

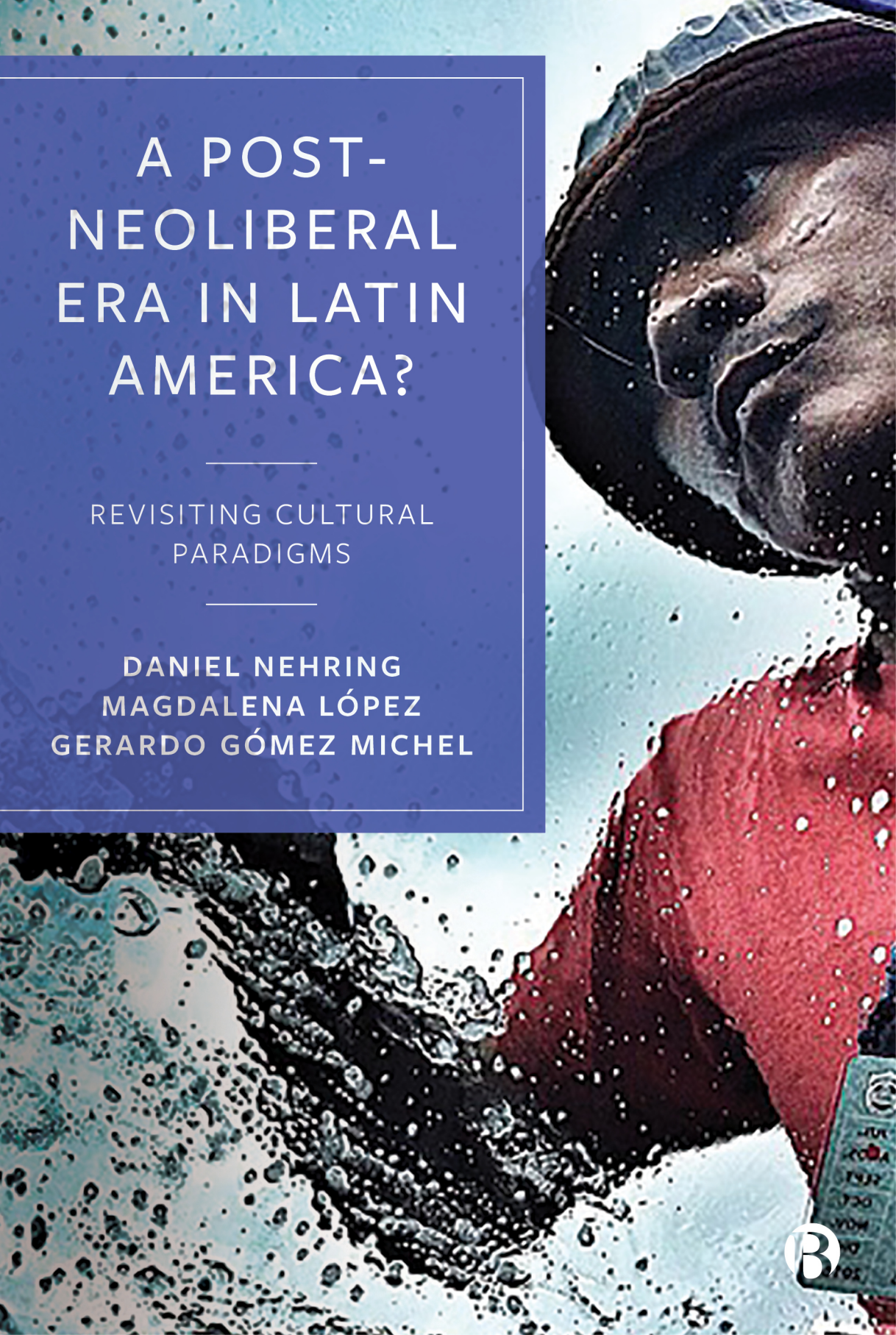
# A POST- NEOLIBERAL ERA IN LATIN AMERICA?

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REVISITING CULTURAL  
PARADIGMS

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DANIEL NEHRING  
MAGDALENA LÓPEZ  
GERARDO GÓMEZ MICHEL



# A POST-NEOLIBERAL ERA IN LATIN AMERICA?

Revisiting cultural paradigms

Edited by Daniel Nehring, Magdalena López  
and Gerardo Gómez Michel

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# **Introduction: Everyday Life in (Post-)Neoliberal Latin America**

*Daniel Nehring, Gerardo Gómez Michel and Magdalena López*

This book explores the cultural dynamics of neoliberalism and anti-neoliberal resistance in Latin America. While Latin American neoliberalisms and the region's transition—perhaps temporary—to post-neoliberalism have been extensively debated (Dávila, 2012; Flores-Macias, 2012; Goodale and Postero, 2013), extant research has largely focused on relevant political and socioeconomic processes. The cultural dynamics of neoliberalism, anti-neoliberalism and post-neoliberalism, in terms of the discursive construction of neoliberal common sense and the organization of everyday beliefs, norms, values, and systems of meaning, have received far less attention.

Together, the studies in this volume seek to address this gap. They pursue three objectives. First, they seek to explore how neoliberal narratives of self and social relationships have transformed everyday life in contemporary Latin America. Second, they examine how these narratives are being contested and supplanted by a diversity of alternative modes of experience and practices in a diversity of settings, in the context of anti-neoliberal and post-neoliberal sociopolitical programs. In this context, the studies in this book examine to what extent contemporary Latin America might in fact be described as post-neoliberal, given the crisis of political challenges to neoliberalism in societies such as Venezuela, Argentina and Bolivia. Third, the following chapters interrogate the discourses and cultural practices through which a societal consensus for the pursuit of neoliberal politics may be established, defended and contested.

## **Neoliberalism and post-neoliberalism in Latin America**

At the beginning of the 21st century, nations such as Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador and Venezuela have attracted international attention for their forceful critique of neoliberalism and their pursuit of alternative developmental models. Until the turn of the century, neoliberal theories had dominated political and economic life at the global level (Harvey, 2005; Davies, 2014). The end of the neoliberal cycle of the 1990s in much of the Latin American region has led to what John Beverley (2011) called a post-neoliberal moment. However, these post-neoliberal political programs have recently entered a period of crisis. The beginning of this crisis was marked by the early death of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela (2013), and it has continued with the electoral defeat of Argentina's left-wing government in 2015, the escalating economic and political crisis in Venezuela, and the removal from office of Dilma Rousseff in Brazil in mid-2016. The current social, economic and political unrest has been heavily intensified by the worldwide financial crisis that began in 2007–08 and its lasting repercussions. Even though Bolivia and Ecuador are politically relatively stable now, there are clear signs of public disillusionment with both country's governments and the political and ideological models they represent. The failures of these programs and ongoing conflicts among neoliberal and anti-neoliberal elites and social movements have by the mid-2010s resulted in growing social instability. This book examines cultural responses to this instability. It looks at a wide range of cultural forms, such as literature, underground cinema, street fairs and self-help books to explore how Latin Americans construct subjectivities, build communities and make meaning in their everyday lives during a profound crisis of the social. In this context, it is important to emphasize the role that neoliberal and post-neoliberal narratives of self and social relationships may come to play in popular culture and everyday lived experience in Latin America today.

David Harvey (2005) defines neoliberalism as:

in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade.

The global hegemony of neoliberalism has turned out to be extraordinarily durable even throughout the contemporary period

of profound socioeconomic crisis brought about by a far-reaching deregulation of financial markets (Mirowski, 2013). At the same time, it is essential to acknowledge that the global dominance of neoliberal theoretical dogma has resulted in a diversity of sometimes only loosely connected policy programs, forms of political practice, institutional dynamics, and cultural narratives. In Latin America, obvious examples of this diversity are the infamous experiments with neoliberal economic policy during the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet in Chile and the far-reaching privatization of public services in Mexico that took place from the 1990s onwards under conditions of formal democracy (Harvey, 2005). Roy et al (2007) accordingly describe neoliberalism as a shared mental model with potentially heterogeneous institutional consequences:

Neoliberalism as a shared mental model refers to the spread of market-oriented ideas across the globe that has been occurring over the past three decades. ... while these ideas have had an important effect in shaping global economic reform, this importance has varied greatly across countries and regions. Additionally, in cases where neoliberal ideas have been influential, they have not always been successful.

This diverse account of neoliberalism marks a central point. How have neoliberal narratives of self and social relationships transformed everyday life in contemporary Latin America?

How are these narratives being contested and supplanted by alternative modes of experience and practice in a diversity of sites and cultural fields? To what extent can contemporary Latin America be described as post-neoliberal? We intend to raise these questions through the case studies presented in this book.

In the field of Latin American studies, neoliberal hegemony was contested by decolonial theory in the late 20th century. Departing from what Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano (1992) called the “coloniality of power” in the early 1990s, this line of research has explored how modernity’s matrix of global power manifested itself throughout the Latin American social fabric and formulated cognitive alternatives. Some of the merits of decolonial theory lay in its concrete referentiality, and in its appreciation of forms of coexistence and indigenous organization, as reflected by the studies of Walsh (2013), Escobar (2008), Coronil (1997), Mignolo (2005), and Castro Gómez (2009). However, alternative forms of knowledge and constructions of local power could not be applied to larger cultural contexts within

the region, and they had little applicability to the political changes of the 21st century, when the interests of leftist governments began to distance themselves from the subaltern demands that initially fed them. The end of the neoliberal cycle in much of the region has led to the present time being identified as post-neoliberal.

However, contrary to what one might expect, secular power asymmetries remain alive. If there was and still is a critical, anti-neoliberal consensus, disagreements regarding possible alternatives have worsened as the left became increasingly hegemonic. Laclau's theory of populism (2005) came to displace decolonial theory in much of the academic debate over the past decade. Laclau provided a conceptual basis for sympathizers of pink tide governments who needed to escape from the negative stigma of the liberal tradition about populism. From this perspective, populism provides a discursive tool to think about changes in hegemony. However, to the extent that the pink tide did not entirely meet the social, political, economic and cultural expectations of countries like Bolivia, Ecuador, Venezuela and Nicaragua, debates about whether it is even desirable to capture the state have emerged. As Jon Beasley-Murray argued, Laclau "took the state for granted, and never questioned its power" (2010, p.69). In recent years we have witnessed the restoration of new exclusions to sustain the hegemony of the pink tide, while the definition of the "people" is becoming more restrictive.

What alternatives are there, then, for thinking about Latin American communities that are emancipatory? To exit the dichotomous choice between hegemony and counter-hegemony, and recognizing similar practices of power between the right and the left, scholars like George Yúdice (2004), Alberto Moreiras (2013) and Jon Beasley-Murray (2010) prefer to blur the boundaries of hegemony or dispense with concept of ideology at all. While Moreiras (2013) calls for an "infrapolitics" which is situated at the very edge of the political, prior to any subjectivity, Beasley-Murray (2010) argues that politics is not moved by ideology, but by habits and affects. Neither the people nor the subaltern, both Moreiras and Beasley-Murray propose the concept of "multitude" to talk about a collective that would function as a kind of autarchic social power. However, these latest proposals are not exempt from questioning either. There is a difficulty in linking post-hegemony and concepts like "multitude" and "infrapolitics" with concrete practices in Latin America. The contribution of these theories will be tested in the next decade.

## Neoliberalism, politics and culture

Recent events raise important questions about the dynamics of neoliberal and post-neoliberal politics in Latin America today, and about the future viability of political programs that seek to occupy post-neoliberal discursive spaces (Gago, 2017). In the most basic terms, these questions result from the current and ongoing crisis of post-neoliberal parties and political movements and the re-emergence of governments led by political parties and sectors of Latin America's elites that have been closely associated with neoliberal political projects. Important crisis moments include (but are not limited to): the escalation of social, economic and political conflict in Venezuela, following the death of Hugo Chávez in 2013; Mauricio Macri's rise to the presidency in Argentina in 2015; the electoral defeat of Kirchnerism; and the decline of the Workers' Party (*Partido dos Trabalhadores*, PT) in Brazil, manifest in acrimonious public debates about corruption and the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff in 2016. At the same time, political programs that can be described as both anti- and post-neoliberal continue to exert a strong influence in Latin America, particularly through the governments of Evo Morales in Bolivia and Lenín Moreno in Ecuador.

The complexity of questions about post-neoliberalism's presents and futures is thus visible across Latin America. In Venezuela, a nation that attempted perhaps Latin America's most radical program of societal reorganization, scholars have called into question the future of progressive societal development, given the recent and ongoing retrenchment of Chavism. Thus, in a recent analysis, Spanakos and Pantoulas argue:

The concern about survivals of neoliberalism among political activists within Bolivarianism has been accentuated since the death of Chávez. Many activists at the base level fear that the post-Chávez PSUV and government leadership are moving toward greater centralization and institutionalization—that they are returning politics to the technically trained bureaucrats and elected officials. This means a decided movement against the creative and more free-flowing politics of the street (post-neoliberalism as ontological project), and this has important implications for the legitimacy that key support groups accord the government. (Spanakos and Pantoulas 2017, p.49)



Spanakos and Pantoulas here draw attention to shifts in the relationship between government and political grassroots, and between state and citizen, that have recently emerged in Venezuela, and they suggest that Chavism's continued political legitimacy will reside in its ability to retain its links to the "free-flowing politics of the street." At the same time, Spanakos and Pantoulas also highlight a lack of clarity with regards to a long-term political vision, beyond anti-neoliberal resistance:

The legacy of one of Latin America's most strident anti-neoliberals, Hugo Chávez, provides a valuable opportunity to do that. Analyzing post-neoliberalism during and following the presidencies of Hugo Chávez confirms what careful observers have noted: that anti-neoliberal movements are clearer about what they oppose than about what they propose .... (Spanakos and Pantoulas, 2017, p.49)

Spanakos and Pantoulas's concerns are echoed in Elbert's equally recent analysis of post-neoliberal politics in Argentina. Drawing on empirical research on unionization and political solidarities in two factories in Greater Buenos Aires, Elbert finds:

There has been a growing debate about the characterization of political regimes that emerged in Latin America after the crisis of neoliberalism .... In Argentina, unemployment was drastically reduced, and the government allowed the comeback of national level collective bargaining. However, the Argentine state tolerated labor informality in order to foster capital investments. In this context, the present study provided evidence of union solidarity strategies toward informal workers. In a broader sense, it showed that workers were not passive victims of labor fragmentation policies but did have agency and were fundamental in developing strategies of resistance to the persistent inequality of capitalism in Argentina. (Elbert, 2017, p.141f)

Elbert's analysis again conceptualizes the viability of post-neoliberal political programs in terms of the relationship between government and political grassroots, and between state and citizen. Taking this argument further, Errejón and Guijarro emphasize the need for post-neoliberal movements to achieve a coherent sociopolitical vision, and to give this vision roots in a coherent social base. In this context, they highlight

the achievements and limitations of post-neoliberal government in Bolivia and Ecuador:

In this sense, the MAS's hegemony seems more comprehensive, capable of dismantling opponents and mediated by organized social sectors—largely campesinos, but also popular-urban and near-middle-class ones on which they rely and by which they expand. The hegemony of the PAIS movement seems subject to greater challenges. Although Correa's leadership remains uncontested in the electoral domain, it has not formed a social bloc around itself, and it is more dependent on the charismatic game that confronts, in addition, the traditional powers that came out of the regime crisis less weakened than in Bolivia and therefore retain a greater ability to resist. The flexibility to incorporate formerly alien issues and demands into its discourse thus seems to be a core feature of hegemony. It is this tension between openness-inclusion/closedness-exclusion that will mark the future directions of political processes in Bolivia and in Ecuador. (Errejón and Guijarro, 2016, p.50)

Errejón and Guijarro add to the conceptualization of post-neoliberalism in terms of the relationships between government and political grassroots and between state and citizen in so far as they draw attention to the long-term viability of relatively new and fiercely contested political movements. While MAS and PAIS have fared well and managed to retain power at the national level, recent developments in Argentina and Brazil have been more complicated. Thus, Grigera ties the past successes and subsequent decline of Lulism and Kirchnerism to short-term commodity booms, in line with older, historical populist movements in Latin America:

We have thus explained the emergence of Kirchnerism and Lulism as responses to the crisis of neoliberalism. We have opted to use the term 'Pink Tide neopopulism' to distinguish them from classical post-war populism, and 'neopopulism' from neoliberal populism. The differences between both were traced in the nature of the mobilized subject, the enabling condition, and the depth and type of the crisis. (Grigera, 2017, p.452)

Finally, explaining the dynamics of post-neoliberal politics in Latin America, it is important to account for the ability of neoliberal political programs and the constituencies that support them to creatively reconstitute themselves. Weinberg is mindful of this when she writes of the “thousand faces of neoliberalism” and Mauricio Macri’s ascent to the presidency in Argentina:

In the new scenario under Macri, we will have to observe the impact of this change on negotiations with the new government and on the ways in which possible new policies and strategies are developed for this sector. One of the main problems we have observed in these years has been the negative impact of institutional fragility on the development of medium- and long-term policy, with the constant creation and disappearance of state structures that we are witnessing nowadays. While remaining hopeful and supporting political activism, we might keep in mind the thousands of faces of neoliberalism. It seems that we are witnessing new arrangements and combinations of old structures. (Weinberg, 2017, p.165)

The permutations of neoliberalism at the level of national political and economic programs and its diffusion into everyday social relationships are further rendered visible by recent research in Mexico. Here, a range of studies has emphasized developmental trajectories and sociopolitical continuity between the stringent implementation of neoliberal structural adjustment programs from the 1980s onwards, the radical privatization of public goods that began in the 1990s, and the escalation of violence initiated in the mid-2000s through the disintegration of everyday social relationships and the growing power struggle between a weakened state and drug cartels seeking territorial and political control (Gaytán and Bowen, 2015; Laurell, 2015; Martin, 2005; Paley, 2015).

How, then, can we make sense of post-neoliberalism presents and futures across the region? A useful point of departure in answering this question lies in Verónica Gago’s observations as to the limits of progressive government in Latin America and the persistence of neoliberalism in new permutations:

The progressive governments’ perspective, which attempts to neutralize the practices from below while the governments present themselves as overcoming an era of popular resistance, closes of a more complex and realistic image of

neoliberalism. ... The progressive governments, despite their rhetoric, do not signal the end of neoliberalism. Further, they severely complicate the characterization of what is understood as postneoliberalism .... My thesis is that neoliberalism survives as a set of conditions that are manifested, from above, as the renewal of the extractive-dispossessive from in a new moment of financialized sovereignty and, from below, as a rationality that negotiates profits in this context of dispossession, in a contractual dynamic that mixes forms of servitude and conflict. (Gago, 2017, Introduction)

Gago's argument usefully returns us to an understanding of neoliberalism not just in terms of large-scale socioeconomic and political programs, but rather in terms of the rationality that organizes social interaction in everyday life. In this sense, and in line with sociology's longstanding lines of sociological enquiry (Adorno, 1991; Marcuse, 2002; Weber, 1992), in this book we approach neoliberalism as a cultural process. We adopt Alain Touraine's (2007) notion of cultural paradigms as a point of departure to develop our argument from an international comparative perspective. Following Touraine (2007), we see a cultural paradigm as a structure of symbolic coordinates with which subjects construct a horizon of expectations, an image of the surrounding world and especially an ethical language that facilitates self-identification in a social context.

This analytical standpoint is useful in three ways. First, it allows us to conceptualize neoliberalism, anti-neoliberalism and post-neoliberalism as cultural processes, in terms of the construction of distinctive sets of norms, values and beliefs that may be mutually exclusive and opposed but, at the same time, are implicated with each other in complex ways. Second, this perspective makes it possible to conceptualize post-neoliberalism as a long-term process, beyond short-term achievements in the electoral and economic arenas. In this sense, Weinberg concludes:

Is it possible to talk about a post-neoliberal era in Latin America? Is it possible to talk about post-neoliberalism in Argentina? Many writers have proposed, and I agree, that the "post-" prefix might be understood not as signifying the complete end of the prior phase and the starting of a new one but as part of an ongoing process. (Weinberg, 2017, p.153)

This conceptualization of post-neoliberalism as a long-term process is useful, third, in so far as it may render apparent developmental disjunctures at the political, economic, and cultural levels. In this context, specifically, it seems important to be attentive to neoliberalism's capacity to organize common sense and to define, therefore, everyday norms, beliefs, and values even in times of ostensible political defeat (Bröckling, 2007; Dardot and Laval, 2013). The deep roots and persistence of neoliberal common sense become apparent both in public discourse, in genres such as literature or film (Blanco-Cano, 2014; Nehring, 2009; Ruiz, 2014), and in the vocabularies of motive that individuals bring to everyday social interaction (Nehring and Kerrigan, 2018).

### **Outline of the book**

The chapters in this book explore different responses that have resulted from Latin American society's efforts at reconstructing sociocultural paradigms that might render a changed world intelligible. The book comprises a range of case studies that explore how cultural and artistic narratives, such as literature and cinema, construct alternative visions of reality that challenge hegemonic discourses, whether neoliberal or anti-neoliberal. In this sense, these case studies analyze how memory and silence are deployed in cultural narratives to overcome social trauma, imagine new forms of constructing community, and give voice to cultural and ethnic groups that have been marginalized for long periods of Latin America's postcolonial history. While there is a substantial body of scholarship on neoliberal politics and economics in the region, research on the cultural dimensions of neoliberalism and anti-neoliberal resistance has largely limited to small-scale case studies. There is a dearth of texts that explore how neoliberalism in its various localized manifestations has entailed cultural transformations across the region. By exploring neoliberalism as a set of interrelated cultural forms, we seek to address this gap. It is our aim to offer a transnational and comparative perspective on the ways in which neoliberalism has transformed public discourses of self and social relationships, popular cultures, and modes of everyday experience. To this end, this book combines contributions from a range of disciplinary perspectives in the humanities and social sciences. At the same time, it offers a broad cross-regional perspective by bringing together scholarship on Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay, Venezuela, and Latin Americans in the USA.

These case studies analyze how memory and silence are deployed in cultural narratives to overcome social trauma, imagine new forms of constructing community, and give voice to cultural and ethnic groups that have been marginalized for long periods of Latin America's postcolonial history. These case studies fall into four thematic parts: Subjectivities and Imaginaries of the Social; Popular Culture and Resistance; Memory and Society; and Religion and Popular Faith. The first four chapters (Contreras Natera, Nehring, López de la Roche, and Ponce Cordero) consider experiences and discourses of everyday subjectivity in the context of hegemonic, subaltern and emergent imaginaries of the social in Latin America. The following three chapters (Silva Ferraz, Padilla and Chaguaceda, and del Percio) examine modes of engagement, resistance and contestation of neoliberal politics through popular culture. Magdalena López and Gerardo Gómez Michel then explore how contemporary sociopolitical discourses and practices are grounded in culturally situated modes of historical memory. Finally, Emmanuel Alvarado and Jungwon Park draw attention to the central role that popular religious attitudes and practices may play in the everyday politics of neoliberalism and anti-neoliberalism in Latin America.

Chapter 2, by Miguel Ángel Contreras Natera, reviews how, from the final years of the 20th century onwards, radical changes in forms of political subject formation have taken shape in Venezuela. These changes have displaced the dominant forms of economic and political regulation of the past 50 years. He proposes that the emergence of political imaginaries rooted in social and political struggles has entailed the constructions of new forms of sociability, new cultural paradigms, and new modes of historical memory. The Venezuelan experience, in Contreras Natera's analysis, amounts to a turning point in the political development of the region. However, the far-reaching consequences of the global crisis that began in 2008 have entailed problematic consequences across Latin America. Tensions caused by fragmented practices of consumption, the extension of criminal networks, and the dislocation of social policy have had profoundly destabilizing consequences. In this sense, this chapter seeks to formulate a comprehensive analysis of the tensions, divisions and uncertainties in popular imaginaries of the social in Latin America. Its argument will focus on Argentina, Paraguay, and Venezuela, contrasting divergent modes of social change, from the moderate and progressive development of Argentine society to radical transformation of Venezuela. Against this backdrop, the chapter will explore alternative

modes of social development in the context of the widening social structural heterogeneity of Latin America.

Daniel Nehring, in Chapter 3, revises how the roles of psychological discourses play in contemporary popular cultures in Latin America, particularly since the neoliberal socioeconomic model has been imposed—and in many ways embraced—in the region. Nehring uses an analysis of the Mexican self-help publishing industry to examine the roles that psychological narratives may play in constructing, bolstering or subverting neoliberal subjectivities. In Mexico, self-help publishing involves, first, the translation and sale of texts written elsewhere, often in the USA, Europe and other Latin American nations, and, second, the sale of books by Mexican authors. Nehring argues that the Mexican self-help industry has a distinctively hybrid character, since a variety of interpretations of self-improvement compete for a readership. The author contrasts self-help texts that blend psychological concepts with Christian nationalism with secular accounts that rely on pseudo-scientific and philosophical arguments to formulate a moral vision of a successful life. Despite their narrative diversity, he proposes that neoliberal understandings of self, choice, and personal responsibility are pervasive in self-help texts. Nehring concludes that, given their popularity, these texts may be read as indicators of much broader public discourses that manifest in a variety of narrative forms and media—in political rhetoric and policy discourse, in news media, in TV talk shows, in online social media, in popular psychological texts, and so forth. Read this way, self-help books speak to the pervasiveness of neoliberal common sense in contemporary Mexican society.

