
<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

Where is Latin American culture? By now, I hope to have suggested that on-tologically driven questions are not the best suited ones with which to engage the central issues facing our field. Instead our focus should be on questions of social justice and transformative politics that take place-based thinking as only one tool in the critical process. Couldry (2011) reminds us that our shared ethical concerns reveal the ongoing critical power of cultural studies work: "*If the force of Williams's original project lay in addressing a democratic deficit, and calling for collaborative work to remedy that deficit, then there is plenty of scope for a parallel project of cultural studies today*" (11). The scope of that deficit is everywhere apparent, and nowhere more so than in the ongoing struggles of the labor force and in the increasing precarity of population segments dispos-sessed by neoliberal capital[9]. For Couldry any meaningful project of cultural studies will have to "*address the broader question of how people experience the economy and society in which they work (or seek work), perhaps vote, and certainly consume*" (10-11). Imagining effective ways to map these struggles into already existing spheres of political action and to advocate for more appropriate legis-lative venues is but one of the key ways that we can sustain the relevance and vibrancy of Latin American cultural studies in the contemporary moment.

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9   For more on this see Andrew Ross (2010).

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