In Chapter 4, López de la Roche first presents explanatory factors concerning Colombian divergence from the recent tendency in several Latin American countries toward 21st century models of political socialism or in conjunction with post-neoliberal development. He then explores the complex legacy of political culture bequeathed by the governments of Álvaro Uribe Velez (2002–06 and 2006–10), which involved an important military effort to combat the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (known by its Spanish acronym, FARC) but was not able to defeat them, although their debilitation constituted one of the factors that led to the negotiations in Havana. López de la Roche deals with redefinitions in the political culture and hegemonic communicative regime promoted by President Juan Manuel Santos (2010–14 and 2014–17), which favored promoting successful conclusion of the peace process with the FARC and the initiation of a new, complex and still uncertain phase of national reconciliation among Colombians, notwithstanding obstinate Uribistic loathing of

both the FARC and President Santos, and President Uribe's systematic and ideological delegitimization of the peace process. De la Roche also focuses on issues concerning the October 2, 2016 ratification plebiscite of the Havana Accords, the triumph of the rejectionists, the renegotiation of the Accords with representatives of the rejectionists by the government's negotiating team, the mobilization of the citizenry in defense of the Accords, and the ratification of the revised accord by the Congress at the Colon Theater. Finally, he outlines some of the challenges and possible alternatives for the country's political development during the post-Accord era.

In Chapter 5, Rafael Ponce Cordero examines the phenomenon of underground cinema industry growth in recent years in Ecuador. He reasons that the vigor around these productions relies on three key factors: first, its strong independence from the traditional and centralized film industry—the production is in most of the cases run by non-professional crews (from script writing and direction to acting and post-production). Second, these films have located their production and screenings away from the economic and political centers of Quito and Guayaquil, giving space to “the local world” to be represented, but also to be watched on the screen by the same people in their own space. This is due the use of mostly local, legal and pirate, distribution channels. Finally, as Ponce-Cordero analyses this movement, he proposes that what is behind the success of the new “Cine Bajo Tierra” is a vigorous response to, and sometimes a critique of, the disastrous consequences of the application of neoliberal policies in Ecuador. Boasting titles such as *Sicarios manabitas* (Hitmen from Manabí), *Doble trampa* (Double trap), *El regreso del llanero vengador* (The return of the avenging cowboy), *Drogas: el comienzo del fin* (Drugs: the beginning of the end), *Avaricia* (Greed), and *El ángel de los sicarios* (The hitmen's angel), these films depict scenarios of crude violence, poverty, and merciless surviving behaviors that have found an “appreciation” from their local viewers as a dialectical relationship of self-awareness between filmmakers and audiences who ultimately have suffered the same under neoliberal policies.

Next, Adilson Silva Ferraz (Chapter 6) shows how complex neoliberal dynamics are expressed in a case study: the displacement of the traditional Brazilian Caruaru Market, in the State of Pernambuco, from the center of the city to its periphery. This relocation will cause the homogenization of the traditional market with a global model that satisfies the increasingly competitive demands of the region. Although this market has been an emblem of the city and its cultural values, Ferraz's study shows that the relocation was supported by a good



part of local civil society in conjunction with the state authorities. This demonstrates that collective mechanisms of deliberation do not necessarily guarantee strategies of resistance against neoliberalism. Since neoliberalism is not only an economic theory but also a form of hegemonic subjectivity, different groups or communities can legitimize it through democratic mechanism. Without a change of consciousness, the author concludes, there can be no post-neoliberal momentum.

The chapter by Armando Chaguaceda and Alexei Padilla (Chapter 7) exposes the difficulties of creating public spheres through meetings, magazines, blogs, or talks in a country like Cuba, where the liberal concept of civil society has no place. The authors turn to the historical experience of other single-party socialist countries in Europe to compare the Cuban case. They expose the similarities between the Cuban constitution promulgated in 1976 and the one of the Soviet Union of 1936, which subordinated freedom of the press and of speech to the construction of socialism. Such limitations produce the precariousness, fragmentation and reduction of the various public spheres that have arisen in the Caribbean country under intermittent periods of opening and closing of governmental tolerance. The article highlights the singularity of the magazine *Espacio Laical* during the years 2008 to 2014 under the aegis of the Catholic Church. This publication was a form of public sphere that welcomed some ideological diversity to debate the economic reforms initiated by Raul Castro and the social problems of the island. However, its impact on Cuban civil society remains to be seen.

In line with decolonial theory, Enrique del Percio argues that there is a Latin American thought of indigenous, Creole or African background, different from what he calls the “European matrix” of philosophy. The difference lies in a conception of the world in terms of relations and not of essences. Under this relational logic, concepts such as fraternity, sovereignty, freedom and equality are redefined outside Western logic, without eluding the existence of conflicts. According to the author, this conception of the world is characteristic of Argentine politics; where popular principles have been misunderstood by the European and neoliberal matrix.

From a literary criticism approach, Magdalena López analyses the most paradigmatic case of the pink tide anti-neoliberal states: Venezuela, where after 17 years of *Chavismo* in power, much its recent literature has focused on representing the 1990s. This phenomenon responds to a dispute over memory regarding the meaning of the period before the ascent of *Chavismo*. It is a dispute that remains confined to national paradigms of political polarization. In this chapter, Magdalena López

proposes the concept of a Black Friday Generation to talk about juvenile subjectivities of the late 20th century that escape the nostalgic views embraced by both the official discourse and the Venezuelan lettered city. Through the analysis of the novels *Pim Pam Pum* (1998) by Alejandro Rebolledo, *La última vez* (2007) by Héctor Bujanda, *Bajo tierra* by Gustavo Valle (2009) and *Valle zamuro* (2011) by Camilo Pino, she shows a constitutive uprooting that allows for a notion of historical continuity between the neoliberalism of the 20th century and the Bolivarian Revolution of the 21st. Thus, López concludes, the perspective of the Black Friday Generation offers a vision of the nation different from binary ideological definitions that violently fracture the social fabric.

Indigenous peoples across the region are perhaps the most affected by neoliberal policies. In Chapter 10, Gómez Michel reviews some of the most severe points on the conflict between the Chilean state and the Mapuche nation, their challenges and responses to state repression, and how they project a possible future for their people within the Chilean nation. First, he resumes the origins of the eviction and consequent dispossession suffered by the Mapuche people after their military defeat of 1883. Going over the deepening of this problem during the Pinochet dictatorship, the author reaches the present time to review the Mapuche's struggles for the recovery of their ancestral territories, their direct confrontation with the extractive projects promoted by the Chilean state, and the neoliberal economic policies that, regardless of the ideological positioning of those in power, have been uninterrupted since the coup of September 11, 1973. The reaction to the protests allows him to explore the ubiquitous face of the neoliberal states: repression and social discipline through the exclusive use of force and the implementation of the emergency rule in the face of any threat (or protest) to the status quo. Gómez Michel analyzes some of the resistance strategies used by diverse Mapuche collectives and examines some literary expressions articulated by Mapuche poets, scholars and journalists that are re-imagining the Mapuche nation and their historical struggle to resist the disintegration of their identity through forced migration to urban centers.

In Chapter 11, Emmanuel Alvarado and Jenifer Skolnick examine the relationship between Christian religiosity and attitudes toward social safety-net policies over the past three decades among Latinos in the US. Over the past 30 years, the US has experienced notable reductions in social safety-net coverage, in the context of successive waves of neoliberal economic reforms. This has left members of the Latino and Black community particularly vulnerable to economic

cycles and downturns. Within this context, this chapter analyses the nexus between neoliberal political discourse, potent cultural narratives found within American Christianity and public support for social protection policies. Alvarado and Skolnick address the way in which Christian themes interact with the formation of public attitudes toward greater or lesser support for social safety-net policies among American Latinos. Looking at beliefs, attitudes and everyday experiences among American Latinos in the USA, it considers how religious beliefs may reinforce, contradict and challenge neoliberal policy programs that emphasize individual self-reliance and entrepreneurialism over public welfare provision. Lastly, the authors propose a broad framework through which to interpret their findings grounded on the existence and interaction of two counterpoised cultural narratives on social protection found within Latino American Christianity.

Jungwon Park tackles the controversial phenomenon of the religious devotion for ungodly figures in the final chapter. Popular religion is frequently considered as the remains of “pre-modern” times. To some it may seem anachronistic in an era of highly developed technologies and urban life styles. However, in Mexican society, new types of religious practices and the devotion to secular saints are associated with the drug world and the informal sector at the margins of urban life. Park affirms that these new forms of popular religion are a sign of a changing Mexican society that has been deeply impacted by globalization and neoliberal economics. His chapter explores this contemporary religious phenomenon by using Giorgio Agamben’s notion of “bare life”, underlining how the worship of Jesús Malverde, La Santa Muerte and other laic figures is gaining popularity among those who are abandoned by the mainstream and involved in the informal sector, where they remain exposed to danger and violence and abandoned by the law. Park argues that the role of new religious icons is to provide protection, identification and a sense of community without authorization by the Catholic Church, the traditional system of Christianity. Practitioners of these forms of popular religion may be accused of justifying illicit activities and reproducing the culture of fear and everyday violence. The author discusses these controversial practices to examine a social environment in which the informal sectors have been condemned while constructing their own culture, identity and ways of life.

This book rethinks the uses of neoliberalism and post-neoliberalism in analyzing the cultures and politics of contemporary Latin America. While these two concepts have well-established trajectories and are still current in academic debates, present political upheaval—the decline of Latin America’s ‘pink tide’, the rise of right-wing governments in

Argentina, Brazil, and elsewhere, and the regional impact of the right-wing political turn in the US and Europe—entails an urgent need to re-appraise their theoretical significance and limitations, and to reflect on new and alternative conceptual tools that could make sense of the far-reaching changes that Latin America faces today.

This book contributes to attendant debates by adopting a distinctly cultural focus, looking at the ways in which neoliberalism and alternative constructions of self and social relationships are grounded in cultural objects, cultural models, and everyday uses of these models and meanings. Departing from this cultural focus, the chapters in this volume move beyond established lines of debate in Latin American studies, which all too often have foregrounded the analysis of political and economic process over the need to be attentive to the locally grounded construction and contestation of common sense. It is here that the intended contribution of this volume lies.

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# **Imaginaries, Sociability and Cultural Patterns in the Post-Neoliberal Era: A Glance at the Argentinean, Paraguayan, and Venezuelan Experiences**

*Miguel Ángel Contreras Natera*

## **Introduction**

Toward the mid-1980s, the intersection between developmental *cepalismo* and the foreign debt crisis destabilized the political and cultural consensus regarding development in the region. This allowed the emergence of adjustment policies that leaned toward neoliberal measures as anti-crisis economic programs. Neoliberalism presented itself as a vast economic, political, and legislative redevelopment plan, providing the right answers when it came to the economic policies needed to target the systemic chaos in the region. The new bureaucrats managed to turn their structural adjustment program into a *new mantra* and into economic policies through the construction of meaning as a powerful offensive strategy. This was mainly due to the historic consequences that gave their creed a new epochal meaning. The introduction of disciplinary neoliberalism into governments brought about the austerity, docility, and repression of the emergent new age. It presented itself as a structural adjustment policy for democratic transitions, implying the closure, crisis, and death of developmentalism.



The breakdown of “development” as a tool for social integration, and the simultaneous neoliberal discourse based around economic growth becoming the new center, implied the strengthening of a market-based austerity model. The symbolic effectiveness of neoliberal discourse was achieved through links between think-tanks funded by transnational corporations and the mass media, and the conversion of important intellectual segments in the region. The political-spiritual union of neoliberalism as the discourse of the accumulation of wealth, and of postmodernism as the cultural logic of late capitalism managed to produce a radical mutation in the global system of culture. From this pattern, a variety of ways to act, think, and feel emerged, and they modulated subjectivities, territories, and institutions, producing *spiritual neoliberalization* (Contreras Natera, 2013, p.254).

Social imaginaries became fields of symbolic contention, negotiation, and interpellation where the subjects, individual and collective, re-signified their concepts of “happiness,” “dignity,” and “personhood” along consumerist lines. Subjects’ modes of reception included a negotiation field distinguished by the ambivalence, porosity, and mutation of the social imaginaries, themselves oscillating between adaptation and resistance. In topological terms, the discourse’s interpellation-reception-negotiation acted as a conflictive combination of cultural patterns, modes of sociability, and imaginaries. All of this produced molecular changes within a global process of implantation, union, and consolidation of this new awareness:

- a political-cultural offensive from mechanisms, practices, and discourses of transnational mediation;
- a production of a molecular mutation that expands, combines, and adjusts inside the middle class and popular sectors of the population; and finally,
- a “proliferation of the ways of life that reorganize the notions of freedom, calculation, and obedience, projecting a new rationality and collective affectivity.” (Gago, 2014, p.10)

The end of history as a *regressive utopia* represents the political and economic transition to the consolidation of the Washington Consensus’ structural reforms in the context of a profound symbolic unraveling in the continent.<sup>1</sup> This change coincided with the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the end of the Eastern European socialist regimes, the promotion of liberal-democratic regimes, the re-evaluation of the United Nations, and the strengthening of the United States’ unipolarity. The emergent political-economic landscape consolidated as an

interpellator of a subjectivity anchored in the social representations of *possessive individualism*. Popular uprisings in Caracas, Buenos Aires, and Quito in 1989 represented, along with the Zapatista movement in 1994 Chiapas and the election of Hugo Chávez Frías in 1998, the foundations for the confrontation against the neoliberal episteme. These popular uprisings showed the reactive, multitudinous, and localized forms of political conflict against the new spirit of capitalism, consolidating the emergence of modular subjectivities in social networks, and disrupting the historically capitalist system. In the words of Sidney Tarrow, it would seem as if

the foundation for a society of movement was being set, in which the disruptive, even catastrophic, conflicts would become quotidian to a large part of the population ... The world could be experimenting a new, far-reaching, mobilization ability in our time. (Tarrow, 1997, p.29)

This way, intensely popular movements began to dismantle the Washington Consensus, an act that pointed toward the critical construction of new intersubjective universes. This shift in the neoliberal agenda coincided with the development of transformative forces in the plurified relations that eroded the statehood of the Washington Consensus, strengthening popular subjectivity. The historic *novum* generated a “before” and “after” in the field of political-cultural forces that faced off against each other, freeing previously stagnant processes which surpassed the experiences of individuals and generations, connecting with the *long memory* as deposits of experiences grafted onto the strata of time. The dual crisis (of economics and legitimacy) of the neoliberal hegemony at the beginning of the 21st century followed the intense popular protests campaigning for isonomy that unfolded in the region at the beginning of the 1990s.

The symbolic split of neoliberal regulation mechanisms coincided with the activation of popular movements inscribed in the *long memory* of political-cultural processes of resistance against colonial-modern logos.<sup>2</sup> The idea of projecting new institutions into the imaginaries opened up the possibility for a creative force to emerge in Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, Honduras, and Paraguay, and to a lesser extent in Nicaragua, Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay. The debate was set for a National Constituent Assembly, which rolled back colonizing processes, going beyond demo-liberal premises and radicalizing the criticisms aimed at neoliberalism. At the start of the 21st century, an ascending economic cycle, coinciding with increasing prices of commodities,

allowed for the reevaluation of the state's role in political maneuvering of the region. At the same time, a creative process of social mobilizations started, as did changes in the repertoire of popular demonstrations, the revisiting of cultural practices embedded in the long memory, and a restructuring of political-cultural forces. In short, the configuration of an agenda antithetical to the neoliberal grammar helped to strengthen a *post-neoliberal epochal spirit* as a way to criticize, overcome, and generate an alternative to neoliberalism.

This chapter centers on a genealogical reconstruction of popular experiences in Argentina (moderate change), Paraguay (containment of change), and Venezuela (radicalization of change), social imaginaries, modes of sociability and cultural patterns, all in their variations, resemblances, and transformations. We know of the theoretical-methodological importance of these concepts for understanding the stability, expansion, or transformation of this historic totality in the global system. In the words of Cornelius Castoriadis, the social imaginary is sociohistorical magma, incessant and indeterminate creations that are embodied in institutions. "What we call reality and rationality are a product of it ... This action and that representation/verbalization are historically instituted." (Castoriadis, 2013, pp.12–13) Therefore, imaginaries as instituted norms intersect in their historicity by an instituting imaginary, within which a potential alterity is contained. A duality always exists: *the instituted*, a relative stabilization of a set of institutions, and *the instituting*, the dynamics that drive its transformations. Sociability as a spontaneous, ludic, and relational relationship not ascribed to material interests finds its form in the instituting, constantly proposing self-alterations. Sociability as a reciprocal action mediated by the common good is reconstituted in the solidarity of expansive community networks that are not mediated by the westernization of America. Likewise, imaginaries as intersubjective universes contain in their constituent form "structural patterns whose origins and nature" (Quijano, 1989, p.29) are plural, conflicting, and opposed. The long memory as critical anamnesis is opposed to the processes of ontological erasure established since the uncovering of America, and it is taken over by indigenous, peasant, and popular movements of the region.

### **Argentina: moderation politics**

Peronism in the 1960s and 1970s, with its ability to build unlimited chains of equivalence, allowed for the subversion of the principle of equivalence. The journey of the *descamisado* toward an organized

community implied an ideological movement's takeover, which tied the initial stages of the revolutionary process together. It was also a moment of institutionalization for the revolutionary process that was supposed to be completed at a third stage, as proposed by Juan Domingo Perón.<sup>3</sup> Both the repertoire and depth of social and economic policies put into place during the Peronista term built the necessary material base for the Argentinian populist's peculiar discourse (Boron, 2000, p.191). The coup d'état in 1955 transformed the debate on new revolutionary policies, contributing to turn Perón's long exile into a new form of populism<sup>4</sup> that signified a symbolic rupture with classical political-institutional forms. The massive emergence of two new characters from within Argentinian society builds a radically new *demos*: "Perón—the workers; and a literally unclassifiable situation in terms of political tradition" (Barciela, 2015, p.162). Retroactive foundation of this symbolic union establishes an identity inside the workers' subjectivation as Peronistas. Undoubtedly, the space for this policy was built on ethnic homogeneity, consequence of the indigenous population's extermination, which in the big urban centers allowed for a wide distribution and influence of Perón's statements. The division between the declaration's content and the action that took place allowed for a multiplicity of meanings to emerge, which established a symbolic wholeness, unifying the popular field around Perón's expected return.

The most contradictory meanings can be gathered together, as long as the subordination of all of them to the empty signifier is maintained ... this would be the extreme situation in which the love of the father is the only bond between brothers. (Laclau 2005, p.270)

The polysemic character, ambiguous and multiple, that resulted from the uncoupling between the action and content of Perón's declarations loses its symbolic effectiveness with his return to the presidency in 1973. Internal differences between various factions of Peronism expanded, producing an accelerated deinstitutionalization that intersected with the disruption of neoliberalism, culminating in the 1976 military coup d'état. Jorge Videla's dictatorship in Argentina constitutes, along with the de facto coups in Brazil, Peru, Chile, and Uruguay, an experience of systemic violence embedded in the instrumentation of a diagram of terror, anchored in the vanguard of *disciplinarian neoliberalism*. The instrumentalization of fear, repression, and exclusion as a political-cultural strategy became one of the main mechanisms for generating social discipline. The state of siege and the establishment of a curfew,

forced entry into people's homes and arrests, forced disappearances and kidnappings, all embodied the deepest fears of a political society. A culture of fear is produced, segmenting gathering spaces, fragmenting social conversations, and inoculating experiences with existential insecurity; both social retraction and resigned disenchantment emerge.

The official acknowledgment of the social and political consequences of forced disappearances "contributed in making authoritarianism and its political overcoming the decisive problem of the seventies" (Franco, 1998, p.122). The path from dictatorship to democracy implied strengthening the symbolic nuclei bound with a subjectivity centered on political stability. This *Schmittian* realism, which regarded the democratic pact as sovereign will, capable of ensuring civil peace, had as a central premise a normative consensus that could be summarized in the following formula: order arises out of power bound by rules. In the words of Norbert Lechner, "the goal of materializing a political system is undercut and even contradicted by the necessity to govern" (Lechner, 1990, p.32). This shift in perspective reconfigures the *transformation of society* to the demand for a *change in political power*. In the field of subjectivity, the conflict to recover their respective historical plotlines, fragmented because of the military dictatorship, refers to a field of representation where knowing one's self and being known became an essential objective of politics found in the democratic transition period. In the prologue to the *Nunca Más* report, Ernesto Sábato said

from justice, we should expect the definitive word, we cannot stay silent in the face of what we have heard, read and registered; everything which goes beyond that which could be considered criminal, achieving the shadowy category of "crimes against humanity". (Sábato, 1984, p.7)

The debate regarding past disputes and subjectivity, for memory and justice, for memory and politics, conflicts with the depoliticization strategies of the dictatorship's victims, integrating them to a neutral field of liberal rules and values. Particularly, the political-moral content of popular struggles begins to be recovered, where the singularity of the memories and the possibility to activate the past-present is inserted into the networks of relationships, groups, institutions, and cultures. The discussion on memory transforms into representations of unexplored possibilities and forbidden roads resulting from lived experiences (Jelin, 2002). This sign is inscribed into dilemmas of historic truth and faithfulness of memory as a field for political dispute. "The return of the past is not always a moment which frees memory,

but instead an advent, a capture of the present.” (Sarlo, 2006, p.9) Justice as collective experience and repair as subjective experience become central, anchoring points for the democratic transition. Paradoxically, as mundane sociability becomes dominant, the frailty present in the exchanges regarding the policies of fear remains and is introduced into cultural practices.

The ghostly specter of the military dictatorship, fear of public disorder, a First World country’s social imaginary, and access to differentiated forms of consumption constituted naturalized representations when faced against the symbolic violence of capital (Bloj, 2004, p.135). In the 1990s, stability as a significant articulator for a threatened order became consolidated when facing uncertainty and political instability. “Daily tasks acquire unusual meaning. ... To reestablish normality is to reestablish routines.” (Lechner 1990, p.95, p.98) The trek of a socially constructed subject built on the universalist political promises of an individual subject, branded by social disappointment and focused on political stability and consumption, represents the place where the neoliberal discourse knots itself symbolically. This subjective shift of the political-economic scene embeds itself in a double political-cultural movement. On one hand, it supposes the loss of the state’s central role as the warrantor of social rights and, on the other, it implies a reevaluation of the discourse found in a civil society. The solid neoliberal consensus in the party system that included Peronism gravitated toward the necessity to *consolidate political stability* in the same way as it contributed to the conformation of neoliberal common sense.

Menem’s government, as a shining example of neoliberal programming, managed to spread through the popular imaginaries the idea that the patient wait for the “trickle down” effect resultant from economic policies would have the expected result promised by the media. The visual proliferation of hunger, poverty, and pain contrasted with media framing, where “the fatal combination of devaluation, recession and inflation led to a desolate panorama, accentuated with the already dramatic hues of millions of lives” (Arfuch, 2008, p.101). The pluralization of spaces where pots and pans were *signs* of weariness, protest, and politicization coincided with the massive protest of the *piqueteros* and the unemployed, as well as the blocking of roads, along with a new repertoire of protests, interrupting neoliberalism’s symbolic density. Massive rejection of the neoliberal program, evidenced by the popular prominence of emergent neighborhood assemblies in December 2001, contrasts with the privatized and fragmentary character of the 1990s’ civil citizenship.

The conquest of public space as a symbolic space for confrontation, construction and creation of meaning made visible debates regarding common rights, associative and enterprising, that overflowed and infringed on civic liberal identities. The participatory transformation of the imaginary as an undifferentiated unit gives way when faced with “union in diversity” as the field for constructing collective policies. The ludic and festive spirit manifests in dynamic and changing modes of expression, fluctuating and active, spreading throughout the plurality of popular spaces. Inside the context of the assembly, the slogan “*que se vayan todos*” acquires a global stamp that immediately defines the subjective acts of popular movements. Efficiency in the public administration becomes essential in politics as a necessary condition for good government. Imposing itself as an idea-force, paying attention to cultural change became indispensable when building new forms of government.

The political legitimacy crisis was characterized by successive changes in government, repression, and political prosecution brought upon militants belonging to popular movements. The government and banking system’s collapse, as a civilization meta-tale, brought into view the profound epochal break of the neoliberal political-economic crisis. The growing tension between economic and social rights, which had been restricted because of the Washington Consensus program and the defenders of neoliberalism, volatilized the political environment. The confrontations found in the political sphere regarding democracy radicalized inside the neighborhood movements’ imaginaries with modular, assembly, and experimental forms in regard to the instituted liberal structures of political representation. Tensions in this political force field were provisionally solved during the elections of May 2003, where a radical variant of instituted imaginaries imposed itself as macro-policy. In this political-intellectual dispute, popular movements are expropriated from political protagonism, being circumscribed into the pre-political sphere.

Nestor Kirchner’s victory in the 2003 elections meant a double process of political normalization and economic restructuring. Undoubtedly inspired by an agonistic political model, his triumph emerged from the impossibility of eradicating antagonism, even as it established the construction of a new democratic order as a plausible objective. In other words, he made the immanent contradictions between political stability and economic reform strategically compatible, as a conflictual consensus. Coming out of the hegemonic, practical, and contingent character of all social order, society would be a product of practices that had as an objective the establishment of an order in a context

of contingencies. In the words of Chantal Mouffe, “an effective democracy demands a confrontation of democratic political positions ... it recognizes the constitutive character of social division, and the impossibility of a final reconciliation” (Mouffe 2014, p.26, p.33).

This paradigm shift meant the construction of a political consensus answering the need of government institutions to strengthen their abilities to face the challenges of poverty and inequality. The rupture of political legitimacy in 2001 managed to interrupt neoliberal symbolic influence in that it would inscribe itself into the continental critical sequence and challenge of the Washington Consensus. Its mutative capacity allowed combination, recreation, and reorganization with other social imaginaries, managing to adapt to political contestations, inscribing its symbolic persistence into the folds of state institutions, which were revitalized through the language of the numerous dissatisfactions of 2001. The conflicting duality of macropolitics as a discourse for the recuperation of sovereignty before the economic crisis, and the proliferation of new modes of work (slave, informal, clandestine, subversive) established a new paradigmatic situation.

The overlap in the diversity found in the modes of labor configures a fragmented, destabilized, and heterogeneous sociability. “This makes it possible to conceive the job market as a pluricultural group where mixed and hybrid forms coexist.” (Gago, 2014, p.32) In this context, post-neoliberalism would not mean overcoming the policies inspired by the Washington Consensus, but instead creating new forms of political and economic articulation of the transnational capital in the region. An essential trait of the popular economy developing in the capital city, structurally connected with globalization, is that it is indelibly branded by the migrant presence, as well as by the innovation of modes of production, circulation, and organization of its collective dynamics. The simultaneous nature of the informal and the underground, the legal and the illegal, in the transnational value chains combines both destabilization and high levels of economic expansion.

Even the massive unemployment rate contrasts with high levels of political organization and the public problematization of labor. The pluralization of informalization spaces, as spaces of intersection and crossing, as laboratories of collective construction, turns the informal experiences of big urban centers into places of new political and economic articulation. Presenting itself as new modes where the community, the family, and the individual weave rationalities, it is ambivalent in that it is “a new territory in which the new regimes of submission and new places of social innovation are seen” (Gago, 2014, p.34). Neoliberalism as a producer of radical mutations in subjectivity



survives in interlocking and growing informalization, with enterprising dynamics in a context of flexibilization and dispossession of rights. The dialectic between movement and insubordination, servitude and exploitation, expresses the complex polyphony of the economy, movements, and popular subjectivities in Argentina. The irony of this process is the persistence of deepening social exclusion, generalized violence, and the emergence of a criminal economy, among other things. But above all, we see the “intercrossing of vectors which coincide in their emergence as the double metamorphosis of social matters, and the crisis of political representation” (Biardeau, 2015, p.101).

### **Paraguay: contention politics**

The Triple Alliance War<sup>5</sup> consolidated a *field of exclusion*—in Roland Barthes’ sense—in the Paraguayan subjectivity that persists even now in its political-cultural performance<sup>6</sup> as a tendency toward *repetition*.<sup>7</sup> Expressed in its dramatic dimensions, the effects of the war set up subjective forms of relating, both among the elites as in the popular field. The *Guerra del Chaco*, the long military dictatorship of General Alfredo Stroessner, and the agreed upon transition to democracy in 1989 (Arditi 1993, p.161), strengthened the role of political violence as a central mechanism of political change. Historical facticity has configured an exclusive regime where both the large part of the social majority, as well as the ethnic, linguistic or cultural minorities,<sup>8</sup> lack real incidence in the construction of a democratic will. “More than a republic ... the form in which our institutional order functions is, in practice, that of an autocracy.” (Arditi and Rodríguez, 1987, p.23)

When transitioning toward democracy, the state is configured as a space of discord, where the client-based devices of traditional political parties are privileged as the means of constructing political consensus. Using this logic, the *coloradismo* operates as a patronage party that filters, selects, and places its political scene in essential places inside the state bureaucracy. Democratic demands confront institutional weakness, displacing the political debates toward new problems. In counterfactual terms, the emerging social movements overflowed by acting on their localities, building political subjectivations that counter the client-based, corporate, institutional framework. The liberalization of the economy, the announcement of a new constitution (1992), and the transition from a military government to a civil one (1993) define the characteristics of the shift toward democracy. The economic measures inspired by the Washington Consensus included: liberalization of the

exchange rate, internal costs, and the interest rate; tariff reductions; restructuring and privatization of public companies; suspension of credit; and a state-subsidized currency exchange.

The reciprocal interactions between economic adjustment, opening up politically, and long-postponed needs all allowed for the confluence of critical subjectivities as a consequence of the emergence of new forms of social and political organization. As society became more political, social mobilizations—of workers and peasants—increased. Social and cultural exclusion of subaltern subjectivities became more visible, along with the demands of inclusion and participation which countered neoliberal policies. “The first great peasant demonstration happened in Asunción, 1994, as did the first general strike to be held in more than 30 years. There were three additional strikes between 1994 and 1997.” (Quevedo, 2015, p.49)

The deepening social, economic, and political crisis, visible through the accentuation of inequality, the neoliberal economic model’s failure, and the corrosion of the client-based apparatus, coincided with the region’s epochal, post-neoliberal spirit. In June 2002, the peasant movement blocked roads off en-masse, demanding the repeal of laws that brought about the privatization of water, telecommunications, and train systems. This defense of common goods was aligned with historical struggles of peasant and popular organizations of different ideological orientations, all of which confronted oligarchical and neoliberal policies. Social mobilizations denounced the concentration and foreignization of lands,<sup>9</sup> dispossession of local knowledge, intensification of agro-export monoculture, loss of native seeds, rise of illnesses, and intoxication of both the communities and the territory. Above all, they mobilized because the expansion of the “agro-business in Paraguay promotes the uneven distribution of land, and impinges against the agricultural system of subsistence and cooperation of small producers” (Winer, 2015, p.195).

Through their collective action, peasant demands question the oligarchic state, embedding their struggles in the need for an integral agricultural reform. The paradox of the peasant efforts presents a fundamental division between social demands for access to the democratization of lands, and the conservative character of their political demands. “The political process isn’t represented as being linked to the social process, and their struggles aren’t represented as being political.” (Ortiz, 2014, p.77) The structural contradictions of the land monopoly, irregular foreign occupation, smallholder peasants, who were impoverished as a *residual* effect of the oligarchic state, are all maintained by the decoupling between the social and economic

spheres, and the policies of peasant organizations (Fogel, 1998, p.197). Fights, mobilizations, and the building of alternative subjectivities become more radical, consolidating the post neoliberal spirit found at the beginning of the century.

Fernando Lugo's candidacy held the promise of political change, which crystallized the desires, dreams, and imagination of a society repressed by the state. These political forces translated into the historic election, asserting that

it could be the final blow to the oligarchic Paraguayan State, pointing to its imminent collapse, in a critical situation that is reminiscent of March 2, 1860, in which a country in ruins was reborn, as the Phoenix rises from the ashes. (Ortiz, 2014, p.148)

Lugo's election meant the fall of the *Partido Colorado*, the first peaceful alternative in power, and the emergence of a middle-left government. President Fernando Lugo,<sup>10</sup> along with the *Teko Porã* plan, managed to implement a series of policies that attempted to revert inequality by means of a social pact centered on redistribution policies. The renegotiation of the *Itaiput* Treaty started with Lula da Silva's government in Brazil,<sup>11</sup> aiming to favor Paraguayan interest. Above all, it attempted to set in motion policies of global reform, which meant confronting the factional oligarchic power in the National Congress.

Internal divisions, interests pitted against each other, and political renegotiations became unavoidable obstacles for the *Alianza Patriótica Para el Cambio*, and for a public administration that reproduced in its governing logic the oligarchic state's client-based co-optation of mobilized actors. The parliamentary coup d'état carried out on June 22, 2012, against Lugo's government managed to translate oligarchic interests into a political-mediatic offensive, aligning its political questioning with the Curuguay peasant massacre. President Lugo, "by not undertaking decisive action to solve the agrarian problem favored the tension that supported it" (Ortiz, 2014, p.178). The Curuguay massacre as a political event condenses in its gory facticity the *colonial-modern dispossession* that installed itself as the way of being for the Paraguayan oligarchy. Policies of death, silence, and impunity that emerge from the massacre are faced with the previously postponed necessity for democratization of the popular subjectivity and, above all, with the desires of *transhistorical justice*, where movements are inscribed by the long memory. The Curuguay massacre has the indelible sign of a return to policies of terror<sup>12</sup> as *intermittent collusion* of force and fear in

the programmed demobilization of society. “Irrefutable proof: deaths and urns that legitimize Cartes’ government.” (Soto and Carbone, 2015, p.289)

Tensions in the internal struggles of the oligarchy ran high as conflicts linked to the transnational economic project erupted between landowner patrimonialism and other emergent factions. The conflict works its way up to the legislative power where, through the practice of *orekuete*,<sup>13</sup> the landowner oligarchy found an effective symbolic and historical political cohesion. This way, two objectives that are incommensurable among each other become consolidated: on one hand, President Lugo’s political trial revalidates mechanisms for the *patrimonialista* faction; and, on the other hand, these mechanisms, by promoting skepticism, make room for social representations of neoliberal antipolitics. Thus, the oligarchy managed to secure its interests, *interrupting* the timid agrarian reforms set in motion by the Lugo administration. The democratic demand’s chain of equivalence cracked, gravitating toward more atomized, de-ideologized, and client-like participation. The transition from *redemptive messianism* (Lugo) to *corporate bonapartism* (Cartes) would define the essential characteristics of Paraguay’s neoliberal restoration.

President Horacio Cartes, with his previous *Acuerdo Por Paraguay*,<sup>14</sup> quickly allowed for a neoliberal restoration by approving militarization laws. The Armed Forces were given powers not bound by legislative control, laws of fiscal responsibility or the private-public alliance (APP/PPA). This allowed for the privatization of common property, as well as the limiting of public and fiscal spending, creating a favorable environment for foreign investment and a new political program called *Un Nuevo Rumbo*. Debates regarding social issues<sup>15</sup> became aligned along with the post-liberal integration policies of popular sectors, to circuits of accumulation of wealth through consumption. In other words, the policy seeking to lower poverty opts to reduce shift policies, looking to increase the labor supply (unstable labor) instead of favoring consumption in popular sectors. This project contradicts the oligarchy’s *patrimonialista* factions by opening up national markets to big capital. First, Cartismo’s *Nuevo Rumbo* establishes a new diagram of political alliances with traditional oligarchic sectors,<sup>16</sup> centering its new architecture on enterprise instead of the state. Second, it unfolds a collection of mechanisms that damage traditional client-based devices used by the *patrimonialista* faction. Lastly, the integration of a transnational economic project that goes against the landowner oligarchy’s interests opens up new political horizons of confrontation for the political subjectivity of popular movements. The consolidation

of new methods of oppression of the territories, along with the deepening of agro-business, acts as a platform for the transnational capital of global domination.

### **Venezuela: politics of radicalization**

In Venezuela, “development” as an imaginary of social and cultural integration, represented through the different variants of the modernizing discourse, was the guiding and legitimizing force for policies in the 20th century. Despite limited achievements and constant failures, there was a general belief that the country had progressed gradually toward that objective since the reestablishment of democracy in 1959. The *Pacto de Punto Fijo*,<sup>17</sup> as a political-institutional arrangement which intertwined foundational agreements on wealth, labor, and political parties, became the legitimizing mechanism used by political-economic actors. Above all, as the compromise settled on the appropriation of income from the state’s extraordinary oil revenue, it solidified *rentist bonapartism*. Representative democracy, another name for the state’s authoritarian regime; political parties, the mediators of political representation; the state itself, a *promoter* of economic development processes and distributor of the oil revenue: all of these have been found in the country’s modernizing discourse since then.

Venezuela advanced gradually but constantly toward modernity until the 1980s, when “the awareness of the necessity to introduce changes on the management of the development process, and even its objectives” (Gómez Calcaño and López Maya, 1990, p.53) spread through the political system. The exhaustion of the developmental model was manifested in the “collapse of the formula that had guaranteed the modern economy and political life: a vast oil income distributed through an enormous central State, and strong political parties to pay clients with and satisfy demands” (Levine, 2001, p.12). In global terms, a crisis, which undermined the fundamental pillars of a system that had guided the discourse on economic, social, military and political action, was expressed through “economic recession, paralysis, political stagnation, and growing protests” (Levine, 2001, p.14). Toward the end of the 1980s, the need for a profound reorientation of the economy became increasingly evident. To this end, the *Gran Viraje*’s politics, instrumented during Carlos Andrés Pérez’ second term, entailed strengthening a vast program of privatization, price release, and labor flexibilization, which corresponded with the symbolic construction of the market as a new center of gravity for economic policy.

The instrumentalization of neoliberal policies meant a radical shift in forms of regulation for the state-society relationship that had dominated for the previous 30 years. The 1989 Caracazo as a *limit-event* represented a profound break in the “development” imaginary, shook the Venezuelan society to its core and “was the first of the social fractures that signaled the end of the social pact, foreshadowing the turn towards the left” (Beasley-Murray, 2010, pp.260–61). This uncertainty configured the political system as an *empty place*, and formed the conflict’s constituent tension. The disruption of an emerging protest cycle, promoting social solidarity as counterfactual sociability to the representation of individualism, induced political innovation along the system’s margins. Sociopolitical conventions instrumented by the *Pacto de Punto Fijo* that had acquired a naturalized character began to break down, shaping a plurality of modes of interaction in general, and establishing new roads for social and political action. In a way, the logic of de-naturalization of the social was pierced by what Jacques Rancière called the *equality effect*.

For the country’s political crisis, the 1990s meant a sharpening of the conflictive as the social became more deeply politicized and the split in Venezuela’s institutionalized forms of politics deepened further. Front and center of a profoundly dislocated and fragmented stage, with a popular interpellation discourse that captured the latent anti-oligarchic and anti-imperialist feelings of subaltern imaginers, Chávez triumphed in the 1998 national elections. The interpenetration between radical and historical struggles and a present of renewed hope built new nets of political subjectivation in a carnivalized and celebratory environment. Simultaneous to the multiform display of popular mobilizations, President Hugo Chávez Frías’ figure is built as an evanescent mediator<sup>18</sup> in the sense expounded on by Frederi Jameson. As a negative trope that reorganizes our perception, and in a scandalous procedure of negative rewriting, Chávez transforms into a *catalytic agent*. His figure’s semantic elaboration as a nodal field condenses, stops, and sets the accumulation of floating signifiers, and builds him up to be the only efficient agent among the horde of barbarians. The mimesis built between Chávez and barbarism, between the horde and popular mobilizations, between noise and disorder, settles and naturalizes a nostalgic semantic around a *Threatened Venezuela*, threatened by the imminent chaos, destruction, and conflict that Chavismo represents.

This happens in moments where the social and political rallies for or against Chávez become intrinsic in the multiple spaces of discussion, mobilization, and confrontation of quotidian Venezuelan politics. The conflicting imaginaries produced an emotional environment,

the vibrations of which were felt in the surface of social and political phenomena, in what Appadurai (1996) calls a *community of feelings*. Profound aggressiveness of *the political* rested against the affective contagion of shared feelings, participation in imagining and feeling in a joint way, as a social and cultural group. Conflictive and mutual incomprehension between manifestations and divergent social expressions reflected the tension between antagonistic projects that had imaginaries incommensurable among themselves. Either way, in the imaginaries' designation, nodes critical for the understanding of transformative cultural processes could be perceived. The knotting between the *instituted* as a reactive force and the *instituting* as a force of transformation for the contemporary topography of Venezuelan politics represented a turn that nominated a profound paradox between a *Hobbesian moment* as a place of order and a *Machiavellian moment* as a place of strategic conflict in the field of imaginaries.

The insurgent imaginaries (*Chavismo*) were contraposed to a restoration logic that had a dynamic, and changing, fluctuating, and active forms of expression, where public spaces get reevaluated as *areas of joy, transgression, and revolt*. Massive popular events marked the place where this new regime of political truth was being disputed: streets, public squares and spaces, among others, gained new symbolic meaning, allowing the emergence of a *popular universalism* which achieved a *symbolic split* with the neoliberal regulatory devices. The coup d'état of April 2002, the oil sabotage strike in 2002–03, and the recall referendum of August 2004 become nodal points of the political mobilization in a force field crisscrossed by the confrontations of divergent imaginaries. The symbolic density of these events grants new meaning to popular mobilizations, intensifying the enthusiasm of insurgent imaginaries and clearing new paths of action. Chávez as a symbol of transformation became the popular mobilizations' object, which traced new epochal destinies, radicalizing the political-ideological contents of insurgent imaginaries. The creative self-alteration process of these movements strengthened through their collective action at the same time as they reinforced Chávez' leadership. Toward the end of 2004, framed by the end of the First Encounter of Intellectuals and Artists in Defense of Humanity celebrated in Caracas, President Hugo Chávez Frías declared “we have to retake the study of socialist ideas. Socialism, its authentic thesis, its original thesis. Revise mistakes, revise successes, refocus and take the path we have to take” (Chávez Frías, 2006, pp.306–07).

In 2006, with the electoral proposal to set *Socialismo del Siglo XXI* in motion, Chávez triumphed in the elections, producing a new transformative gestalt, founded in the simultaneous need to

build socialism and the communal state as new critical agencies for the Bolivarian Revolution. Toward the end of 2006, the process of constructing the only socialist party started with a government proposal titled “*Los Cinco Motores*” (The Five Motors), which included a constitutional reform. The conjunction of both proposals configured a technocratic sign by strengthening the corporative tendencies of popular participation that had formed partly due to Chávez’ criticism of the previous political system. In this extraordinary context of centralization, the appeal to the popular became a supplement of the constituted powers as it utilized itself as a rhetorical inscription of the government’s action. The constituted power supplanted the constituting one as the forces of emergent corporate order traced insurmountable limits of a popular subject-turned-object. The government corporatism’s removal of the *General Intellect* of popular movements’ transformational value became the most challenging political consequence moving forward. The centripetal and congressional process that opened in 1998 started to have an inverse centrifugal effect. The autonomy of corporative and bureaucratic interests produces distance in regard to utopic energies and historical solidarities of popular movements. This distance expands in the same measure as the people, as much a source of sovereignty and legitimacy, are perceived not as a protagonist subject, but as an object susceptible of organization.

In a way, Chavismo, by expanding, deepening, and radicalizing the contents of democracy in the region, became a specter that, to paraphrase Marx, tormented the liberal groundwork of the colonial-modern logos. Acquiring a statute of indecibility, “in this sense, chavismo reflects the ambivalence of the *specter metaphor*, sometimes working as a companion to democracy, but in occasion also becomes its antagonist” (Arditi 2009, p.157). The impulse that had begun on a theoretical, programmatic, cultural and political plane began to have serious flaws in terms of programs, strategies, and normative horizons. President Hugo Chávez Frías’ health became the fundamental political event at the end of 2012 and beginning of 2013. His death on March 5, 2013 triggered a multiplicity of events that turned the *interpretation of his legacy* into an *object of political-cultural dispute* for the internal workings of Chavismo. The triumph of Nicolas Maduro (the chancellor in Chávez’ government) in the March 2013 presidential election by a small margin meant an intensification of political conflict as it opened a space for electoral competition. This event *fractured* the force field’s homogeneity, transforming the stability, order, and the differences that had organized the political conflict in Venezuela since the Caracazo. The figure of Chávez as a center of gravity that polarized, organized,



and unified imaginaries exerted a global magnetism that strained the dynamic intersection of conflicting imaginaries.

This vector field's fracturing pointed toward the exacerbation, confrontation and dissemination of *political violence* in a context of intensification of the economic, social and political crisis, configuring a *nebulous distribution* of the imaginaries. The force field's constitutive tension became re-signified in new social and political circumstances, where the precarious nature of the links displaced the center of gravity between the instituting and the instituted by deepening the manifestations of economic crisis. Social and political violence became the *leitmotif* of daily life amid the economic indicators of rising inflation, scarcity of essential products<sup>19</sup> disseminated as issues into the totality of Venezuelan society. At this point, Venezuelan society is confronted with the negation of its historical existence when the designation of its citizen conflict points toward the parable of the two cities. In metaphoric terms, the city possessed by war is opposed to the plural city of repetitive time of social practices, a matter that directs us toward the constitutive heterogeneity of society. The colonial-modern *visibility regime* negates its constitutional fracture, sensible as it closed the cultural and class conflict, appealing to natural law as a mechanism for naturalized construction of racialized and hierarchized identities (Contreras Natera 2014, p.28).

The sensible order that partially sutured society opened the profound wounds of *stasis*, conducting negation as a dialectic between the same and the Other, pointed toward the annihilation of the enemy, following the famous *Schmittian* distinction. Political violence traverses the crisis of the political representation modes in its double manifestation: on one hand, as an undermining of democracy's procedural mechanisms with the deepening of the State's deinstitutionalization; and on the other, as absence of a shared national project by means of the emergence of an extreme confrontation of existential negation. The violent confrontation that defines Venezuela's everyday political present is between an imaginary that points toward the reestablishment of neoliberal grammar, in all its colonial appellation to the United States' modernity, radically contraposed to an insurgent imaginary that becomes inscribed into the recovery of the long memory's historical debt. The instituted and the instituting face off against each other in changing, dynamic, and contradictory historical circumstances in regard to the political architecture of antagonism, which lays bare the difference in the privileges of voice and word. It rigorously distinguishes between those who possess the logos (patricians) as those who recognize the just, the beautiful, and the good; and the talkative beings (plebeians),

who are without qualities, identifying themselves instead with the noise, tumultuousness, and transgression (Rancière, 1996, p.31).

Society is then presented as a composite social body; social divisions are the disease of this organism against whom we must fight—the enemy being Chavismo, a carcinogenic institution that must be exterminated to recover the ailing social body's health. The gestures of separation, classification, and cleansing are used to evidence the deterioration of health, the dangerous contagion of the political body with an unprecedented symbolic load. Only exaggerating the differences of the inside and the outside is the appearance of a *coming order* created. Chavismo becomes a doubly evil object, worthy of reproach, first for crossing the line, and second for threatening society. The identity standing between contamination, purification, and security establishes the political propaedeutic of existential confrontation in Venezuela. The main issue in the dramatic political debate is the geopolitical, strategic, and continental character of its political, social and economic consequences, as much as they are inscribed in an antagonism that, in their constitutive germ of existential negation, can turn into a breaking off from the democratic order.

### **By way of conclusion**

The persistence of political-cultural tensions at the beginning of the century, the return to the neoliberal agenda as an anti-crisis program, and the absence of alternative programs to the systemic crisis manifested strongly in the economic, political and social consequences of the mortgage bubble's explosion of 2008. The semantics of the crisis' return displaces the debate from the political to the economical, installing in its central position of political action the contents of global technocracy, written in a neoliberal tone. And above all, imposing itself as a political-economic diagnostic in that it reinstates the critique of the state as a producer of waste, inflation, and inefficiency, comparing the logic of the market with its axiology of efficiency, productivity, and performance. The state becomes the fundamental interface, as capital depends on the legal-institutional framework, the socio-spatial and work conditions for the process of accumulation of wealth in its double dimension of appropriation: as relative or absolute surplus. Apparent de-territorialization linked to financial globalization represents just one dimension of the complex socio-spatial process on a global scale. "The perpetual change that is produced in capitalist modes of production guarantee that the requirements, definitions of qualifications, systems

of authority, division of labor, etc., are never stable for long periods of time.” (Harvey, 2007, p.127)

The attempts to conjure, domesticate, and normalize the region’s processes of change become a subtext for the reaction of neoliberal nostalgia. The emergence of deinstitutionalization, the split of regional alliances, and the deepening of economic, political, and social crises meant a symbolic break with the transformative assumptions of the political turn toward the left in the region. Toward the end of the century, the regional cartography was characterized by the simultaneous nature of the progressive decline of the *cepalista* industrializing paradigm and the emergence of structural adjustment policies anchored in the Washington Consensus. Globally, the consolidation of deindustrialization and refocusing processes, combined with the dependent transformations of commercial, financial, and productive international structures, has driven a pattern of accumulation of wealth centered on the exporting of commodities and importing of industrial goods. This is a return to the structural conditions of the 1950s. The profound transformations of historical capitalism that are leading toward systemic stochastic confrontations (hegemony, recentering, and systemic change), accelerate the processes of economic, political and social crisis of a region in a scheme of dependent transformation.

The decadence of US hegemony, with its new perfectionist politics (in the Trump era), together with the decisive emergence of China, in the restructuring of international commerce points toward systemic confrontation, affect the construction of commercial, productive, and political alliances in the region. In the words of Elmar Altvater, “the economical mechanisms won’t be enough to maintain inequality and, in consequence, they must be complemented with political or even military coercion. Rich nations are getting prepared for that situation with new military strategies and expanded security concepts” (2012, p.253). Undoubtedly, the transformations of the imaginaries were signified by the dialectic between the instituting as a transformational moment, and the instituted as a reactive moment in its point of inflection. But also, in their interpolations, negotiations and receptions, they indicate the persistence of neoliberal assumptions as social ontologies in middle- and lower-class sectors; this demonstrates the perseverance of the forms of *possessive sociabilities* anchored in the mercantile representations of neoliberalism. The media-based offensive anchored in the expansion “of a way of life, mythical and demobilized, for the professional and intellectual middle class, highly remunerated, ideologically and politically conservative, of a renewed promotional, internationalist and individualist culture” (Contreras

Natera, 2015, p.22) has continued to have a fundamental and constant presence in the political-cultural debate. Epochal censoring points toward the contradiction on a global level with uncertain regional consequences and, above all, the restructuring of loyalty, compromises, and challenges of popular imaginaries in a context of simultaneous political pugaciousness and systemic destabilization.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Carlos Andrés Pérez' election in Venezuela, Carlos Menem's in Argentina, and the post-Stronist transition in Paraguay, which allowed for a political liberalization process, become inscribed into this phase of destruction of the social fabric and the stability of the economic adjustment coded in the neoliberal key. Reforms to political systems meant eliminating critical, plural, and democratic parliamentary discussion, as well as simultaneously reinforcing executive power.
- <sup>2</sup> "If the logos (being) is an imperial instrument of colonization, one of the urgent tasks which we must achieve is becoming decolonized (getting rid of) the colonial-modern logos ... The affinity between the eurocentral humanist project and the imperialist one shows the persistence of the scientific, cultural and spiritual theater of operations that began in 1492, and which hasn't yet ended its effective time of action." (Contreras Natera, 2014, pp.342–3) The colonial-modern logos represents the programmatic continuity between colonialism and modernism in forms of being, representation, and thought of the elites endogenous to the regions.
- <sup>3</sup> The Chamber of Commerce's 1944 speech specifies that Argentina must prepare for a third stage. Above all, "to prevent the masses which have obtained necessary and logical social justice to go any further in their pretensions, the first remedy is the organization of these masses, so that, forming responsible organisms, logical and rational, well-run, which won't produce injustice, because the common sense of the organic masses ends up imposing itself over the exaggerated pretensions of some men. This would be insurance, the organization of the masses. The State would then organize the reinsurance, which is the necessary authority that, when in place, no one can step outside it, because the statal entity has an instrument that, if necessary, will set things straight and let them run their rightful course if necessary. This is the integral solution put forth by the state at this time as a solution to the social problems. It's been said, gentlemen, that I'm an enemy of capital; if you look at what I've just said, you wouldn't find a more, let's say, staunch defender than me, because I know that the defense of businessmen, industry, and merchants, is the same as the defense of the State."
- <sup>4</sup> Populism is "the synthetic antagonist set of popular interpellations which face off against the bloc in power" (Barciela, 2015, p.154). It is the principle of articulation in its relational complexity that unifies popular identity in an equivalence chain. "Populism is not, therefore, an expression of ideological delay of a previously-dominated class, but, on the contrary, an expression of the moment in which the articulatory power of this class hegemonically imposes itself over the rest of society." (Laclau, 1980, p. 30)
- <sup>5</sup> "Paraguay, since its birth as a republic at the beginning of the 19th century (1811), went through dictatorships, a genocidal war, and a period of oligarchic democracy until finally reaching, in the mid-twentieth century, one of the longest and cruelest authoritarian regimes in American history: the dictatorship of Alfredo Stroessner."

(Ortiz, 2014, p.10) Paraguay's economic uniqueness in the 19th century cemented a state model of public expansion and investment, the absence of foreign debt, and economic autonomy. Paraguay's national industry, anchored in fluvial and railroad transportation, had the most cutting-edge technology in the region. With Bartolome Mitre's victory in Argentina in 1861, strategies were set in motion to produce the military conflict that would eventually destroy Paraguay. The War of the Triple Alliance (1864–70) caused the death of 90% of the male population, territorial devastation, and dispossession of public lands by the Anglo-Argentinian and Anglo-Brazilian elites. "A pattern of plundering and inequality imposed itself after the war, the Paraguayan State gave out immense tracts of land at laughable prices to English, Argentinian, Brazilian, American, French, and, to a lesser degree, Paraguayan businessmen." (Guereña and Rojas Villagra, 2016, p.11)

- 6 Popular imaginaries in Paraguay show the persistence of the colonial-modern logos as an instituted form of sociability, and simultaneously, it recreates spaces of opposition and resistance from critical interstices in an instituting sense, with the re-appropriation of the long memory reproducing consuetudinary relationships of reciprocity and autonomy in the popular, peasant, and indigenous field.
- 7 The profound *mnemonic footprints* of these events are, in the traces of subjectivity, testimony of a tendency toward repetition, where imaginaries looking to reclaim different representations of the past cross. On one hand, official celebratory representations that *selectively* mystify the past, and on the other, the ways of being Paraguayan that highlight the static, immutable and hopeless as *ontologized*. In terms developed by Sigmund Freud, through the compulsion toward repetition, the subject reproduces sequences, actions, ideas, thoughts, and memories that generated suffering, retaining its painful character. "Lacan observes that unconscious repetition is never repetition in its usual meaning of identical reproduction: repetition is the movement that sustains the search for an object, always located beyond this or that particular thing, and therefore, *always out of reach*." (Roudinesco and Plon, 1998, p.922)
- 8 In Paraguay, dynamic relationships between Spanish and Guaraní, which are cemented on a pyramid-like organizational structure anchored on the processes of colonization, allow us to understand the random transmission of Guaraní, supported by the immense vitality of the communities for which it is the mother tongue.
- 9 For an author such as José Carlos Rodríguez, it is unacceptable to call a society in which 60% of the population lives in cities and half of the rural population doesn't work in agriculture or livestock farming "agrarian" (Rodríguez, 2015, p.144). This facticity implies historicizing the *community of feelings* shaped since colonial times until the present to understand nomological patterns which form the basis of the colonial-modern logos in Paraguay. A social structure persists in its recursivity, unequal and anchored as it is in the consolidation of colonial-modern relationships, favoring the interests of the landowner oligarchy. Social relationships are constructed over this *original trauma*, based on recreating the patronage relationships present in the Paraguayan state. During the Stronist dictatorship, great tracts of land were spuriously handed out to those loyal to the regime, without this transaction being revised during the democratic transition to *landowner dispossession*. "During the Stronist regime, mechanisms for popular participation in resolving all the different topics which make up the national problematic have, by definition, been absent: the dictatorship confiscated the rights of Paraguayan citizens until 1989, the year of its fall." (Ortiz, 2014, p.102) Political resistance to the popular field's colonial-

modern logos introduce difficulties into the construction of the democratic demands equivalential chains.

- <sup>10</sup> The Frente Guasu as a political platform includes a variety of left-leaning and progressive political parties, such as Tekojoja, Frente Amplio, Partido Revolucionario Febrista, and Pais Solidario, among others.
- <sup>11</sup> None of the six formally renegotiated points were endorsed by the Brazilian congress, even though most of its members were supporters of President Lula Da Silva.
- <sup>12</sup> “The *Chokokue* report (assembled for the Coordination of Human Rights of Paraguay, *Codehupuy* in 2007 and updated in 2014) investigated and certified 115 cases, proving that in none of them did the Paraguayan State fulfill its obligations of investigating and sanctioning those responsible.” (Soto and Carbone, 2015, p.293)
- <sup>13</sup> This practice implies a radicalization of the *ore* scheme, which consists of the express intentionality of those who “make up part of a system of relationships inside a closed circle, of excluding the others and creating favorable conditions only for those that are part of the group.” (Juste, 2015, p.98)
- <sup>14</sup> Commonly known as the *Azulgrana* Pact.
- <sup>15</sup> “Today, without a doubt, there is a systematic plan of attack against landless peasants which supports soy landowners in their determination to have peasant-less fields. Indigenous settlements are also victims of the agro-export, soy monoculture model, as their ancestral lands are being deforested.” (Zambrano, 2015, pp.195–6)
- <sup>16</sup> The naming of Chancellor Eladio Olaizaga (high Stronist bureaucrat) is irrefutable proof of the upward direction taken when building bridges by the factions within Paraguayan oligarchy.
- <sup>17</sup> The Pacto de Punto Fijo, agreed on October 31, 1958, constitutes the most important agreement between the political, economic, and military elites, as it represents the compromise of the main parties at that moment, AD, COPEI and URD, to back whoever was elected, and conform around the victor in a coalition government. The rules of the game and the basic political agreements of the pact crystallized in the Constitution of 1961 (Levine, 2001, p.10).
- <sup>18</sup> An evanescent mediator is a catalytic agent that allows for the energy exchange between two terms that would otherwise be excluded among themselves. In any case, it functions as an agent of change and social transformation, only to be forgotten once this change has ratified the reality of the institutions involved. This concept, of Weberian inspiration (Weber, 2008, p.126), contests that “social change is relatively undecidable: it postulates the intervention in a series (social tradition) of an event by another series (religious and political) that is completely different, in which the resurgence of the charismatic or prophetic figure provokes a mix in the traditional situation and allows the formation of a totally new situation in its place” (Jameson, 2004, p.187).
- <sup>19</sup> The explanations for the economic crisis oscillate between economic sabotage, used recurrently by the government as causal explanation, and the failure of the economic model, emerging from sectors of the political opposition. The debate regarding the rentist character of the current economy, along with the discussion of the socialist-inspired economic development model becomes one of the political agenda’s fundamental themes. The reappearance of neoliberal phraseology such as adjustment, privatization, and competitiveness emerges as a response to the economic crisis, revealed as *post-liberalism* as it deepens the global crisis of historic capitalism.

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# **Making Neoliberal Selves: Popular Psychology in Contemporary Mexico**

*Daniel Nehring*

This chapter looks at narratives of personal development in self-help books in contemporary Mexico. In so doing, it explores the sociocultural significance of the ‘happiness industry’ that has come to play an outsized role in contemporary life. Across much of the world, from East Asia to the Americas, counseling sessions, personal development workshops, newspaper advice columns, self-help books, life advice apps for smartphones and a range of other media teach individuals how to be happy, how to be successful, how to make money, how to be happy, how to find love, how to get married, how to get divorced, and so forth (Watters, 2010; Nehring et al, 2016). The success of this happiness industry reflects to the extent to which psychotherapeutic narratives of the self and interpersonal relationships have seeped into everyday life and come to define moral visions of what a ‘good life’ might mean. This popularization of therapeutic narratives is closely bound up with the success of neoliberal political projects around the world, in so far as it tends to reinforce neoliberalism’s emphasis on individual autonomy, choice and competition as basic principles of social interaction (Rimke, 2000; Gershon, 2011). In Mexico, popular psychology has likewise enjoyed considerable success over at least the past two decades, and its recipes for personal development have come to play a significant role in public life (Nehring, 2009a, 2009b).

This chapter has two objectives. First, it seeks to explore the proliferation of popular psychological narratives in contemporary

Mexico. Its second aim is to examine the ways in which these narratives may reinforce or contest neoliberal discourses of the self and social relationships. To address these objectives, the chapter focuses on self-help books. Self-help books are didactic texts that offer their readers life advice on a range of issues, including work and professional development, marriage and family life, health and wellbeing, and spiritual concerns. Self-help books have a long history across the Western world, including Hispanic societies, which dates back at least to the manual of conduct and moral treatises of the 18th century (Secord, 2003; Mur Effing, 2009; Nehring et al, 2016). They set out, typically at considerable length, a moral grammar of personal conduct with regard to a specific reality of everyday life. The term moral grammar refers to a particular set of norms, values and beliefs about the nature of social life and the relationship between individual and society (Nehring and Kerrigan, 2018). The moral grammars of self-help books are typically situated within broader cultural narratives. Thus, for example, the life advice books of the American pastor Joel Osteen (such as Osteen, 2011) draw on the ethical framework of certain strands of Evangelical Protestantism in the USA, while the treatises of Mexican writer Don Miguel Ruiz (for example, Ruiz, 2011) purport to recover ancient Toltec wisdom to enhance readers' spiritual wellbeing. In other words, self-help books may be read as indicators of dominant and alternative public moral discourses. This is, to a large extent, where the sociological significance of these texts lies, and this is how this chapter will approach them.

The following analysis of self-help books excludes questions about consumption, readership and the ways in which readers may or may not use these books to orient their everyday conduct. Rather, it is interested in what a very widely circulating form of popular literature may reveal about the prevalence of neoliberal public narratives of the social in Mexican society today. This chapter looks at self-help books from the perspective of public discourse, and not from the perspective of individual consumption and interpretation, in line. In this, it follows the approach taken in much of the academic literature in this field, which tends to separate discursive analysis (Hochschild, 2003; McGee, 2005) from enquiries into the personal uses of popular psychology (Lichterman, 1992; Simonds, 1992).

This chapter builds on fieldwork conducted in Mexico since the mid-2000s, on popular psychology, self-help narratives and the production, marketing and circulation of self-help books. On the one hand, it draws on the narrative analysis of more than 100 self-help books, both those written and produced in Mexico and those imported from elsewhere

to be translated into Spanish and sold to local audiences. Given the limited space available in this chapter, typical cases are used to document patterns in self-help narratives current in Mexico. While it is not possible to showcase the full range of self-help books analyzed for this study, engagement with typical cases nonetheless makes it possible to highlight important trends in the narrative organization of self-help in contemporary Mexico.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, this chapter briefly analyses the trajectories of production, circulation and consumption of self-help books in Mexico and shows how popular psychology in Mexico may be embedded in wider, transnational cultural flows. This chapter will thus present statistical data on the production and sales of self-help books in Mexico. These publication statistics were provided by the National Chamber of the Publishing Industry of Mexico (CANIEM). The data analyzed in this chapter do not allow empirical generalizations about self-help culture and popular psychology in Mexico. However, they allow for significant insights into the range of self-help narratives prevalent in Mexico and the relationships of these narratives with neoliberal discourse.

This chapter adds in substantial ways to academic debates on neoliberalism and post-neoliberalism in Latin America. These debates have concentrated, on the one hand, on the political and socioeconomic consequences of Latin America's turn to neoliberalism in the 1980s and its post-neoliberal aftermath in the early 21st century (Harris, 2003; Dello Buono, 2011; Yates and Bakker, 2014; Laurell, 2015; Springer, 2015). On the other hand, scholars in Latin American cultural studies have engaged with the expression of neoliberal discourses and anti-neoliberal resistance in literature, film and the arts (Levinson, 2001; Masiello, 2001; Blanco-Cano, 2014). However, there has been relatively little engagement with the ways in which neoliberalism, anti-neoliberalism and post-neoliberalism have re-organized popular culture and everyday experiences and practices of social life. The 'therapeutic turn' that has accompanied neoliberalism's ascent has remained widely under-researched in Latin America, a few scattered studies notwithstanding (Lakoff, 2005; Nehring et al, 2016). This is due, perhaps, to the development of academic sociology in the region and the fact that the cultural turn that reshaped the discipline in much of Europe and Anglophone North America did not have a similarly far-reaching impact in Latin America (Nehring, 2005). Be this as it may, scholarly interest in Europe, Anglophone North America, East Asia and Oceania in therapeutic culture and its associations with neoliberalism has not been matched in Latin America. The following analysis of self-help books in Mexico addresses this omission.

## Popular psychology and neoliberalism in contemporary Mexico

The history of popular psychology in Mexico has so far not been documented through academic research. However, there is some scholarship that points to the long history of psychological knowledge and its application in clinical psychiatry, dating back to the late 19th and the early 20th century (Buffington, 1997; Benassini, 2001; de la Fuente and Heinze Martin, 2014). This coincides with the transnational diffusion of psychological knowledge and the establishment of institutions related to mental health care in other parts of the Americas (Lappann Botti, 2006; Illouz, 2008; Brandão Goulart and Durães, 2010; Ferrari, 2015). The diffusion of psychological knowledge beyond academia and clinical practice into popular culture remains poorly researched. However, from at least the late 1980s onwards popular psychological narratives began to acquire a considerable degree of visibility in public life, through advice columns in newspapers and magazines, TV talk shows, self-help books, and a range of other media (Nehring, 2009a). The extraordinary success of self-help writers such as Carlos Cuauhtémoc Sánchez in the same period speaks to the growing cultural influence of therapeutic narratives of self and social relationships. Sales statistics for the period from 2005 to 2011 speak to the continuing popularity of self-help books in Mexico (Table 3.1). The fact that, in a country of 120 million people, between 3.5 and 4.3 million new self-help books were sold every year in this period

Table 3.1: Sales of self-help books in Mexico, 2005–11

Year	Number of titles sold	Number of copies sold	Total sales value, Mexican pesos
2005	4,642	4,101,759	241,019,606
2006	5,485	4,536,105	311,824,402
2007	3,529	4,557,996	319,399,314
2008	5,966	3,773,438	270,025,220
2009	6,328	3,599,363	224,512,334
2010	8,578	4,328,206	303,168,849
2011	8,572	4,299,865	350,702,536

Source: National Chamber of the Publishing Industry of Mexico (CANIEM); personal correspondence.

Note: Due to substantial fluctuations in the value of the Mexican Peso in this period, the table does not include conversions of sales values into other currencies. For purely illustrative purposes, it may be useful to point out that the sales value of self-help books in 2011 is equivalent to more than US\$19 million, at 2017 exchange rates and following a substantial depreciation of the Peso.

illustrates the extraordinary popularity of the genre. Of the titles on sale each year, only small and decreasing proportion was produced locally in Mexico (Table 3.2).

Table 3.2: Local production of self-help books in Mexico, 2005–10

Year	Total number of titles	Number of locally produced titles	Share of locally produced titles, %
2005	4,642	1,424	30.7
2006	5,485	1,304	23.8
2007	3,529	898	25.4
2008	5,966	1,109	18.6
2009	6,328	968	15.3
2010	8,578	1,074	12.5

Source: National Chamber of the Publishing Industry of Mexico (CANIEM); personal correspondence.

Most self-help books sold in each year therefore were titles by foreign authors and foreign publishing companies imported and sold to Mexican readers. This hints at the transnational scale of popular psychology, in terms of the cross-border circulation of self-help narratives and the media that carry these narratives, and in terms of those narratives' ability to captivate audiences from a range of national and cultural backgrounds (Nehring et al, 2016).

The period of extraordinary popularity of self-help books in Mexico coincides with the country's turn to neoliberalism from the mid-1980s onwards. Following a profound crisis of the Mexican economy in 1982, successive governments embarked on a string of structural adjustment programs guided by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank (Alvarez Béjar and Mendoza Pichardo, 1993; Christopherson and Hovey, 1996). Until the beginning of the crisis of the 1980s, Mexico had experienced several decades of relative prosperity. The pre-crisis period had been characterized by expanding public and social welfare services, declining income inequality and growing middle classes, in the context of Mexico's pursuit of a development model driven by theories of import substitution industrialization (Hirschman, 1968; Baer, 1972; Careaga, 1983, 1984). During the crisis, the Mexican government abandoned this development, turning instead toward direct foreign investment, the generation of employment and revenues through export-oriented manufacturing in the burgeoning *maquiladora* industry, and the large-scale privatization of public assets and public services (Laurell, 1991; Alvarez Béjar and Mendoza Pichardo, 1993;

Coppinger, 1993; Botz, 1994). As a result, poverty, unemployment and precarious employment in the informal sector grew for much of the 1980s and 1990s and Mexico's middle classes collapsed, while at the same a small number of individuals and firms profited greatly from the privatization of state-owned enterprises (Escobar Latapí and González de la Rocha, 1995; Ramirez, 1995; Hogenboom, 2004). The years since the crisis of the 1980s and 1990s have been marked by a recovery of ambiguous scale. Official data point to a marked decline of the poverty ratio since its high point in the mid-1990s (Table 3.3).

However, the validity of official poverty measurements has been called into question (Rodríguez Gómez, 2009). At the same time, the level of economic inequality in Mexico has remained stubbornly high, as indicated by relatively small variations in the Gini index from the mid-1980s until the mid-2010s (Table 3.4).

The transformation of the macro-structural framework of Mexican society had profound consequences for individuals and families. Growing unemployment and declining unsettled established patriarchal family structures, built around the model of a male breadwinner and household head supported by his wife and mother. Economic

Table 3.3: Poverty headcount ratio at US\$3.10 a day (2011 PPP), Mexico, 1984–2014 (% of population)

Year	% of population	Year	% of population
1984	21	2000	25
1985	n.a.	2001	n.a.
1986	n.a.	2002	23
1987	n.a.	2003	n.a.
1988	n.a.	2004	13
1989	18	2005	18
1990	n.a.	2006	11
1991	n.a.	2007	n.a.
1992	24	2008	12
1993	n.a.	2009	n.a.
1994	23	2010	12
1995	n.a.	2011	n.a.
1996	31	2012	10
1997	n.a.	2013	n.a.
1998	30	2014	11
1999	n.a.		

Source: The World Bank, World Development Indicators (accessed September 2017)

Table 3.4: Gini index for Mexico, 1984–2014

Year	Gini index	Year	Gini index
1984	49	2000	52
1985	n.a.	2001	n.a.
1986	n.a.	2002	50
1987	n.a.	2003	n.a.
1988	n.a.	2004	46
1989	54	2005	51
1990	n.a.	2006	48
1991	n.a.	2007	n.a.
1992	51	2008	48
1993	n.a.	2009	n.a.
1994	54	2010	48
1995	n.a.	2011	n.a.
1996	48	2012	48
1997	n.a.	2013	n.a.
1998	49	2014	48
1999	n.a.		

Source: The World Bank, World Development Indicators, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GINI?locations=MX>

readjustment at the household level, through the incorporation of multiple, female and male, family members into the labor market, thus entailed a crisis and readjustment of gender relations, through women’s expanding participation in extra-domestic labor and concomitant shifts in domestic power relations (Fernández-Kelly, 1984; Escobar Latapí and González de la Rocha, 1995; Fernández-Kelly, 2008). In turn, women’s role in Mexico’s labor market often occurred on highly exploitative terms, for example through women’s incorporation in export-oriented manufacturing in only the most subordinate positions (Alarcón González and McKinley, 1999; Wilson, 1999). The application of neoliberal political-economic models in Mexico was ostensibly to resolve a profound crisis of the state. However, it destabilized Mexican society, and the insecurity it produced was, from the early 2000s onwards, exacerbated by the escalating confrontation between the state and Mexico’s drug cartels (Chabat, 2002; Calderón et al, 2015; Shirk and Wallman, 2015). In stark words, Asa Cristina Laurell (2015) describes the long-term consequences of Mexico’s neoliberal turn as the “destruction of society.” She points to increasing restrictions



of basic human, political and social rights, a pervasive climate of fear and insecurity and a fundamental decline in social solidarity:

Neoliberal ideology promotes the disqualification of representative democracy with the aim of transferring crucial decisions to formal or informal undemocratic structures. This distortion of politics can take on different forms, and the Mexican case is perverse. However, the role of widespread fear—whether of terrorism, violence, immigrants, the poor, the delinquent, or any unspecified “threatening other”—seems to play an important role in disciplining the population. This serves to make acceptable the restriction of civil, political, and social rights .... The Mexican situation is especially dangerous because formal state institutions are permeated with organized crime to create what some analysts ... consider a Narco-State that practices state terrorism. The ideology of individualism, power, and consumerism has a damaging influence that tends to destroy social values such as solidarity, humanism, and respect for human life. This ideology turns particularly toxic in the absence of the possibility of getting a decent job or access to education. The exaltation of power, money, consumerism, and violence by mass media seems to play an important role in the making of extremely violent criminals under conditions of what Valencia Triana ... named *Gore* capitalism. (Laurell, 2015, p.260f)

The period of neoliberal privatization and marketization since the 1980s thus coincides with a profound crisis of Mexican society, in political, economic and cultural terms. One of the central issues in this book is the question to what extent a post-neoliberal turn has offered Latin Americans alternative developmental pathways that may enable a recovery of the social (Davies, 2009; Radcliffe, 2012; Elwood et al, 2016). In contrast to the post-neoliberal turn in Latin American studies (Springer, 2015), scholars in Europe and in the US have pointed to neoliberalism’s distinctive capacity to retain its political, economic and cultural dominance in spite of the ostensible delegitimization of its basic assumptions (Crouch, 2011; Mirowski, 2013), following the financial crisis of 2008. Likewise, it seems doubtful that a post-neoliberal turn has taken place in Mexico at all, given the persistent consequences of privatization for Mexican society, in terms of the long-term precarization of the lives of a large part of the country’s population

and the still escalating spiral of insecurity and violence (Mercille, 2014; Paley, 2015; Castillo Fernandez and Arzate Salgado, 2016).

In everyday life, neoliberalism's resilience is visible in the thriving market for popular psychological ideas and products, exemplified by the outlined, extraordinary and persistent, success of self-help books among Mexican readers. Self-help fills the gaps left behind by the decline of social bonds and solidarities, in so far as it is usually premised on the assumption that individual solutions to pressing life problems are both feasible and desirable (Nehring et al, 2016). Self-help recipes for personal development tend to emphasize the association between autonomous behavioral modification and improved life chances, in terms of the attainment of a range of material and immaterial goals, from the achievement of wealth and professional success to the realization of happiness and spiritual fulfillment. In this sense, the individualism of self-help appears as closely associated with neoliberalism's emphasis on an entrepreneurial ethic of personal development. This ethic is the social-psychological corollary of neoliberalism's political-economic program; it sustains this program by translating it into the common-sense assumptions that define individuals' everyday experiences and practices, and by rendering its basic tenets—market-based competition, autonomy, choice, private responsibility—unquestionable. Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval characterize neoliberalism's entrepreneurial self along these lines:

Once the subject is fully conscious and in control of his choices, he [sic] is also fully responsible for what happens to him. The correlate of the 'irresponsibility' of a world that has become ungovernable by dint of its global character is the infinite responsibility of the individual for his own fate, for his capacity to succeed and be happy. Not being weighed down by the past, cultivating positive expectations, having effective relations with others: the neo-liberal management of oneself consists in manufacturing a high-performance ego, which always demands more of the self, and whose self-esteem paradoxically grows with its dissatisfaction at past performance. (Dardot and Laval, 2013, p.274)

The close association between popular self-help narratives and the figure of the entrepreneurial self is documented by the narratives of a wide range of advice books published over the past three decades. At the same time, these books exhibit notable variations on the theme of self-directed entrepreneurialism that merit closer consideration.

## Crisis and individual choice

The self-help books analyzed for this study hardly ever portray the crisis of Mexican society in socioeconomic terms. This seems to be due to two reasons. First, in line with the statistics shown above in Table 3.2, most of these books were written by foreign authors, translated into Spanish, and imported into Mexico. Second, the narratives of both imported and locally authored texts share an important feature, in that they tend to elide the social context in which individuals' personal development takes place. In line with their didactic character, they offer detailed recipes for personal improvement, but they typically frame such improvement as the outcome of individual choices, irrespective of the social-structural arrangements that organize such choices.

A characteristic example of this narrative trend is Carlos Cuauhtémoc Sánchez's *Juventud en Extasis* (*Youth in Sexual Ecstasy*) (1994). Originally published at the height of Mexico's economic crisis, the book became a bestseller and launched its author's enduring career as self-help entrepreneur known across the Hispanic world (Nehring, 2009b). *Juventud en Extasis* addresses young people in their teens and twenties and offers them moral guidance on issues of sex and intimate relationships. Written as a novel, the book tells the story of Efrén, a student with a highly promiscuous way of life. When a former girlfriend undergoes an abortion and Efrén contracts a sexually transmitted disease, he seeks the guidance of Dr Asaf Marín, a medic who cures his illness and turns into Efrén's mentor and moral guide along the way.

To better illustrate what I would like to tell you, I will present the case of two male patients I had recently. Both began to have very serious confrontations with their wives, a few months after getting married. When he was single, one of them belonged to gangs, was an expert seducer, and went frequently to bars and cantinas. The other was committed to his studies and to sports; in addition, for many years he played the guitar with his bohemian friends, and sometimes also for the local church. Afterwards, during his fights with his wife, both men became so upset that more than once they left their homes full of anger. Where do you think that the one and the other went? As is obvious, the first went to see prostitutes, drowned himself in alcohol, and did not return to his wife for several days. In contrast, the second paced the streets calming his anger with exercise, and sometimes he took refuge in the tranquility of a church

to think and recover his calm. These are extreme cases, but they are real. ... If you have a balanced life before marriage, have fun in a decent and measured way, it is difficult for you to become corrupted after getting together with a woman. On the other hand, if you live unhealthily and without control, when marital problems arise, you will have the tendency to flee through the wrong door of licentiousness. In the developed countries the environment among the youth has been degraded so much that it is now very difficult to find successful young marriages; young people are used to so much depravation that after marriage – as seems logical – they do not manage to overcome their promiscuous habits. (Cauhtémoc Sánchez, 1994, p. 37f; author's translation)

This extract is noteworthy on several accounts. First, Cauhtémoc Sánchez depicts the development of an intimate relationship as the result of individuals' moral choices, as evident in the contrast he builds between the faithful husband and the man of low moral fiber who seeks out prostitutes after fights with his wife. Both in the preceding extract and throughout the book at large, Cauhtémoc Sánchez does little to engage with the relational qualities of love, intimacy, marriage, and so forth. Rather, he takes an interest in the moral qualities that allow individuals to create and sustain intimate bonds that correspond to his distinctive Christian vision of human life.

Second, in so far as Cauhtémoc Sánchez accounts for the social context in which individuals' choices are set, he does so by considering the moral influence which society may have on individuals. In the preceding extract, his allusions to prostitutes, alcohol and the escalating moral degradation of contemporary youth hint at a larger theme of his work, namely the corrupting influence of modern life. Cauhtémoc Sánchez's self-help writing ultimately seems geared toward counteracting this moral corruption, and toward promoting his version of Christian morality and judging individuals' choices accordingly.

Carlos Cauhtémoc Sánchez deserves mention here because his work ranks among the big self-help bestsellers in Mexico throughout the late 1990s and 2000s. However, the emphasis on individual choices considered outside their social context pervades is typical of the sample of texts analyzed for this study. Consider, for instance, the words of another bestselling Mexican self-help author. Don Miguel Ruiz writes texts that claim to be inspired by Toltec spiritual traditions. His work

belongs to the long-established New Age movement, and it thus stands clearly apart from the Christian moralism of Carlos Cuauhtémoc Sánchez. In *The Four Agreements*, a 1990s bestseller that is still found frequently in bookshops around the world, Ruiz suggests:

Whatever people do, feel, think, or say, *don't take it personally*. If they tell you how wonderful you are, they are not saying that because of you. You know you are wonderful. It is not necessary to believe other people who tell you that you are wonderful. Don't take *anything* personally. Even if someone got a gun and shot you in the head, it was nothing personal. Even at that extreme. ... Our mind also exists in the level of the Gods. Our mind also lives in that reality and can perceive that reality. The mind sees with the eyes and perceives this waking reality. But the mind also sees and perceives without the eyes, although the reason is hardly aware of this perception. The mind lives in more than one dimension. There may be times when you have ideas that don't originate in your mind, but you are perceiving them with your mind. You have the right to believe or not believe these voices and the right not to take what they say personally. We have a choice whether or not to believe the voices we hear within our own minds, just as we have a choice of what to believe and agree with in the dream of the planet. (Ruiz, 1997, p. 20; author's translation)

Ruiz here discusses interpersonal communication in everyday life, in a language that is noticeably more abstract than that Carlos Cuauhtémoc Sánchez employs. The roots of his writing in New Age thought are apparent in his references to “the Gods”, the nature of reality, and so forth. However, Ruiz shares with Cuauhtémoc Sánchez an emphasis on personal choice. Ruiz's emphatic claim that we “have a choice whether or not to believe the voices we hear within our own minds” implies that individuals have the capacity to define their self-image on their own and as a result of personal choices, regardless of the influence of others.

Here and elsewhere in *The Four Agreements*, Ruiz makes his case for individual choice in an otherworldly language that has nothing concrete to say about everyday life in contemporary Mexico. In this sense, a significant corollary of Ruiz's emphasis on choice lies in his encouragement of a kind of mental inward turn. Personal truths, Ruiz suggests, can be gained through a journey that occurs within

individuals' minds and that removes them, morally, emotionally and cognitively, from engagement with other people and the everyday world. Ruiz has nothing explicit to say about the crisis of Mexican society, but the mental withdrawal he encourages marks an important response to an everyday lifeworld that has little to offer by way of certainties and security. At least in part, this might explain the lasting success of his work.

### **Autonomy**

The works of Carlos Cuauhtémoc Sánchez and Don Miguel Ruiz represent another typical feature of the sample of self-help texts analyzed for this chapter, in that they rely on a strongly voluntaristic model of self-identity. Their contrasting intellectual roots in Christian theology and New Age thinking notwithstanding, they both posit a self that is separate from the social world, autonomous and therefore able to determine its development to a large degree. Both authors' emphasis on the importance of personal choices stems from this assumption of a self-enclosed and autonomous self. This assumption is equally apparent in other self-help texts on a range of subject matters. For instance, in *Los Secretos de la Mente Millionaria* (*The Secrets of the Millionaire Mind*), a translation of an English-language bestseller, Canadian self-help writer T. Harv Eker (2005) argues that accumulating substantial personal wealth is, above all, a matter of developing an appropriate mindset:

You surely have read other books, listened to CDs, taken part in courses and taken an interest in numerous systems to get rich, be it through real estate, stocks or business. But what happened? In the case of most people, not much! They gain a brief charge of energy, and later they return to their prior situation. Finally, we have an answer. It is a simple answer, which also is a law that cannot be mocked. Everything can be reduced to if your subconscious 'financial pattern' is not 'programmed' for success, nothing you might learn, nothing you might know and nothing you might do will change things very much. (Eker, 2005, p.12; author's translation)

Starting with this supposition, Eker goes on to develop a scheme for mental reprogramming that, he suggests, will allow his readers to develop a set of attitudes that will allow them to achieve great financial

gain. His reprogramming exercises depart from statements such as the following:

PRINCIPLE OF WEALTH:

Thoughts engender feelings.

Feelings engender actions.

Actions lead to results.

(Eker, 2005, p. 33; author's translation; emphasis in original)

As this “principle of wealth” illustrates, in Eker’s reasoning, there is a clear path from having the right thoughts to achieving the right results—wealth. Eker thus sells his audience a “get rich quick” scheme in which having the right attitude is all that matters, irrespective of social circumstances, such as one’s social class, pre-existing inherited wealth, family connections, and all the other factors that social research has long tied to individuals’ life chances (Dorling, 2014).

Dealing with a much less facile subject matter, in *Autoboicot (Self-Boycott)*, the Argentinian pastor and motivational speaker Bernardo Stamateas advises his readers on how to overcome negative attitudes that prevent them from leading a fulfilling life. In this context, he discusses the problem of low self-esteem, and he relates it to frequent criticism by others. He suggests:

The self-harming person [*el automaltratante*] does not move by the principle of ‘wanting’, but by ‘having to’ and by orders. [...] Because of this it is necessary that you gain control of your mind; and I am not talking about mind control or New Age, but rather about learning to fill your mind with words of recognition, of self-improvement, of action. Little by little your thoughts will change. Your worst enemy are not others, but your own mind. Your worst enemy are not criticisms by others but those you accept, those you allow to invade you and to slowly destroy you. Criticism and all the actions that are tied to it [...] make you doubt what your real thoughts are and what thoughts others want to impose on you. (Stamateas, 2008, p.37: author’s translation)

Stamateas’s account of mental self-control hinges on his assertion that your “worst enemy are not others, but your own mind.” Negative thoughts and the negative influence of others can be overcome once

individuals realize their power to control their own thoughts. Just like T. Harv Eker, Bernardo Stamateas thus relies in his self-help writing on the figure of an autonomous self that can be analyzed, understood and systematically guided toward ‘better’ thoughts and emotions. The voluntarism that is inherent in this notion of an autonomous self is a defining feature of the self-help texts analyzed for this study. These texts propose that a better life is possible on purely individual terms and as the result of individual action. In turn, this highly individualistic version of self-improvement hinges on the assumption of an autonomous self whose modification can have a far-reaching impact on individual’s life changes, regardless of social context.

## Responsibility

As self-help books elide social context and the personal consequences of large-scale institutional arrangements, they also tend to place a heavy burden of responsibility on individuals’ shoulders. As has been noted elsewhere (Simonds, 1992; Hochschild, 2003), the advice literature on women’s intimate relationships is notable in this regard. A prominent example of these texts is Robin Norwood’s *Las Mujeres que Aman Demasiado* (*Women Who Love Too Much*). Originally published in the USA in 1985, the book has since been translated into a range of languages and re-published in various international editions. It has also spawned several sequels, such as Norwood’s *Meditaciones para Mujeres que Aman Demasiado* (*Meditation for Women Who Love Too Much*) (2012), and spin-offs by other authors, such as the recent *Las Mujeres que se Aman Demasiado* (*Women Who Love Themselves Too Much*) by Mexican writer Gabriela Torres de Moroso Bussetti (2017). At the time of writing, *Las Mujeres que Aman Demasiado* is available in Mexico in various print and electronic editions, through booksellers such as Librerías Gandhi. All this illustrates the book’s lasting influence, both in Mexico and at the international level. One of Norwood’s central points lies in the argument that women must take charge of their intimate lives, place their wellbeing center-stage, and apply their entrepreneurial energies to the management of their relationships with their partners, even if this may mean abandoning an unfulfilling or harmful bond:

From the beginning, Jill was willing to accept more responsibility than Randy for the beginning of their relationship and for keeping it going. Just as in the cases of so many other women who love too much, it was obvious that Jill was a very responsible person – a great entrepreneur



[*emprendedora*] who had been successful in many areas of her life, but who, nonetheless, had very little self-love. The accomplishment of her academic and professional objectives was not enough to balance the personal failure she had to bear in her couple relationships. Each time Randy forgot to call her on the phone constituted a heavy blow to the fragile image that Jill had of herself – an image that Jill afterwards would try heroically to strengthen, in order to receive some sign of affection from him. Her willingness to accept all the responsibility for a frustrated relationship was typical, as was her inability to evaluate the situation realistically and to take care of herself by abandoning the relationship when the lack of reciprocity became apparent. Women who love too much have little consideration for their personal integrity in a love relationship. (Norwood, 1986, p.16f)

The story of Jill and Randy plays a large role in Norwood's narrative, and she uses it to illustrate the harmful consequences of women's inability or unwillingness to take responsibility for their intimate lives. This notion features quite clearly, for example, in the final sentence of the quoted extract, when Norwood writes that women "who love too much have little consideration for their personal integrity in a love relationship." Norwood tells the story of Jill and Randy as a series of close personal encounters between two lovers whose intimate bond ultimately proves too weak to sustain their relationship. Broader considerations, for instance about gender or about the ways in which intimate attachment is complicated by the growing burden of work (Hochschild, 1997), do not feature explicitly in Norwood's analysis of what went wrong between Jill and Randy. Intimate relationships, Norwood's narrative implies, are a matter of the emotional bonds between two individuals, and the management of these bonds is likewise a matter of individual responsibility.

*Las Mujeres que Aman Demasiado* deserves mention here due to its considerable and lasting success. However, the emphasis on individual responsibility cuts across much of the sample of texts compiled for this study. It is central, for instance, to the—in Mexico—equally influential writing of Carlos Cuauhtémoc Sánchez. In *Juventud en Extasis*, individual responsibility is a major theme in the narrative of Efrén's misadventures—he finds himself in trouble, with a sexually transmitted disease, due to his own carelessness, while his life improves dramatically once he realizes his mistakes, accepts Christian sexual

morality, and forms a lasting relationship that involves sexual abstinence before marriage. Just like Norwood, Carlos Cuauhtémoc Sánchez does not interrogate the social, cultural and economic implications of Efrén's life and issues such as Christian morality, abortion, and young people's intimate relationships.

### **The moral grammar of self-help: neoliberalism, self-identity and the denial of the social**

The preceding analysis suggests that self-help writing seeks to empower individuals by encouraging them to adopt an ethos of autonomous self-making, characterized by self-directed choices and the assumption of individual responsibility for major life events. This narrative pattern corresponds to central features of the self-help genre and popular psychology at large identified elsewhere in the Western world (Rimke, 2000; Hazleden, 2003, 2012). However, the academic literature also points to the capacity of therapeutic discourses to empower individuals by facilitating social bonds and collective agency (Wright, 2010). In the sample of books analyzed for this study, this capacity did not feature in significant ways, even though it comprised a broad range of books, both written locally by Mexican authors and imported from abroad.

Central to the moral grammar of these self-help texts is a de-socialized self thinking, feeling, and acting without clear reference to the social processes and institutions in which self-development is situated. In a sense, thus, self-help writing contradicts the central assumption of the sociological project, namely that individual biographical trajectories are in various ways defined by structures and processes beyond immediate individual control or understanding (Mills, 1959; Durkheim, 2013). Importantly, self-help discourses thus underpin the pursuit of neoliberal political and economic projects in Mexico, by promoting the competitive, individualistic ethos of the marketplace in everyday social relationships and rendering invisible the collective ties that sustain these relationships. In turn, when self-improvement is framed in terms of the purely individual agency of autonomous individuals, it becomes difficult to envision it as the result of collective political action. The individual empowerment of popular psychological self-help may therefore be accompanied by collective disempowerment. This collective disempowerment corresponds to the fundamental tenets of neoliberalism, which understands society in terms of market-based exchanges between private individuals, with the market acting as a natural regulator of these exchanges, to be warded off from political intervention (Harvey, 2005; Peck, 2010).

The assumptions that neoliberal theorists have articulated in academic publications are thus raised by self-help authors to the level of everyday common sense.

These far-reaching conclusions seem warranted for two reasons. On the one hand, as this chapter has shown, self-help texts are widely popular in Mexico. In so far as they are consumed by very large audience, they have the capacity to define common-sense assumption about the self, individual agency, and social relationships. On the other hand, given their popularity, these texts may be read as indicators of much broader public discourses that manifest in a variety of narrative forms and media—in political rhetoric and policy discourse, in news media, in TV talk shows, in online social media, in popular psychological texts, and so forth. Read this way, self-help books speak to the pervasiveness of neoliberal common sense in contemporary Mexican society.

### Note

- <sup>1</sup> For a more comprehensive account of self-help texts in contemporary Mexico, see *Transnational Popular Psychology and the Global Self-Help Industry* (Nehring et al, 2016).

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# **From Uribe’s “Democratic Security” to Santo’s Peace Accords with the FARC: Hate, Fear, Hope and other Emotions in Contemporary Colombian Politics**

*Fabio López de la Roche*

## **Introduction**

This chapter first presents explanatory factors concerning Colombian divergence from the recent tendency in several Latin American countries toward 21st century models of political socialism or in conjunction with post-neoliberal development. It then explores the complex legacy of political culture bequeathed by the governments of Álvaro Uribe Vélez (2002–06 and 2006–10), which involved an important military effort to combat the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC by its Spanish acronym) but was not able to defeat them, although their debilitation undoubtedly constituted one of the factors that led to the negotiations in Havana. Hatred and fear of the FARC, promoted by President Uribe’s discourse supported by the mainstream media and important journalistic sectors, are then explored as factors in conjunction with societal ideological homogenization around the policy of “Democratic Security.” The chapter moves onto the redefinitions in the political culture and hegemonic communicative regime promoted by

President Juan Manuel Santos (2010–14 and 2014–17), which favored promoting successful conclusion of the peace process with the FARC and initiation of a new, complex and still uncertain phase of national reconciliation among Colombians, notwithstanding obstinate Uribe's loathing of both the FARC, and President Santos and President Uribe's systematic and ideological delegitimization of the peace process. This section also deals with issues concerning the October 2, 2016 plebiscite regarding the ratification of the Havana Accords, the triumph of the rejectionists, the renegotiation of the Accords with representatives of the rejectionists by the government's negotiating team, the mobilization of the citizenry in defense of the Accords, and the ratification of the revised Accords by the Congress at the Teatro Colón. The chapter concludes by outlining some of the challenges and possible alternatives for the country's political development during the post-Accord era.

### **Colombian divergence and its causes**

Colombia has not had a “pink tide” experience since the beginning of the 21st century unlike several other Latin American countries<sup>1</sup> because it has not experienced anything like 21st century socialism or an eventual post-neoliberal alignment. Such divergence has a few explanations.

### **Colombian conservatism**

During the 20th century Colombia was characterized by conservative politico-cultural hegemony. The Constitution of 1886, a normative model based on the fear of God and conservative, authoritarian and religious Catholic culture, led alternatives in partisan politics and ideas to coalesce around political and philosophical liberalism and the Liberal Party. Amid that conservative order, the political left, communist as well as socialist, seemed an extremist and marginal phenomenon. Such conservative hegemony and the religious tenor it imposed on culture and politics generated a conservative form of modernization that hampered societal dialogue with respect to modern values such as freethinking, scientific thought, secularism, separation of church and state, philosophical liberalism and socialism (Jaramillo Vélez, 1994; Melo, 1990; López de la Roche, 1990). The system, in place for more than a century (until the Constitution of 1991), promoted and maintained an exclusionary, anti-leftist, anti-communist politico-cultural tradition that stigmatized and obstructed the consolidation of the political and social left.

## **A proposal for violent revolutionary societal transformation**

A country that, for more than 50 years, maintained an internal conflict<sup>2</sup> without resolution facilitated stigmatization by the establishment of not only violent leftists but also of unarmed leftists and social movements, predicated on the false premise that protests were always insurgency sponsored. The presence of armed insurgents coupled with the seductive quality of revolutionary violence hampered development of a legal, civil, and democratic leftist political project (López de la Roche, 1994).

## **Sectarianism and concealed truths within the world of the left**

Starting in the 1920s, leftist organizations and political parties played an important role in social justice and in the organization of laborers, *campesinos* (rural crofters) and other urban and rural worker sectors. Influenced by the Cuban revolution during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, such organizations and political parties in Colombia and Latin America became critics of the peripheral capitalist order and of its related exclusions and inequities. Despite contributions to the development of an emancipatory spirit, the study of national realities, and criticism and denunciation of repression, leftist political culture was not exempt from problems involving authoritarianism, dogmatism, and the absence of a democratic inclination for resolving differences or relational recognition of political, social, and cultural diversity.

The sectarianism of most of the legal left's gradations—the Colombian Communist Party (with a pro-Soviet orientation), the Marxist-Leninist Colombian Communist Party (with a pro-China orientation), the Independent and Revolutionary Workers' Movement (MOIR by its Spanish acronym, a pro-China oriented critic of armed struggle), and many Maoist, Stalinist and Trotskyist parties and groups—constituted an additional factor in the left's struggle to unite and consolidate into a unitary and truly alternative project. Ideological intolerance was often the predominant tone among such leftist gradations during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s: self-assumed political churches, each with their respective closed and incontrovertible truths. Such truth regimes expressed in a sectarian manner are still present among leftist organizations.

## **The degradation of war and deterioration of the armed left's ethics**

Outside the purview of the legal left, responding to the leftist insurgent presence (and its use of extortion, kidnapping and association with drug trafficking to finance its growth) right-wing paramilitary groups entered the Colombian conflict during the 1990s and beginnings of the 21st century, degrading it with massacre and terror-based strategies of their own. The armed left's reaction had unfortunate consequences involving deterioration of its ethics and revolutionary ideals. Too often it resulted in relationships with the illicit drug industry, human rights abuses, and a lack of respect for the lives and physical integrity of the civilian population. Resulting excesses, although characteristic of prolonged and crude military confrontations such as that experienced in Colombia, earned the insurgents strong animosity from broad sectors of Colombian society. Those sectors also, albeit indirectly, discredited the legal left because the mass media and anti-subversive government propaganda did not always make the necessary distinctions between armed leftists and the legal and civilian left.

## **Military containment of the FARC and societal drift toward the right (2002-2010)<sup>3</sup>**

Evaluations of democracies deal with how presidents think and how they manage governmental communications and the communicative rights of opposition parties and groups; and, by virtue of their presidential investiture, how they deal with their relationships as governments (and consequently as rulers) imbued with great rhetorical power with respect to the media and journalism. The communicative modalities used by leaders permit evaluation of their perspectives with regard to power, democracy, and political and cultural pluralism, and of their view of the opposition. It is posited that such elements are as important for evaluation of the democratic quality of political systems and governments as judicial and congressional independence from the executive and even the existence of truly free and competitive elections.

President Uribe, an extraordinary and skillful political communicator, made "propaganda" the dominant genre of his governmental communication, favoring mass media and audiences such as television and radio, to the detriment of the press and more reflexive and thought-provoking discourse and audiences. Propaganda, which generally functions as a type of unilateral communication and rhetorical device, geared to persuasion, was created during his rule by the repeated

production of an insistent message to the effect that “the country is getting better every day,” “the war against the insurgency is being won,” and, as for the FARC, the idea that “the end of the end” of that organization was here and now.

So-called “community councils”, community meetings, and meetings with regional and local institutions—to discuss their needs and exigencies and to make decisions with regard to investments in works and projects—played a central role in Uribe Vélez’s governmental communications. Such “community” or “communal” councils became personalized and populist areas of communication. The president would take his ministers to account to the populace for their ministries’ performance, publicly interview them with respect to details of their administration and related supporting data, and might also reprimand them in such a hierarchical display of authority that it was popularly said “Uribe had vice-ministers rather than ministers.” President Uribe was the star of such weekly council performances, televised publicly for eight to twelve hours on Saturdays and which made it appear that he was responsible for all investment indulgences and regional progress. Through such publicly staged discourses, Uribe Vélez was portrayed as a moral leader and an exemplary fighter against political chicanery and corruption. One could thus allude to the communicative regimen (Brunner, 1988) characteristic of the Uribe government as “monologic” or “monoglossic” (single voiced) contrasted with “heteroglossic”, one inclusive of differing voices (Bajtín, 1993); or perhaps as an “oracular” regime where oracles would equate to paternalistic, vertical, and unilateral forms of communication where others do not count, their voices being faint or simply conceived of as servants or subjects (Evans, 2008).

Government discourse and television news played a central role in Uribe’s monologist communication regimen. During his eight-year administration, Uribe’s discourse (supported by private television channels’ reports) homogenized and effectively reoriented public opinion through generation of a singularly “anti-FARC (*antifariano*)<sup>4</sup> nationalism” through discursive definition of the FARC as Colombian’s public enemy number one (López de la Roche, 2014). Such anti-FARC nationalism catalyzed, multiplied and politically exploited the feelings of hate and rejection shared by millions of Colombians because of the FARC’s systemic kidnapping and extortion practices and because of such insurgency’s militaristic arrogance during the Pastrana government’s frustrated peace initiative in the Caguan region from 1998 through 2002.

From a communicative perspective, such “anti-FARC nationalism,” which transformed the FARC into the “Colombian society’s primary culprit,” developed an inequitable victim visibility structure that prioritized FARC victims over others and reflected the FARC as more responsible than other victimizers. Right-wing paramilitary groups were never persistently criticized by Uribe Vélez despite the probability that they were much crueler and more heartless, with massacres and terror being central to their politico-military strategy. This strategy was designed to provoke the flight of affected campesinos and the abandonment of their lands, permitting paramilitaries to appropriate the lands while presenting themselves as guarantors of security. Paramilitaries were not subjected to systemic media and journalistic campaigns denouncing and confronting them in a manner that might have stemmed the bloodshed they occasioned, as was done with respect to the FARC.

Official propaganda, as well as the hegemonic media system’s anti-FARC propaganda, was perverted by a systemic “pedagogy of hate” directed against the organization, directly promoted through presidential discourse.<sup>5</sup> In order to understand this phenomenon in all of its complexity it must be added that President Uribe not only managed to unify part of the country against the FARC but he also automatically categorized opposition politicians, intellectuals, journalists and other government opponents as FARC sympathizers or as “complicit in terror.” Such a nationalist construct produced a Manichean (but politically profitable) polarization of public opinion.

From another analytical angle, Uribe Vélez’s military policy in combating the FARC was, unequivocally, very successful. It resulted in the FARC’s expulsion from the Department of Cundinamarca, as well as from areas near the national capital, severely impairing their offensive capabilities. It also allowed government penetration into the jungles of the Colombian Orinoquia and Amazonia, where insurgent encampments and positions had been considered unassailable. With foreign aid,<sup>6</sup> incorporation of advanced technology permitted improved coordination between intelligence and telecommunication functions as well as making location of insurgent encampments and areas of concentration much easier to find.

Given this, President Uribe’s anti-FARC military policy must be credited with helping to rebuild foreign investor confidence in Colombia as well as the confidence of Colombians themselves who, after many years of insecurity and fear of possible kidnapping by insurgents, were once again able to travel on principle highways. The “Democratic Security” policy also helped overcome the designation

of Colombia as a “failed state”—a state that lacked viability due to the inability to control its own territory. Nonetheless, while “Democratic Security” solved the problem of security on major highways and seriously degraded the FARC, it was unable to defeat them and, beginning in 2008, the FARC were able to restructure their military strategy.

As to right-wing paramilitaries, between 2004 and 2008, Uribe Vélez sponsored political negotiations with leaders and members of paramilitary groups who chose to avail themselves of a “Law of Justice and Peace” promulgated at his urging and thereby temporarily deactivating an important aspect of the armed conflict. However, many mid-level paramilitary commanders and lower ranking troops were subsequently recycled into new paramilitary groups or criminal gangs denominated “Bacrim” (an abbreviation for criminal gang). Senior paramilitary leaders (Salvatore Mancuso, “Jorge 40,” “Don Berna,” Hernan Giraldo, and ten others), rather than facing Colombian justice, were extradited to the US during May 2008 by President Uribe, making unfavorable information relating to their crimes, human rights violations, and complicity with politicians, businessmen, military personnel, and senior state officials unavailable to Colombian authorities.

Returning to the theme of government rhetoric with respect to “anti-FARC nationalism”, during the eight years of the Uribe government confrontational daily polarizing discourse directed at those who thought differently or had a different perception with respect to the country, the conflict, security or peace, produced a profound deterioration of confidence among diverse sectors of the population. Whole families, friends and coworkers became estranged; political conversation became shunned either tacitly or explicitly both at home and at work, all because of the official discourse of “good versus bad” and of “friends versus enemies” that permeated all of Colombian society.

Using a linguistic policy aimed at establishing an official ideological version of reality, Uribe Vélez prohibited reference in government documents to the existence of an armed conflict in Colombia; in its place they had to refer to a “terrorist threat,” consequently rendering victims of the conflict invisible.<sup>7</sup> In order to complete such linguistic standardization, President Uribe sent the communications media a “Style Manual,” through which he sought to intrude into media and journalistic ideological orientations (Secretaría de Prensa, Presidencia de la República, 2009). President Uribe, having reaped widespread popularity among Colombians by virtue of his decisive and effective



struggle against the FARC, made perverse use of the authority he had acquired by subverting public discourse in a manner bordering not only on the unwarranted but also on the criminal. He did so in order to repeatedly stigmatize his critics and opponents, to illegally intercept the telephone conversations of the journalists, judges, intellectuals, and politicians he considered enemies or unreliable, and to organize smear campaigns against justices of the Supreme Court investigating collaborative relations and complicity between ultra-right-wing paramilitary leaders and Congressional leaders.

Such actions eventually miscarried, resulting in legal proceedings that led to imprisonment of more than 50 legislators. One of the most serious cases involved the Administrative Department for Security (DAS by its Spanish acronym) which, under the direction of Jorge Noguera (appointed directly by the President), provided paramilitary leaders in the departments of the Atlantic Coast with lists of trade unionists and leftist leaders to be intimidated or killed. An egregious example involved Professor Alfredo Correa de Andreis, a renowned sociologist and social researcher, and an exonerated victim of a judicial process fabricated to make him appear a member of the FARC, was shot and killed in Barranquilla in 2004 by hired assassins linked to paramilitaries. María del Pilar Hurtado, DAS director after Noguera, was also tried and sentenced by the Supreme Court, in her case for illegal telephone interceptions involving judges, journalists, and opposition politicians. Another of the Uribe government's notorious cases of corruption involved the *Agro Ingreso Seguro A.I.S.* program, supervised by Agriculture Minister Andrés Felipe Arias. Arias illegally granted millionaire subsidies to affluent families on the Atlantic Coast in exchange for electoral support. Arias, under investigation by the Colombian attorney general's office, is currently a fugitive seeking asylum in the US. It bears noting that, in conjunction with similar but less serious crimes by members of his administration involving the Watergate affair, US President Richard Nixon felt compelled to resign.

A further instance of impropriety involved Uribe's efforts to secure constitutionally prohibited re-election in 2004 where, in order to obtain Congressional approval for a required Constitutional amendment, his government bought the votes of congressmen Yidis Medina and Teodolindo Avendaño. A case relating to such acts was adjudicated by the Supreme Court, resulting in the imprisonment of then ministers Sabas Pretelt and Diego Palacios for offering bribes and notarial posts<sup>8</sup> to the Congressmen in exchange for their votes.

In summary, not only can the corrupt nature of the Uribe government be affirmed but also the right-wing, authoritarian and

antiliberal nature of Uribe's politico-communicative regimen and the consistency during its eight-year administration of a markedly anti-leftist discourse directed against defenders of human rights and non-governmental organizations (NGOs)—in a country where, in the midst of symbolic exclusion and violent physical annihilation, the consolidation of a legal left has proven a tortuous process.

The delegitimization of liberal opposition and the legal left was compounded by the stigmatization of other voices critical of the government, especially those of intellectuals in favor of political solutions to the armed conflict through negotiation. President Uribe publicly referred to the latter (such as members of "Colombians for Peace") as "the FARC's intellectual bloc" (*El Tiempo*, 2009). Such stigmatization of intellectuals, journalists, and opposition politicians constituted a potential death sentence in a country where in many regions and marginal urban areas the state was unable to preserve its legitimate monopoly over the use of violence (effective authority being held by rightwing military groups). A number of those publicly accused via the then president's obdurate discourse of being "accomplices of terrorism," such as opposition journalist Hollman Morris, were forced to experience a veritable "calvary" of intimidations and threats (Morris, 2010). Between 2002 and 2010 the Uribe Vélez phenomenon reflected an experience similar to that of Fujimori in Peru—the abuse of authority attained as a result of a successful military containment policy against an insurgency in support of a complex of antidemocratic and criminal objectives.

Another rhetorically discursive track unfurled by President Uribe during his administration in public speeches, event inaugurations, and declarations to the mass media involved historical revisionism keyed to antiterrorism. In his version of history, he was portrayed as fighting "against 50 years of terrorism," incorporating not only the paramilitaries and drug related car bombings of the 1980s and 1990s but also all historical insurgencies, notwithstanding the absence of any careful assessment regarding timing or concrete historical circumstances. Within that same mixed terrorist bag he included: human rights NGOs; the indigenous movement in El Cauca (which had dared to confront him directly, questioning his authoritarian communication model and propaganda); the Marxist left; M-19 nationalists; critical journalists like Hollman Morris and Jorge Enrique Botero (whom he called "accomplices of terrorism"); and opposition politicians and intellectuals like Gustavo Petro and León Valencia, former insurgents who had resumed civilian life as part of the legal left to whom the president systematically referred as "guerrillas in civilian clothing."

Finally, Uribism's legacy in terms of political culture generated a strong coterie comprised of millions of Colombians, a legion of unconditional believers in the former president, many voting for whatever candidates Uribe Vélez selects.<sup>9</sup> Because they consider their leader not only a great political leader but also a great moral leader, many of them fail to acknowledge the crimes and abuses here analyzed and take as their own, without the tiniest criticism, the arguments posited by Uribe Vélez and his legislators in his Centro Democrático (the political party founded by Uribe after he left the presidency) to the effect that his ex-ministers and senior officials found guilty and imprisoned are victims of political persecution by a "politicized" justice system, biased against the former president and his party.

### **The governments of Juan Manuel Santos (2010–14 and 2014–17) and its reconsideration of "Democratic Security"**

Juan Manuel Santos won the 2010 election with the support of President Uribe and his political base on the expectation that he would continue the "Democratic Security" policy of his predecessor. However, to the surprise of those who expected continuity with the Uribe administration in which Santos had served as Defense Minister and as a promoter of the "Democratic Security" policy, the election resulted in important reconsideration of Uribist policies and discourse.

To begin with, Santos transformed the conflictive relationship and permanent tensions with Venezuela and Ecuador, neighboring countries ascribed to 21st century socialism—an anathema to Uribe. He advocated for Colombia's integration into organizations of Latin American states such as the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR, by its Spanish acronym), de-ideologized relations with Venezuela, and promoted a pragmatic coexistent relationship with regimes of differing political orientations. With a touch of irony, the media and journalists began to refer to President Santos's relationship with Hugo Chavez as that among "new best friends."

As for internal politics, promoting consensus, Santos surprised critics of doctrinaire Uribism by affirming in his speech in celebration of his electoral triumph on June 20, 2010 that "I am and I will be the president of national unity ... Let us turn the page from hatred ... No more pointless confrontation, no more divisions." Toward that end, President Santos symbolically crossed clear and progressive boundaries with respect to the worst facets of Uribe Vélez's politics. On August 7, 2010, in one of his first post inauguration acts, he met with the justices

of the Supreme Court in an effort to normalize the conflictive relations that had characterized the Uribe era, clearly expressing his desire for a harmonious and respectful relationship with the courts. Another of his decisions involved support for the "Law of Victims,"<sup>10</sup> a very important symbolic differentiation with respect to Uribism, which had consistently torpedoed such an initiative in Congress. A symbolically strategic demarcation was the recognition of the existence of internal armed conflict that his predecessor had systematically denied, arguing that it was a "terrorist threat."

Santos promoted a "Land Law" to accelerate restitution of rural properties appropriated through paramilitary expansion during the 1990s and the beginning of the 21st century. That decision generated resistance among regional economic, political, and military elements who had thrived due to paramilitary plundering of poor campesinos, and small and medium rural landowners. In some regions, the new government's policies were challenged by purported "anti-restitution armies," criminal bands comprised of recycled demobilized former paramilitaries known as BACRIM. While some restitution process leaders were able to remain on their land with government protection, others were displaced as a result of threats or assassinated.

With respect to communications, Juan Manuel Santos, the scion of an elite, cosmopolitan, capitalist family with an important background in the newspaper industry, replaced former President Uribe's personalist, monologic, rural-plantation driven and confrontational communicative regime.<sup>11</sup> Importantly buoyed by the presidential decisions described above, a liberal, democratic, pluralistic, less ideological and less dogmatic tone less linked to a traditional, rural and religious view of authority was adopted in the president's public discourse and in the political life of the country.

Such repositioning of "Democratic Security" policies and discourse by President Santos earned him the animosity of former President Uribe, who was accustomed to the unconditional obedience of his officials and partisans. It also earned him the animosity of thousands of Uribist militants who began to brand the new president a "traitor" and to delegitimize his political decisions.

## **The Havana peace process between 2012 and 2016**

The peace process with the FARC was made public at the end of 2012 after a year of secret conversations between insurgent commanders and Santos government emissaries, which had concluded in the signing of a minimalist agenda permitting the initiation of a public phase to such

conversations. The peace process has been well conducted to date by President Juan Manuel Santos, who has proven a skilled strategist in the quest for peace. The support of the international community has been key to its success: Cuba as host of the talks and, together with Norway, guarantor of the agreements, with Venezuela and Chile as support countries. Experiences involving the quest for peace in South Africa, Guatemala, Salvador, Ireland, and other countries were studied in order to advance the dialogue and highly competent national and international advisers, expert in conflict negotiation, international humanitarian law, transitional justice, and rural land reform, were consulted.

The UN's involvement was key for participation by social leaders from different regions of the country<sup>12</sup> in the discussion of each of the Havana negotiation agenda items. This enabled placing of the agenda items before such different social groups in different regions and gathering related societal input and proposals. This work was carried out by the UN and the Centro de Pensamiento y Seguimiento al Diálogo de Paz (Center for Thought and Follow-up on Peace) of the Universidad Nacional de Colombia, which also organized working meetings with a view to preparing proposals for the dialogue table in Havana among representatives of a wide variety of victims of the armed conflict from different regions.<sup>13</sup>

One of the most important aspects of the Havana peace negotiations was the attention paid to victims' reparations demands. Given the complexity of the Colombian conflict and the tensions arising from political polarization between Uribism and Santism not all groups of victims felt represented at the negotiating table; however, the UN, the Catholic Church, and the Universidad Nacional de Colombia made significant efforts to assure pluralistic and equitable representation of the different categories of victims. The inclusion through a liaison committee of active duty armed forces personnel and national police generals and senior officers in the Havana dialogues was also key to the negotiations' progress on issues involving terms for ending the conflict (disarmament, security and reincorporation of the insurgents into civilian life). Such officers also having participated in the redesign of their respective institutions in order to adjust to the new, post-agreement context.

Because for the main part negotiations took place in the midst of armed confrontation between the parties, they experienced several precarious moments, including: the FARC capturing (deemed a kidnapping by the government) General Alzate during November 2014 (*Semana*, 2014); the death of 14 soldiers in Buenos Aires, Cauca, in

an attack by the FARC during April 2015 (*Semana*, 2015a); and the systematic attacks by the FARC during June 2015 against electrical and oil infrastructure in Buenaventura, Tumaco, and Putumayo (*Semana*, 2015b). These episodes seriously threatened continuation of the peace talks.

The 2014 presidential election (May and June<sup>14</sup>) posed an additional challenge to the peace process because the Uribe radical opposition had, during the seven years of the Santos administration, generated not only visceral hatred against the FARC and Manuel Santos, but also, in parallel fashion, spawned significant fear with respect to the peace process and the transition of the FARC from a military insurgency into a political party. While Uribe's designated candidate, Oscar Ivan Zuluaga, won the most votes in the first round, Santos managed to win the second round thanks to supporters of the democratic left, Clara López' Alternative Democratic Pole Party and Gustavo Petro's Progressives Party, key allies in supporting political negotiation to end the war.

### **The Havana Peace Accords as agreements for democratization and social modernization**

The agenda for discussions on termination of the armed conflict included six agreed upon items: comprehensive rural reform; political participation; end of the conflict; solution to the problem of illicit drugs; victims' rights (including the transitional justice component); and ratification and implementation of the items agreed upon.

With respect to political participation, the objective involved conversion of the FARC into a political party so that, upon abandonment of its weapons, verbal arguments rather than bullets and bombs would be used to defend and promote their ideals. The topic of rural reform involved recovering a countryside totally neglected by ruling groups during the past half century. Modernization includes recording ownership to the 50% of rural property that neither has titles of record nor pays taxes, the granting of land to those displaced by the armed conflict, the construction of tertiary roads, and the implementation of improvements in rural healthcare and education. A key component of the accords deals with creation of the institutions required for implementation of transitional justice: the Special Jurisdiction of Peace (JEP in its Spanish acronym), the Commission for Clarification of the Truth (CV in its Spanish acronym), and the Unit for Search of Disappeared Persons (60,000 estimated). Those eminently democratic and modernizing tasks that have nothing to

do with socialism are currently major sources of tension among the Uribist right.

### **Reasons why the NO triumphed in the October 2, 2016 plebiscite**

Although unnecessary from a legal perspective, President Santos decided to submit the peace accords with the FARC to a public plebiscite as a means of strengthening the political legitimacy of the peace negotiations with the insurgency. Colombians would vote *yea* or *no* to express either their support for or opposition to the peace accords.

Despite being well designed and despite its success, the peace process was very poorly executed from the perspective of public opinion. Not only were there no public-to-state-to-government communication policies in place with respect to the Havana Accords but President Santos himself was communicatively ineffective, failing to express positive emotions such as “hope,” “enthusiasm for peace,” or “a collective sense for the future.” In addition, the excessively confident tone of the official promotional campaign during the final weeks preceding the plebiscite generated a false sense of security (and of governmental arrogance) when public opinion surveys indicated that the YES vote was likely to win with 70% of the vote. An additional factor involved the systematic failure of the Santos government to comply with agreements with social movements such as Dignidades Campesinas de Boyacá, truckers and educators, which led thousands of Colombians to vote NO, not so much because of their opinion with respect to the peace process but as a *de facto* plebiscite on the overall performance of the government.

The FARC’s poor communication, its delayed apology to victims (on September 26, 2016, only a few days after signing of the Peace Accord), as well as the contrast between its last-minute agreement to return land to victims compared with its initial assertion that “[w]e have neither the money nor the property to make reparations” obviously also failed to favorably impact the YES vote.

The mass media played a somewhat negative part in the process as the two major news providers on private television channels (essential sources of information for Colombians) made very limited supplemental information publicly available. Since the beginning of 2015, one network, RCN,<sup>15</sup> has been actively opposed to the peace process and through four daily programs on RCN News, its news channel and an important forum for peace process opponents, echoes

and expounds on the positions of former President Uribe and the Centro Democrático party's Congressional delegation (López de la Roche, 2018b).

Moreover, former President Uribe and the Uribist right's policy of "lying and myth building – falsehood and fear" (and slogans like "takeover of the country by Castro-Chavism", "Santos will deliver the country to Cuba"; we are headed toward a model like Maduro's Venezuela) played their part in the NO vote's success. A dirty propaganda campaign in traditional media and social networks by the Centro Democrático against the YES vote (unveiled with a mixture of cynicism, arrogance and ingenuity by its director, Juan Carlos Vélez, in a *La República* interview (2016)) implemented a deception-based strategy designed to generate indignation against the Havana Accords. Less well-off citizens were provoked with allegations that the Santos government would pay insurgents two million pesos monthly while better off citizens were incited by criticism of alleged insurgent impunity, eligibility for public office and resulting increased taxation (*La Republica*, 2016).

### **“Salvation” of the Peace Accords**

The NO vote triumphed by a little over 50,000 votes, a precarious triumph stained by illegitimacy given the surprising revelations of Juan Carlos Vélez on October 5 with respect to NO vote promoters' strategies for emotional manipulations of the voters. Reflecting the fact that the difference in voting between proponents and opponents of the Peace Accords had been negligible (in spite of having lost, almost half the country had voted YES) and that many of the NO voters had been manipulated through the Centro Democrático's admittedly dirty campaign, a broad student and citizen mobilization in defense of the Havana Accords was organized between Monday October 3 (the day after the plebiscite) and Wednesday October 5. On October 5, a huge concentration of university students filled the Plaza de Bolívar in Bogotá clamoring for peace under the slogans "No more war!" and "Agreements now!" and for a swift new agreement between the Santos government and spokespersons for NO voters in order to break the impasse generated by the victory by opponents of the YES vote. Concurrently, similar mobilizations took place in numerous cities in support of the Peace Accords and of their renegotiation with partisans of the NO vote (López de la Roche, 2018a).

Despite the need to seek consensus among YES and NO voters, the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to President Juan Manuel Santos



on Friday, October 7, 2016, constituted a formidable political and symbolic endorsement by the international community of the manner in which the quest for peace had been managed and of the manner in which victims' interests were to be dealt with. Additionally, on October 12, indigenous movements and numerous regional and local associations throughout the country joined the students in backing the peace process with another massive march to the Plaza de Bolívar. The resulting mobilization by the citizenry, animated by genuine feelings of hope and the conviction that war had to be overcome generated a complex new scenario (*Semana*, 2016).

Discussions between government negotiators with representatives of the different sectors who had led the campaign for the NO vote<sup>16</sup> permitted the presentation of their objections, many of which were deemed acceptable. However, notwithstanding the concessions made by government negotiators and FARC spokesmen, the obtuse opposition of former President Uribe was unrelenting. The opposition was partly predicated on Uribe's intransigence with respect to transitional justice, the absence of prison as punishment for insurgent leaders, opposition to comprehensive rural reform and to political participation by former FARC commanders). It also involved his personal rivalry with Santos for his "betrayal" of "Democratic Security" and calculations concerning the electoral benefits of radical opposition to the accords in the looming 2018 presidential election, the latter probably carrying more weight than judicious assessment of the points renegotiated<sup>17</sup>.

Given such circumstances, the Santos government played its only remaining card by signing a new accord with the FARC incorporating the points agreed to with opponents other than former President Uribe. The new accords between Santos and the FARC were signed on Thursday, November 24, 2016, at the Teatro Colón in a much more modest and lackluster ceremony than the one prior to the October 2, 2016 plebiscite. Rather than a second plebiscite, the new version of the accords were ratified by the Congress subject to approval by the Constitutional Court, making it possible to salvage the peace process and the agreements with the FARC but at the cost of a partial loss of legitimacy due to the electoral victory of the NO vote and because of the inability to secure the support of Uribe and his partisans: quantitatively significant deficiencies with an important impact on public opinion.

## Conclusions

At stake today in Colombia is not a transition to 21st century socialism or to a post-neoliberal economic-political model. What is deeply revolutionary in the contemporary Colombian experience is the severance of the exercise of politics from its relationship to violence, a development which now applies not only to the left but also to the right and the extreme right. They too must now exercise politics, especially in remote regions, dissociating themselves from paramilitary groups engaged in the murder of social and leftist leaders. Overcoming the internal armed conflict and displacing it from its privileged place on the political, electoral, and media agenda is likely to allow social agenda issues (health, education, improvement of rural life, employment and equity) to come to the fore in its place.

Contrary to Uribe's negative discourse and to that of his political and media spokesmen, as FARC insurgents were incorporated into rural settlement transition zones during the first half of 2017, the former fighters validated their strong desire for peace and for reincorporation into civil life to the population and the media. The delivery of 7,132 of their weapons to UN representatives at the different transition zones on Tuesday, June 27, 2017 reaffirmed such determination to national and international public opinion. The reauthorization of a second UN mission to verify implementation of the Teatro Colón agreements on July 10, 2017 signified renewed backing for the peace process on the part of international society. The peace process is highlighting profound changes in the former FARC insurgents' political culture. They now accept democratic institutions (the decisions of the Constitutional Court and Special Peace Jurisdiction, for example) and have reconsidered not only ideological ties to orthodox Marxism but also militaristic and authoritarian gambits typical of any politico-military insurgent organization.

Transformation and mental broadening in the political culture of important sectors of the military, the national police and liberal and conservative political classes are also being witnessed, notwithstanding the strong still existent national polarization concerning peace with the FARC and the implementation of the accords. However, and as part of the current situation's complexity foreshadowing a strong politico-ideological conflict during the post-accord period, significant opposition still exists among the sector of the right embodied in Uribism, several sectors of conservatism, a strong Protestant and Catholic moralistic right-wing, and social sectors victimized by the FARC, all of which maintain ideological, exclusionary, and revanchist

postures, still resisting or not yet prepared for reconciliation and forgiveness.

Sectors of the right, encouraged by Uribe Vélez's intransigent discourse and his rejection of everything in the Peace Accords that provides former insurgents with the right to participate in politics or that creates an equitable transitional justice system, seek a return to power in 2018 using the same discourse of fear and hate that has characterized them politically during the past 15 years of the nation's history.

Opposition to such sectors will need to be based on democratic strategies emphasizing peace-building and compliance with the accords, reconstruction of trust and hope among Colombians, progress in attaining social justice, and in the construction of modern institutions in rural and marginal urban areas, and minimization of widespread corruption among almost all political forces. As John Paul Lederach (2016) has emphasized, periods of armed conflict tend to dehumanize mutual perceptions among enemies while peace processes favor the re-humanization of social relations.

It is probable that this process of re-humanization of relations between Colombians which seeks the generation of hope and confidence in reconciliation and the attainment of collective purposes is only just beginning, and that between 30 to 50 years will be required to consolidate it. But the truth is that with the current peace process, the first steps in that direction have already been taken.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia, Brazil, Argentina and briefly Paraguay during the Lugo government.
- <sup>2</sup> The FARC were born during 1964 and only started reincorporation into civil society in July 2017.
- <sup>3</sup> For more detailed information concerning the analytical elements with respect to Uribe's political culture heritage, see López de la Roche (2014).
- <sup>4</sup> A term coined by the author, López de la Roche (2014).
- <sup>5</sup> The FARC facilitated their transformation by Uribe into Colombian society's "worst monster" through their absurd justification for kidnapping as a purported "social tax."
- <sup>6</sup> Primarily involving US sponsored Plan Colombia. Assistance under Plan Colombia reallocated from the War on Drugs to counterinsurgency operations during the administration of President Pastrana (1998–2002) had permitted retooling of the Colombian armed forces which had suffered crippling blows during the 1990s at the hands of the FARC, including the loss of government garrisons and dozens of soldiers taken prisoner, especially during the administration of Ernesto Samper (1994–98).

- <sup>7</sup> At the conclusion of the Uribe administration, its government shelved a Congressional proposal for a "Law of Victims," with one of its ideologues, José Obdulio Gaviria, daring to affirm that "no displaced persons existed in Colombia but rather, only internal migrants" (*Revista Cambio*, 2008).
- <sup>8</sup> Notaries are much more important, prestigious and lucrative than in the US, more akin to quasi-judiciary county clerkships.
- <sup>9</sup> They do so for various reasons, including: because they were victims of extortion or kidnapping by the FARC; for their ideological affinity with President Uribe's "hard hand" discourse and actions against the insurgents; or because of fanatical and uncritical assimilation of the "democratic security" discourse.
- <sup>10</sup> The proposal sponsored by progressive sectors of the Liberal Party involved providing reparations for the consequences of past and recent political violence to a broad group of victims.
- <sup>11</sup> For more complete information concerning the communicative regimes of the Uribe Vélez and Santos administrations and with respect to hegemonic characteristics of other "communicative regimes" in Colombia, see López de la Roche (2013).
- <sup>12</sup> Indigenous peoples, campesinos, Afro-Colombians, settlers, small and medium range entrepreneurs, and so on.
- <sup>13</sup> The author participated with social leaders and victims as a member of the Centro de Pensamiento y Seguimiento al Diálogo de Paz of the Universidad Nacional de Colombia during each of its combined working sessions, serving as the moderator of a 30-person dialogue working group.
- <sup>14</sup> Colombia requires an absolute majority of the popular vote for a first round electoral victory and a second round was required in the 2014 election.
- <sup>15</sup> Radio Cadena Nacional, S.A. (the National Radio Network) a provider of mass radio and television programming with a presence in 50 countries.
- <sup>16</sup> For example, Protestant pastors, ultraconservative former attorney general Alejandro Ordóñez, the Conservative Party sector led by Martha Lucía Ramírez, Francisco Santos and former President Uribe of the Centro Democrático.
- <sup>17</sup> The first round of presidential elections was held in Colombia on 27 May 2018. As no candidate received a majority of the vote, a second round was held on 17 June. In this round Ivan Duque, candidate of right-wing party Centro Democrático, was elected.

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## Cine Bajo Tierra: Ecuador's Booming Underground Cinema in the Aftermath of the Neoliberal Era

*Rafael Ponce-Cordero*

I film, therefore I am.

Nelson Palacios, Ecuadorian filmmaker

When I am not around anymore, I want to be remembered as a woman who was important. I want to make something real, so when people ask “Who was Irma Herrera?” they will remember me ... as the pioneer of cinema in [my hometown of] El Triunfo.

Irma Herrera, Ecuadorian filmmaker

Film or die!

Fernando Cedeño, Ecuadorian filmmaker<sup>1</sup>

There is a cinematic boom going on in Ecuador. Long gone are the days when Ecuadorian films were few and far between, when there could be prolonged periods of time—sometimes several years in a row—without a single movie release, when every new motion picture felt like the first. In fact, when *La tigre* (The tigress), a film based on a short story by José de la Cuadra and directed by Camilo Luzuriaga, premiered in 1990, renowned Ecuadorian poet and cineaste Ulises Estrella sardonically criticized its promoters' apparent inaugural



pretensions (De la Vega, 2016, pp. 20–21). *La tigre* was not the first feature-length fictional film ever made in the South American country, of course,<sup>2</sup> but it quickly became—and, today, it still is—the biggest box office hit in the history of Ecuadorian cinema.<sup>3</sup>

*La tigre*'s success notwithstanding, the 1990s saw the release of only three additional Ecuadorian movies, one of them also directed by Luzuriaga, and the other two by various members of just one single family. *Sensaciones* (Sensations), by siblings Juan Esteban Cordero and Viviana Cordero, premiered in 1991; *Entre Marx y una mujer desnuda* (Between Marx and a naked woman), by Luzuriaga, in 1996; and *Ratas, ratones, rateros* (Rats, mice, petty thieves), by Juan Esteban and Viviana's younger brother, Sebastián Cordero, in 1999. The latter film, arguably the first one made in the South American nation with international production values, marks a definite watershed in the history of Ecuadorian cinema, to such an extent that it is usually heralded as the cornerstone of today's so-called boom. Cordero would go on to become the most recognizable Ecuadorian filmmaker of all time both inside and outside his country, and to helm projects backed by global capital, such as 2004's *Crónicas* (Chronicles), a Mexico/Ecuador co-production shot in Ecuador with American, Mexican, Spanish, and Ecuadorian actors; 2009's *Rabia* (Rage), a Mexico/Spain/Colombia collaboration filmed in Spain with Colombian, Mexican, and Spanish performers; and 2013's *Europa Report*, an American movie made in the US with an international cast featuring American, Romanian, Swedish, Polish, and South African talent.

After *Ratas*..., there seemed to be an awakening of filmmaking enthusiasm in Cordero's home country. While the 1990s gave us a meager four feature-length movies, for an average of one release every two and a half years, the following decade would see the pace of production increase to an average of three releases per year. Some of the works produced in the wake of Cordero's opera prima are *Alegría de una vez* (My one time joy), directed by Mateo Herrera, and *Sueños en la mitad del mundo* (Dreams in the middle of the world), by Carlos Naranjo, in 2001; *Un titán en el ring* (A titan in the ring), by Viviana Cordero, and *Fuera de juego* (Offside), by Víctor Arregui, in 2002; *Cara o cruz* (Heads or tails), by Camilo Luzuriaga, and *Tiempo de ilusiones* (Time for illusions), by Germán Aguilar and Margarita Reyes, in 2003; *1808–1810: mientras llega el día* (1808–1810: until that day comes), by Camilo Luzuriaga, and the already mentioned *Crónicas*, in 2004; *Jaque* (Check), by Mateo Herrera, in 2005; and *Qué tan lejos* (How much further), by Tania Hermida, in 2006. The latter film is to this day the second largest box office hit in the history of Ecuadorian cinema, the

only one other than *La tigra* to sell over 220,000 tickets, and with 24 weeks in movie houses it had one of the longest theatrical runs on record for a domestic production. It was around this time—the mid to late 2000s—when some people started talking about an Ecuadorian cinematic boom.

This was not unreasonable. Some of these movies were good, some were selected to participate and even won awards at prestigious film festivals from around the world, and some were commercially successful or at least viable. And, while an average of three releases per year may look like nothing to write home about, it was progress. Yet the best was still to come: in the late 2000s and early 2010s, production climbed again, at such a pace that 2012 saw the theatrical release of six Ecuadorian motion pictures, thirteen more premiered during 2013, and 2014 brought a record sixteen.<sup>4</sup>

State support has been decisive in the development of this still modest cinematic boom, especially in the last decade or so—in other words, since Rafael Correa's rise to power in 2007. Charismatic leader of what he called a citizens' revolution, sympathizer of the new socialism of the 21st century, and self-proclaimed anti-neoliberal, Correa did not hide his conviction that the state can—and should—intervene in the most diverse facets of national life, including the cultural field. He also believed that those diverse facets, and in particular the cultural field, must serve a common good defined as the advancement of the key values of the citizens' revolution. Ecuador's Ley de Cine (Film Law), which was promulgated in 2006 and thus predated Correa's presidency by about a year (Maldonado, 2014), as well as the subsequent creation of the Consejo Nacional de Cinematografía (National Council of Cinematography) or CNCine, recently renamed and reconfigured as the Instituto de Cine y Creación Audiovisual (Institute of Cinema and Audiovisual Creation) or ICCA, have been instrumental in the formation and consolidation of an embryonic Ecuadorian film industry mainly through the distribution of subsidies to the tune of \$1 million per year on average.<sup>5</sup> Between 2007 and 2015, CNCine financed almost 400 projects (Criollo, 2016).

Some motion pictures made in Ecuador over the past ten years—many of them with state funding—include *Cuando me toque a mí* (When my turn comes, released in English as *My Time Will Come*), directed by Víctor Arregui, and *Esas no son penas* (Those are not sorrows, released as *Anytime Soon*), by Anahí Hoeneisen and Daniel Andrade, in 2007; *Retazos de vida* (Offcuts from real life), by Viviana Cordero, in 2008; *Impulso* (Impulse), by Mateo Herrera, *Los canallas* (The scoundrels, released as *Riff Raff*), by Ana Cristina Franco, and *Blak Mama [sic]*, by

Miguel Alvear and Patricio Andrade, in 2009; *A tus espaldas* (Behind you), by Tito Jara, and *Prometeo deportado* (Deporting Prometheus), by Fernando Mieles, in 2010; *En el nombre de la hija* (In the name of the daughter, released as *In the Name of the Girl*), by Tania Hermida, and *Pescador* (Fisherman), by Sebastián Cordero, in 2011; *Sin otoño, sin primavera* (No autumn, no spring), by Iván Mora Manzano, and *Mejor no hablar (de ciertas cosas)* (Better not to talk (about certain things), released as *The Porcelain Horse*), by Javier Andrade, in 2012; *No robarás (a menos que sea necesario)* (Thou shalt not steal (unless it is necessary)), by Viviana Cordero, *Mono con gallinas* (Monkey with chickens, released as *Open Wound*), by Alfredo León, *Distante cercanía* (Distant proximity), by Alex Schlenker and Diego Coral, *El facilitador* (The facilitator), by Víctor Arregui, *Tinta sangre* (Blood ink), by Mateo Herrera, *La llamada* (The call, released as *On the Line*), by David Nieto Wenzell, and *Silencio en la tierra de los sueños* (Silence in the land of dreams, released as *Silence in Dreamland*), by Tito Molina, in 2013; *Quito 2023*, by César Izurieta and Juan Fernando Moscoso, *Saudade* (Melancholy), by Juan Carlos Donoso, *Sexy Montañita*, by Alberto Pablo Rivera, *Feriado* (Holiday), by Diego Araujo, and *A estas alturas de la vida* (At this point in life), by Manuel Calisto and Alex Cisneros, in 2014; *Adolescentes* (Teenagers), by Rogelio Gordon, *Sed* (Thirst), by Joe Houlberg, *La descorrupción* (The de-corruption), by María Emilia García, and *Ochentaísiete* (Eighty-seven), by Anahí Hoeneisen and Daniel Andrade, in 2015; *Alba*, by Ana Cristina Barragán, *Entre sombras: Averno* (Between shadows: Hell), by Xavier Bustamante Ruiz, *UIO: sácame a pasear* (UIO: take me for a ride),<sup>6</sup> by Micaela Rueda, *Tan distintos* (So different, released as *An Ocean Between Us*), by Pablo Arturo Suárez, *Translúcido* (Translucent), by Leonard Zelig, and *Sin muertos no hay carnaval* (There is no carnival without dead people, released as *Such is Life in the Tropics*), by Sebastián Cordero, in 2016; *Tal vez mañana* (Perhaps tomorrow), by Dwight Gregorich, *Sólo es una más* (It is just one more), by Viviana Cordero, and *Quijotes negros* (Black Quixotes), by Sandino Burbano, in 2017; *Oscuridad* (Darkness), by Jaime Rosero, *Cenizas* (Ashes), by Juan Sebastián Jácome, and *Agujero negro* (Black hole), by Diego Araujo, in 2018. Also worth mentioning are feature-length documentaries such as *Descartes* (Scraps), directed by Fernando Mieles (2009); *Abuelos* (Grandparents), by Carla Valencia (2010); *Con mi corazón en Yambo* (With my heart in Yambo), by María Fernanda Restrepo (2011); *La bisabuela tiene Alzheimer* (My great-grandmother has Alzheimer's disease), by Iván Mora Manzano (2012); *La muerte de Jaime Roldós* (The death of Jaime Roldós),<sup>7</sup> by Manolo Sarmiento and Lisandra Rivera

(2013); *Alfaro Vive Carajo*,<sup>8</sup> by Mauricio Samaniego (2015); and *Si yo muero primero* (If I die first), by Rodolfo Muñoz (2017).

A boom indeed, especially for a country such as Ecuador, a tiny peripheral fragment of a Latin American film industry that is itself already peripheral in the context of global capitalism. Important though it may be, however, this is not the Ecuadorian cinematic boom that this chapter wants to examine. For there is a different, unofficial, subterranean cinematic boom also going on in the South American nation.

### The ‘other’ boom

“It turns out there is another cinema in Ecuador,” Quito-based visual artist and filmmaker Miguel Alvear wrote in 2009. “It is such a different cinema that the word *another* should be capitalized,” he added. Yet which one of these distinct expressions of the Ecuadorian cinematic imagination deserves to be defined by its alleged otherness was then, and remains, a debatable issue. Alvear went on to characterize this alternative Ecuadorian cinema in terms of its relationship with the marketplace and the audience:

You will not find these movies on the screens of any theater in the country. Their place, where they thrive and feel like home, is the pirate DVD market, where anything goes, where everything can be sold and bought, where hierarchies such as artistic-commercial, good-bad, Gringo-European-Latino have been obliterated forever. And, believe it or not, in contrast to the other Ecuadorian cinema—the semi-subsidized one that wins prizes at international festivals—this cinema sells like hotcakes. (Alvear, 2009a, p.28)

Together with film critic and academic Christian León, Alvear conducted an investigation that resulted in the 2009 book *Ecuador bajo tierra: videografías en circulación paralela* (Underground Ecuador: videographies in parallel circulation), still today the best source of information about this movement. After considering other options such as amateur, exploitation, trash, and low-budget cinema, they concluded that the most fitting adjective to describe the phenomenon that they had just “unearthed” was *underground* (León, 2009, pp.12–13), and thus labeled it “Ecuador bajo tierra” (EBT). A marveled quality is palpable throughout their writing after the realization that

there was a complex system of production, distribution, and commercialization that did not go through the quality standards, the film schools, the filmmakers guild, the audiovisual production structures, the commercial or alternative movie theaters, the Internal Revenue Service, the Ley de Cine regulations, or the jurisdiction of cultural authorities. We discovered that there was a massive audiovisual universe running parallel to the institutionalized realm of cinema, the lettered culture, the middle class, and the formal market. (León 2009, p.11)

Another voice that contributed to the task of making these subterranean movies visible was writer and academic Gabriela Alemán, who also in 2009 published an essay on the pirate DVD market in Ecuador included in the edited volume *Latsploitation, Exploitation Cinemas, and Latin America*. That same year, Alvear joined forces with Ochoymedio, a cultural organization led by film producer Mariana Andrade, to put together the EBT film festival. This event, which has had three additional iterations since then, marked the first encounter between these underground creators and mainstream audiences in Quito and Guayaquil. In 2010, Alvear would revisit the EBT movement, this time in a docu-fiction titled *Más allá del mall* (Beyond the mall). Using his own experience as a commercially unsuccessful filmmaker, a fictionalized Alvear played by actor Andrés Crespo sets out to understand where the ‘real’ Ecuadorian cinema is, distressed by the revelation that most domestic productions do not turn a profit—his *Blak Mama*, for instance, ends up \$247,267 in the red and is seen in theaters by only 1,922 moviegoers. The protagonist then ‘discovers’ the elusive EBT filmography, travels around the country interviewing these popular filmmakers, and winds up deciding to bring *Blak Mama* to the pirate DVD distributors and let them copy it—he just wants his work to reach an audience. Throughout *Más allá...*, as throughout most of the texts and media dealing with the EBT phenomenon, the comparison between the two sides of Ecuadorian cinema is inevitable, awkward, and instructive.

The films that belong to the post-*Ratas...* and especially post-*Qué tan...* explosion of ‘mainstream’ filmmaking creativity in Ecuador described above have a number of things in common. Their participants see themselves as auteurs, regard what they make as art, usually come from Quito or Guayaquil or live in those cities, have attended film school in Ecuador or abroad, are members of the upper middle class and tell their stories from that specific perspective—even if they depict

poverty or include lower class characters—and their productions have an average budget of \$370,000 (García Velásquez, 2017, p.91) that would be unthinkable without state subventions, among other reasons because very few people go to the theater to watch these expensive movies.

Until the late 2000s, each new Ecuadorian production—being a relatively isolated novelty—was able to attract an average of 100,000 moviegoers (García Velásquez, 2017, p.84). Beginning in the early 2010s, box office figures started to decline rather sharply. As the number of movies per year drastically rose, the response from the public grew colder: 2013's thirteen releases had to share 235,000 viewers, 2014's record sixteen films attracted a paltry 85,000 moviegoers, and 2015's five productions sold an embarrassing combined total of under 5,000 tickets. Indeed,

Trying to explain the mismatch between this exponential growth in the production of national cinema (300%) and the extremely low levels of ticket sales has been a constant in the analyses on the topic. However, these analyses leave out the demand for that 'other cinema', absent from commercial theaters, that is produced not only in tune with, but even at the express request of, the public. (Montalvo, 2016, p.6)

The underground films that belong to this 'alternative' explosion of filmmaking creativity do not sell tickets in commercial theaters either, because in fact they are not even shown there. Yet despite their shoestring budgets they have an audience of hundreds of thousands, sometimes even millions, thanks to their considerable success in the informal market of pirate DVDs completely outside the conventional channels of cultural distribution—and, more recently, their free circulation on the internet via video-sharing websites such as YouTube or peer-to-peer file-sharing protocols such as BitTorrent. They are part of "globalization from below," that is, globalization "as experienced by most of the world's people" or "the transnational flow of people and goods involving relatively small amounts of capital and informal, often semi-legal or illegal transactions, often associated with 'the developing world' but in fact apparent across the globe" (Mathews and Alba Vega, 2012, p.1).

In most cases, the creators involved in this parallel cinematic boom are not from Quito or Guayaquil, nor do they live in those cities. They are from rural areas of the country, mainly in the coast.<sup>9</sup> The regional divide between the mainstream cinematic boom and its subterranean

counterpart cannot be overstated in a nation so intensely affected by regionalism<sup>10</sup>. In the words of *La Tigra*'s director, "Ecuadorian cinema is perceived as cinema from Quito; it is not perceived as national" (Luzuriaga, 2014). Suffice it to say that, according to CNCine, every year about 80% of the state monies dedicated to the promotion of the national film industry are awarded to Quito-based projects.

It is obvious, and often painfully so, that EBT filmmakers have not studied filmmaking at all, in Ecuador or abroad, and they are far from being members of the upper middle class, something that their movies make quite clear. While the first boom's creators favor non-linear narratives and other techniques typical of "great cinema," their underground counterparts choose clarity over cleverness every time. While the first boom's directors show, in general, white-mestizo city dwellers who belong to the middle or upper classes, except when they want to portray the dangers of a supposedly pervasive urban criminality, the other ones make Ecuador's enormous racial diversity visible and let the viewers peek into a world that is eminently rural, lower class, even marginal.

Crucially, and in stark contrast to their mainstream counterparts, EBT creators do not receive state funding at all, making this alternative boom a truly independent phenomenon that responds exclusively to a massive consumption by the subaltern classes of Ecuadorian society<sup>11</sup>.

### **Underground movies, subaltern voices**

The EBT phenomenon has multiple foci throughout the country, particularly in the littoral region, and a growing number of participants from diverse backgrounds. However, its epicenter is arguably Chone, a small city in the province of Manabí, so much so that the term Chonewood is now commonly used—albeit often in a tongue-in-cheek way—by the media, in academia, and by Choneños themselves (see for example Alvear, 2009a; Neumane, 2013; Araya, 2016; Cedeño, 2016; Coryat and Zweig, 2017).

The story of underground filmmaking in Chone is a tale of two pioneers, Nixon Chalacamá and Fernando Cedeño, with an indefatigable desire to "be in the movies"<sup>12</sup> and express themselves through cinematic means. As they have reminisced in numerous interviews, most notably for Alvear's *Más allá...*, in their youth both men were part of a bunch of friends in love with martial arts and motorcycles. At some point in the early 1990s, one of their pals got a hold of a VHS camcorder, so the group started taping their fights and races. One day, Chalacamá suggested they make a movie akin to the

Bruce Lee, Jean-Claude Van Damme, or Arnold Schwarzenegger-led action flicks they liked. Cedeño thought he was crazy, but went along with the idea, as did the rest of the crew. The result was 1994's *En busca del tesoro perdido* (In search of the lost treasure), followed by *Potencia blanca* (White energy) one year later. Today, both works are sadly lost, but they were shown for several days at the now defunct movie theater Oriflama,<sup>13</sup> where they attracted big crowds of locals despite being such rudimentary productions that their camera movements—shot without tripods or Steadicams—left many in the audience dizzy from motion sickness (Alvear, 2009a, p.33).

Chalacamá has directed or co-directed five feature-length films and several shorts since then. *El destructor invisible* (The invisible destroyer), from 1996, has in Alvear's words the privilege of being "the first postmodern Ecuadorian movie" (quoted by actor Andrés Crespo during the Pinchagua Voladora (Flying Herring) award ceremony at the second EBT film festival in 2013). To make it, Chalacamá mixed and matched scenes originally recorded for his previous productions, splicing them together, redubbing them, and ultimately managing to create a somewhat coherent story against all odds. Chalacamá's most interesting film may be 2012's *Los raidistas* (The raiders), co-directed with Ignacio Solórzano. First, because it is a historical drama based on the real-life adventure of five Choneños who in 1939 traveled cross-country to Quito in a Chevrolet convertible to demonstrate the viability of the itinerary and force the government to fund the construction of the first road connecting Chone to the capital. Second, because it features Colonel Lucio Gutiérrez, leader of the coup d'état that deposed Jamil Mahuad in 2000 and then democratically elected president of Ecuador from 2003 to 2005, in the role of 1930s dictator General Alberto Enríquez Gallo. Chalacamá's latest movie, 2017's *Un minuto de vida* (A minute to live), tackles the difficult topic of human trafficking for sexual exploitation purposes with a heavy dose of Chonewood's trademark cinematic action and violence. Made for around \$20,000 (Ramos Monteiro, 2016, p.48), Chalacamá's biggest budget to date by a large margin, it was among the first Ecuadorian motion pictures to use a drone for aerial filming and shows a remarkable progress for the director in terms of production values and narrative technique when compared to his earlier efforts.

A reluctant participant at first, Cedeño is now considered one of the de facto leaders of the EBT movement, for which he prefers the term "guerrilla cinema."<sup>14</sup> His first movie as a director, *Avaricia* (Avarice), was released in 1999. Still made in close collaboration with Chalacamá—they parted ways, amicably, in the early 2000s—it



featured a motorcycle chase that later became a cult sequence among some professional filmmakers in Quito (Alvear, 2009a, p.34). His second work, 2004's *Sicarios manabitas* (Hitmen from Manabí), may well be the most commercially successful Ecuadorian film of all time: it is said to have sold over a million copies in the pirate DVD market (Alvear, 2009a, p.35). A tale of love, violence, and revenge, this western continues to be the undisputed flagship of the EBT phenomenon to this day. Cedeño took a long time to complete his third motion picture, *El ángel de los sicarios* (The hitmen's angel), released in 2012 to great acclaim. It tells the story of Ángel, a young man who becomes a vigilante after witnessing the murder of his parents, devoting his life to the seemingly unachievable mission of killing each and every hired gun in a Manabí full of them. As with Chalacamá's latest project, *El ángel...* exhibits unusually high production values, to such an extent that—despite a frugal budget of just \$4,000—it is perhaps the only EBT creation virtually indistinguishable, in terms of 'look', from many of the movies produced by professional Ecuadorian filmmakers at almost 100 times the cost.

Manabí is not, of course, the only place with an intense EBT activity. To the south, also on the coastal region, the Guayas province—where Guayaquil, the most populous city in the country, is located—has a lot to offer in terms of underground cinema. To start with, it is the home province of Nelson Palacios, without a doubt the most prolific Ecuadorian filmmaker of all time. Born in the city of Milagro and a resident of Durán, a commuter town just outside Guayaquil, Palacios averages a whopping 4.5 movies per year: he had directed 12 by the end of 2009 (Alvear, 2009b, p.57), 26 by early 2012 (Matamoros, 2012), 36 by mid-2014 (Martillo Monserrate, 2014), and almost 50 by the end of 2016 (Alvear, 2016, p.2). Some of his films are also exceptionally popular: *Pedro, el amante de mamá* (Pedro, mom's lover), from 2014, has over 11 million views on YouTube as of November 2018, which probably makes it the most watched movie in the history of Ecuadorian cinema.

Palacios started producing his substantial body of work in 2006 with a small video camera and the help of his family, friends, and neighbors. His oeuvre includes Chonewood-style westerns full of gun violence, such as 2007's *Sicarios malditos* (Damned hitmen) and 2008's *El llanero vengador* (The avenging cowboy) as well as its sequel *El regreso del llanero vengador* (The return of the avenging cowboy) from the following year, but Palacios seems to be a creator with a wider range of interests. He has explored the horror genre in films such as 2010's *No te burlas de los muertos* (Do not make fun of the dead) and 2015's *Cansado de esperar*

*sentí a la muerte llegar* (Tired of waiting I felt death coming), religious cinema in 2011's *El pastor, el ateo y el ciego* (The pastor, the atheist, and the blind man) and 2012's *El pastor y el siervo del mal* (The pastor and the servant of evil), and even the animal movie genre in 2012's *Sentimientos de Jashy* (Jashy's feelings), which features the director's own dog in the title role.

The main obsessions for Palacios as a storyteller, in any case, seem to be abandonment and poverty. These two themes, which are reportedly autobiographical, combine to produce a certain kind of "masculine melodrama" (León, 2009, p.125) that informs much of his output. Examples include movies such as *La niña abandonada* (The abandoned girl) and *Buscando a mamá* (Looking for mum), from 2007; *El dolor de ser pobre* (The pain of being poor), from 2008; *No me dejes, mamá* (Do not leave me, mum), from 2009; *Recordando a mamá* (Remembering mum) and *Cuando nos toca llorar* (When it is our turn to cry), from 2011; *La hija no deseada* (The unwanted daughter), from 2012; *Espérame en el cielo, mamá* (Wait for me in heaven, mum), from 2014; and *Te perdono, papá* (I forgive you, dad), from 2016.

There is room for feminine melodrama, too, within the EBT movement. Also in Guayas, two female directors have made a point of presenting their perspective in underground movies. Bárbara Morán, an actress since she was 12, is a playwright who has written over 40 theater plays (Martillo Monserrate, 2012). One day, she decided to tape some of them with the help of her family and an amateur crew, and thus 2007's *Lágrimas de una madre* (A mother's tears), 2008's *Sueño de morir* (The dream of dying), 2009's *Cuando los hijos se van* (When children leave), 2010's *El gran varón* (The great man), and 2011's *Emigrantes latinos* (Latino emigrants) were born. The latter film is undoubtedly her most interesting one, because it deals with the collapse of the national economy and its dollarization in the early 2000s, the massive migration of suddenly impoverished Ecuadorians to Spain, and the racism that many of them suffered there. Meanwhile, Irma Herrera has made three feature-length movies, each of them in a different genre, during the last decade. Inspired by Nelson Palacios, who in 2008 visited her hometown of El Triunfo in search of locations for his next production, she premiered *Fantasías de Rita* (Rita's fantasies), a fairy tale aimed at children made with a budget of less than \$1,000, before an audience of 800 people. Her second film, *Odisea de un sueño* (Odyssey of a dream), tackled the drama of immigration and violence in the US–Mexico border. It cost almost \$20,000 and debuted in front of 2,000 spectators (Franco, 2016, p.7). For her third movie, Herrera chose to tell the

story of her hometown's name change in the 2016 documentary *De Boca de los Sapos a El Triunfo* (From Boca de los Sapos to El Triunfo).

Indigenous people, in this case from the highlands, are another prominent demographic in the EBT movement. In fact, the films of the Sinchi Samay collective directed by William León, such as *Ch'uchipak Navidadtapash* a.k.a. *La Navidad de Pollito* (Pollito's Christmas), from 2004, and its sequel *Ch'uchi Tigramuytapash* a.k.a. *Pollito 2*, from 2007, both in Kichwa<sup>15</sup> and both incredibly popular, were among the first 'discoveries' that launched the original EBT research project (León, 2009, p.11). More recently, in 2014, Sinchi Samay and William León premiered a horror movie titled *Pillallaw* that narrates the legend of the titular monster. Given the current surge in indigenous filmmaking, as well as the special situation of native Ecuadorians in a country that defines itself as pluricultural,<sup>16</sup> CNCine created a specific category for this kind of endeavor—first conceptualized as 'community cinema' and then subsumed under the broader umbrella of 'intercultural content'—in order to provide an avenue for state funding. This makes indigenous film the only portion of Ecuadorian underground audiovisual production with access to institutional support (Coryat and Zweig, 2017, pp.276–8).

Other regions where EBT activity is conspicuous are Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas, a province created in 2007 that used to belong to Pichincha (where Quito is located), and Esmeraldas, the northernmost coastal province. In the former, Manabí-born Cristóbal Zambrano has been able to complete three films, including one where he plays a feral child in the Tarzan tradition (Espinosa, 2015). In the latter, Elías Cabrera has written and directed over 15 movies, several of them—such as 2010's *La Tunda*<sup>17</sup> and 2011's *Mitos afro* (Afro myths) along with their respective sequels—re-telling old legends taken from Afro-Ecuadorian folklore. He is also behind the 2015 urban actioner *El taxista verdugo* (The killing taxi driver) (Bonilla, 2015). From Esmeraldas as well, but working out of Isla Trinitaria—an extremely impoverished area of Guayaquil with a large, and growing, Afro-Ecuadorian population—Jackson Jickson directed *Trinity Island: dime hasta cuándo* (Trinity Island: when will it stop) in 2014 and starred in José Daniel Cuesta's *Una noche sin sueño* (A sleepless night) the following year (Holguín, 2017). In a similar vein, Félix Caicedo has depicted how truly bare 'bare life' can be in Bastión Popular, another of Guayaquil's slums, in his 2016–17 pentalogy *Un día en Bastión* (A day in Bastión).

Granted, these films are all of variable and often questionable quality, and plenty of them are simply dreadful. Copies of copies of copies, their creators draw inspiration from Hollywood action blockbusters,

from Hong Kong martial arts movies, from the narco-narratives produced in Mexico and Colombia and other countries devastated by the consequences of the illegal drug trade and the ‘legal’ fight against it, from popular music, and so forth:

Popular videographies advance readings of appropriation that take the codes of hegemonic cinema to rework, relocate, and exacerbate them in a questioning process emanated from the imitation of an impossible model. Indeed, among EBT films we find westerns, melodramas, comedies, and zombie movies that, perhaps without intention, parody Hollywood narratives from a local perspective. (León, 2009, p.22)

They employ these sources liberally, with more boldness than ability, and with very little faithfulness. Their plots are formulaic, their characters stereotypical, their actors amateurish, and, in the ultimate affront to the lettered city, their credits often contain typos or even gross grammatical errors. It seems obvious, though, that the importance of cultural artifacts such as these EBT films—however ‘good’ or ‘bad’ one considers them to be as works of art or entertainment—cannot be overstated at a time when “Latin American national majorities are accessing modernity not through books but rather through audiovisual technologies and formats” (Martín-Barbero, 1992, p.14). Furthermore, “there is nothing that is not social and historical—indeed, . . . everything is ‘in the last analysis’ political” (Jameson, 2002, p.5). Even lowbrow entertainment, even bad movies, and even clichéd tales of hired assassins, abandoned daughters, and ancestral indigenous monsters. Dismissing the most popular films in today’s Ecuador does very little to advance the study of Ecuadorian cinema and Ecuadorian popular culture. The sensibilities these movies channel are clearly popular, in the sense of “stemming from the common people,” although the concomitant senses of “adapted to the ordinary taste” and “commercially successful” are not foreign to them—*Sicarios manabitas* alone is proof of that.

Beyond the exaggeration and glamorization, understandable given their sources of inspiration, EBT’s crude and generalized violence is far from gratuitous: it responds to a violent reality. Specifically, to the nefarious consequences of the application of neoliberal policies in Ecuador since the 1980s (Eguren, 2017, p.108). In a post-modern, post-revolutionary, post-ideological, in fact virtually post-everything, and—this is critical—allegedly post-national world, the spectacle of “every man for himself” seems hardly baffling. Neither should it be

surprising, in these times, to find popular narratives that treat the cruelest violence as habitual and omnipresent. EBT movies “portray, display, and create the social memory of a marginal, violent, neglected, and forgotten city for those who inhabit it from other points of view” (Henríquez Mendoza, 2017, p.97). They make visible previously silenced “memories without archive” regarding true violence and thus constitute the “irruption of the other” in Ecuador’s audiovisual landscape (Pinto, 2017, pp.130–31).

That said, it is perhaps worth inquiring why this boom of a kind of cinema that is at once hyper-violent and hyper-popular—and/or offers a heightened, almost hysterical melodrama that stems from the most abject destitution—occurs precisely under an openly anti-neoliberal government whose achievements include a pronounced decrease in poverty as well as an apparently sincere effort to redistribute wealth at a level never before seen in Ecuador.

### **A post-neoliberal era in Ecuador?**

In part, of course, the answer lies in the fact that it is impossible to undo in just a few years a reality of social and economic exclusion shaped by a history of decades, if not centuries. In part, too, a redistribution of wealth “at a level never before seen” in a country such as Ecuador still leaves us with shocking inequality, because the previous levels have always been negligible. Yet it seems clear that, also in part, the crux of the matter lies in the way Correa’s anti-neoliberalism has at times been only timidly anti-neoliberal.

A good approach to measuring how truly post-neoliberal the current situation of Ecuador is may be to compare it to neighboring nations not involved in leftist rhetoric and politics for the past decade. A recent study did so and found that

beyond alignment with ‘twenty-first century socialism’ or ‘neo-liberalism’, the differences in terms of how property concentration is treated are not major, even though the governments of Colombia and Peru are more enthusiastic supporters of investment in large-scale farming for export than are the governments in Ecuador and Bolivia. (Eguren, 2017, p.121)

While it is true that “In office, Correa has implemented policies that shifted resources to poor and marginalized sectors of society. Many of his moves against the conservative oligarchy have earned him

broad popular acclaim” (Becker, 2013, p.47), it is also undeniable that “Coupled with Correa’s technocratic leadership style, his government did not organize the subaltern beyond elections, and has not promoted mechanisms of participatory democracy at the local and community level” (De la Torre, 2013, p.28), as well as that, in Correa’s usage, socialism “meant state investment and spending in the pursuit of national development that essentially left intact existing class relations” (Riofrancos, 2017, p.42).

Correa has had more than his fair share of disapproval, opposition, and outright enmity from right-wing, neoliberal, or oligarchic types, but it is the criticism from the left, and specifically from social-movement activists, that matters more here. Their problem with Correa “is not that he is too radical but that he is too conciliatory toward imperial forces, has refused to make a clean break from Ecuador’s neoliberal past, and has failed to open up participatory spaces” (Becker, 2013, p.53).

In fact, while he was brought to power by a coalition of social movements, particularly indigenous and ecologist ones, as well as a broad spectrum of leftist forces, Correa’s relationship with most of these groups grew sour almost from the very beginning of his presidency. In a then-unstable country where “Three previous presidents—Abdalá Bucaram in 1997, Jamil Mahuad in 2000, and Lucio Gutiérrez in 2005—had been forced out of office early due in part to Quito-based street mobilizations in which a variety of social groups and media outlets had taken part,” it seems clear that “taking actions to undermine the power of groups, especially those with a track record of anti-government rabble-rousing, made perfect sense” (Conaghan, 2015, p.10). Yet such a display of rational political strategy does not make Correa’s stance any less disappointing, or more palatable, from a left-wing perspective.

Correa was unwilling, or unable, to fulfill the promise of the new socialism of the 21st century and move the nation beyond extractivism, economic dependency, and neoliberalism. Indeed,

It seems that the wheel has come full circle. The Pink Tide has receded, and the promise of a Latin America in control of its own resources appears to have been abandoned. Today the governments of Bolivia, Ecuador, and Venezuela are once again under the thumb of the global market, delivering their minerals, oil, and gas to big capital, whether US, Canadian, Chinese, or Russian. (Gonzalez, 2017, p.113)

In structural terms, Correa's purported revolution did little to push Ecuadorian society toward an economically more egalitarian, politically less oppressive system. In part, this was so because he simply did not need to:

The achievements of the Pink Tide were made possible by a particular moment in the world economy—a boom in commodity prices generated by the growth of China. The resulting primary export growth provided rents to fund social programs. This meant the Pink Tide could assist the poor, but without need for the type of structural transformation that would compromise the rich by fundamentally changing the balance of power in society. The favorable economic climate covered up the persistence of structural inequalities, and also left the social gains of the project vulnerable to fluctuations in the world market. (Sankey, 2017, pp.33–4)

Inevitably, due to the cyclical nature of capitalism, after years of bonanza “The collapse in oil prices triggered a decline in resource rents, which then forced the government to make massive cuts to social spending and state pensions,” so while “The benefits that Correa’s government delivered to the poor were real” they will “always be in jeopardy under the present development model, where the web of class relations is left virtually untouched” (Riofrancos, 2017, p.42)<sup>18</sup>.

In the realm of culture, cultural promotion, and more specifically film subsidies, this new economic crisis caused a drastic reduction in available state funding. This, of course, has not affected EBT filmmakers, since they did not have access to those monies anyway. But it is interesting to note how, whether in good or lean times, and despite their revolutionary rhetoric, Ecuador’s cultural authorities have maintained a two-pronged approach to national cinema that perfectly mirrors that “virtually untouched” class structure. As should become obvious by examining its notion of culture itself and its discriminatory practices when determining the allocation of cultural promotion funds discussed above, Correa’s movement—not unlike other political projects in Latin America deemed more or less populist, more or less well-intentioned, more or less revolutionary—is after all an entity designed in, by, and for the lettered city. At best, the citizens’ revolution aspires to bring the rest of Ecuador’s social reality inside this beautiful city’s tall, lettered walls. It does not seem to understand or even see what lies beyond those limits.

There is an additional explanation for the persistence of a neoliberal ethos in Ecuadorian underground cinema, this time from below, which is to say from the standpoint of the producers and consumers of this audiovisual violence themselves. Filmmakers such as Palacios, Cedeño, and Chalacamá see and present themselves as entrepreneurs, as veritable self-made men, and as profit seekers who cite money as one of their main motivations. Of course, they also talk about their vital need to express themselves through cinematic means and tell the stories they have inside. In Chalacamá's words, "We are totally underfunded. But we do these kinds of artisanal things for art's sake, for the culture, because we love cinema" (Neumane, 2013). Yet they know and fully admit that what they make is commercial entertainment, not art house film, and they dream big:

We have not reached the movie theaters, but we are sure that our future productions will do so, because we have been sowing the seeds and the audience is ready to watch our films. The fight will not be easy, but we will win. (Cedeño, 2016, p.75)

As usual, "the agents of globalization from below are not really aiming at constructing another world from that of globalization from above; they aim at becoming rich and powerful, just like those who consider them illegal smugglers or pirates" (Lins Ribeiro, 2012, p.230). Neoliberalism comes "from above," imposed by corporations, governments, the IMF, and so forth, yet also operates "from below," once it takes root in popular subjectivities and becomes part of the collection of tools people use to participate in and adapt to—but also resist—the system. In fact,

thinking of neoliberalism as a mutation in the "art of government," as Michel Foucault . . . proposes with the term governmentality, supposes understanding neoliberalism as a set of skills, technologies, and practices, deploying a new type of rationality that cannot be thought of only from above. Moreover, this rationality is not purely abstract nor macropolitical but rather arises from the encounter with forces at work and is embodied in various ways by the subjectivities and tactics of everyday life, as a variety of ways of doing, being, and thinking that organize the social machinery's calculations and affects. Here neoliberalism functions immanently: it unfolds on the territorial level,



modulates subjectivities, and is provoked, without needing a transcendent and exterior structure. (Gago, 2017, p.2)

In this sense, though their fictions contain traces of the representation of a certain reality and even of social criticism, they also seem to carry within them the possibility of the reproduction of the very ideology—neoliberalism—that has allowed and incentivized this perpetual state of economic crisis and savage competition, this generalized anomie, this political and social morass filled with symbolic and physical violence. A violence suffered, but also practiced, by the subaltern classes in a counterproductive struggle with and against themselves that in the end makes power more powerful.

Popular culture is always a complex, contradictory, dialectical phenomenon. On the one hand, it is formed with elements and languages owned by the ruling classes, so it has no choice but to reproduce, at least partially, the logic of power. On the other hand, and in a more promising way, it is in the realm of the popular where its meanings are ultimately created and re-created, often against and despite the ruling classes' desires. It is, after all, popular use and affection that determines its success and its permanence: nothing can be popular if the public is not willing to accept it. Ecuadorian elites seem happy promoting films that Ecuadorian popular subjects reject not because they are not interested in audiovisual narratives, but because they prefer their own. They want to see themselves—or what they think of themselves—in these hyper-violent, hyper-melodramatic, hyper-popular movies that tell stories “as real as life itself.” They do not need the prestige of international film festivals or the complexities of great cinema. They want “cine bajo tierra.”

Frequent Chalacamá collaborator Elías Zambrano summarized it best in an interview for the 2013 documentary *Luces, cámara, ¡Chone!*, produced and directed by Ana María Neumane:

We have the best audience right here on the streets: the gentleman who sells coconut water, the one who sells lottery, the one from the store, the one from the butcher shop. That is our public. Our cinema is popular because people identify with it. We do not aspire to be like Hollywood. ... We are going to be much better. Because Hollywood may have the equipment, the money, the technique, but we have the desire, the will, and that character that identifies us as children of this land, as Choneros, which makes us feel so proud.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from Spanish are my own.
- <sup>2</sup> Such honor belongs to *El tesoro de Atahualpa* (Atahualpa's treasure), directed by Augusto San Miguel and released in 1924 (León, 2010, p.68).
- <sup>3</sup> *La tigrá* sold over 250,000 tickets during its theatrical run. It is sometimes claimed that an older movie, a comedy titled *Dos para el camino* (Two for the road) directed by Jaime Cuesta, was able to bring half a million people to the theaters in 1980. However, there is no tangible proof of this, so most experts prefer to quote *La tigrá's* confirmed figures and treat *Dos para el camino's* record as the stuff of legend.
- <sup>4</sup> The number of films per year has decreased more recently but is still higher than it was in the pre-boom era.
- <sup>5</sup> Ecuador abandoned its old currency, the sucre, and adopted the US dollar in 2000.
- <sup>6</sup> UIO is the International Air Transport Association (IATA) code for Quito's Mariscal Sucre International Airport.
- <sup>7</sup> Jaime Roldós Aguilera was Ecuador's president from 1979 until his untimely death in an airplane crash in 1981.
- <sup>8</sup> ¡Alfaro Vive, Carajo!, literally 'Alfaro lives, dammit!', was an Ecuadorian terrorist group active in the 1980s.
- <sup>9</sup> Ecuador's territory is customarily divided into four very distinct geographical regions: La Sierra, or the highlands, where Quito is located; La Costa, or the coast, where Guayaquil is located; El Oriente, literally 'the orient', which comprises the portion of the Amazon that belongs to Ecuador; and the Galápagos Islands.
- <sup>10</sup> The rivalry between Quito and Guayaquil, and more generally between the highlands and the coast, predates the formation of Ecuador as an independent country and manifests itself in every aspect of national life, from the economy to the arts, from soccer to electoral politics.
- <sup>11</sup> The author does not want to insinuate that state-backed filmmaking is easy: in Ecuador, as elsewhere, filmmaking is always a complex, expensive, and time-consuming endeavor. Furthermore, in most cases government funding covers only about a third of the final budget. That said, it is evident that the state has a clear-cut hierarchy when it comes to deciding which productions are worthy of its support, and it goes without saying that unsubsidized filmmaking will always be more difficult than its subsidized counterpart.
- <sup>12</sup> "I wanted to be on Chone's movie billboards—and I did it," Chalacamá told *BBC Mundo* (Zibell, 2013).
- <sup>13</sup> Indeed, Chone—where so many films have been produced over the past two decades—does not have a movie theater and has not had one since the Oriflamma closed its doors at the dawn of the 2000s.
- <sup>14</sup> The director makes a point of explaining that the term does not necessarily imply violence: "When we say guerrilla cinema, it can be a comedy, a drama, a horror movie, etc. It is not only a cinema about guns, but an insurgent, ideological one." (Cedeño, 2016: 75) Yet he also calls his collaborators 'soldiers' and is proud of the fact that his movies used to feature real guns firing real bullets until this practice was expressly forbidden by law (Zibell, 2013; Araya, 2016, p.57).
- <sup>15</sup> Kichwa is a Quechuan language that encompasses all the dialects of Quechua spoken in Ecuador and Colombia.
- <sup>16</sup> The first article of the current Ecuadorian Constitution, promulgated in 2008, characterizes the South American nation as "sovereign, unitary, independent, democratic, pluricultural, and multiethnic."

- <sup>17</sup> La Tunda is a myth of the Pacific coastal region of Ecuador and Colombia, particularly popular among the Afro-descendant community, about a shapeshifting monster resembling a woman that lures people into the forests to suck their blood and sometimes devour them.
- <sup>18</sup> Since the end of Correa's presidency in mid-2017, the austerity measures have worsened under his successor, Lenín Moreno (Correa's own vice president). Moreno has been accused by many critics—including Correa himself—of betraying the citizens' revolution, steering Ecuador rightward, and either allowing or pushing the return to neoliberalism.

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# Neoliberalising Humanity: Culture and Popular Participation in the Case of the Street Market of Caruaru, Brazil

*Adilson Silva Ferraz*

## Introduction

The Caruaru Market  
provides us a very pleasant sight.  
It sells everything in the world.  
The Caruaru Market.  
("A Feira de Caruaru" [The Market of Caruaru] by the  
composer Onildo Almeida)

Neoliberalism is not merely one of the main theoretical strands of contemporary thought. It also transcends the economic model that has given new breath to *laissez-faire*. Neoliberalism manifests itself dynamically through the everyday forms of subjects' thoughts and actions, in the constant reconstruction of public and private spaces, in the daily choices that modulate levels of equality and social justice, in the urbanization of cities, in the distribution of goods and power struggles, which often take place without an explicit and direct connection with the abstract concepts of theory. Neoliberalism shapes society itself and only makes sense as an effective set of political actions and contexts. Real subjects live and practice neoliberalism! This "everyday application of the theory" is often not perceived as neoliberal

values (individualism, freedom, minimal state interference, defense of capitalism) are unconsciously practiced by the agents themselves (from ordinary people to politicians). This can be partly explained by the force of the neoliberal rhetoric of progress and economic prosperity itself: neoliberalism presents itself as the natural and most favorable proposal for any person. Any discourse against freedom in the market, or against any other issues (environment, education, security) where the freedom of individuals is at stake, automatically becomes a discourse against justice. The pragmatic naturalism of this fallacy seems to be so advantageous to the individual that it excuses neoliberalism from announcing itself explicitly on the stage of social life, as if the ethics of such a model was self-evident. For many, to propose alternatives to this model would be illogically equivalent to acting against oneself and against others. That is why neoliberalism is more than a normative ideal and a transition to an alternative post-neoliberal model requires more than a mere theoretical impulse, but rather a strong reaction against this production of subjectivity. It is important to recognize, therefore, that neoliberalism not only shapes society by theoretical arguments, but also that its principles are countered or sustained by the way the web of power relationships is configured, horizontally and vertically, between social actors and institutions. Analyzing neoliberalism, using the social world and the experience of individuals as a point of reference, allows us to adopt an approach (others are possible) linked to the empirical stance that minimizes the risks of myopic theorization or blind activism. Viewing neoliberalism in the context of its own movement allows us to analyze the possibilities of moving beyond it, especially in Latin American contexts, where studies and post-neoliberal experiences have flourished more strongly. Based on this perception, we propose to study the reality of the Street Market of Caruaru (or Caruaru Market), located in the interior of the state of Pernambuco, in northeastern Brazil. The case we study in this work, involving the local government's attempt to change the location of the market, was the trigger for an intense discussion among traders, other social groups, business people, and institutions, regarding the advantages and difficulties of such a project. However, both the government and most traders, from different perspectives, defend positions that are targeted toward protectionism and economic growth to the detriment of culture. This shows that the preservation of the local and regional culture, symbolized strongly by the Caruaru Market, has been contradictorily discarded in the face of the possibility of economic ascension of the individuals and an increase in municipal power in the region. Thus, the main objective of this research is to understand the relationship between the subjectivity

model driven by neoliberal capitalism and the loss of tradition and the cultural values that make the Caruaru Market one of the most renowned at an international level. The data collected enables us to question whether popular participation in decision-making processes always acts as a mechanism of resistance against the centrality of the market in social life. The case of the Caruaru Market seems to demonstrate that the dialogue between government and society, widely proclaimed as a tool for emancipation, may function, in some cases, as a reinforcement of neoliberal values.

### **The socioeconomic development of the Caruaru Market**

The history of the Caruaru Market, as with other renowned markets that have stood the test of time (the *Grand Bazaar* in Istanbul, *Jemaa el Fnaa* in Morocco or the *Rialto* in Venice), is mixed up with the past of the city in which it is situated. Caruaru is in the semi-arid region of the state of Pernambuco, in the Ipojuca valley, about 130km from Recife, one of the main capitals of the Brazilian northeast. It owes its name to the fact that the region was inhabited in the period of colonization by the *Cariri* Indians, who named the region *Caruru* or *Caruaru*, which means “main place/field.” At the end of the 17th century the banks of the *Ipojuca* river were occupied and used for rearing livestock and subsistence culture, and a large farm was established, which became a point of support for travelers crossing the state to carry out their trade. Gradually, there was an increase in the quantity of products offered and in the circulation of people. To supply the demand, at the end of the 18th century, the market became a weekly event, consolidating Caruaru as the trade center of the region. At that time, the Caruaru Market was characterized by the fact that it was established by the “Brazilian bourgeois,” the new class of oligarchic merchant proprietors, but also by the traders and craftsmen and a few slaves (Medeiros, F.M.). On May 18, 1857, provincial law no. 416 sanctioned that *Caruru* be classified as the “City of Caruaru.” Due to its importance in the region, Caruaru is known today as the “Capital of the Dry Climate Region,” the “Capital of Forró” and even as the “Little Princess of the Dry Climate.” After almost 200 years, the market was relocated to the *Avenida Rui Barbosa* in 1966, returning to its former location in 1969, near the Church of the Conception (see Figure 6.1). In 1992, it was relocated to the 18 May Park.



Figure 6.1: Photo from the “Memories of Caruaru” postcard series



As Albuquerque Júnior (2013, p.39) explains, the identity of the northeastern region of Brazil was predominantly shaped by the influence of the dry climate and the rustic landscape. From a cultural point of view, it would be characterized by the preservation of popular forms of expression, social rituals, legends, tales, poetry, dances, religious manifestations, festivals, superstitions, and oral literature. The Caruaru Market emerged within this symbolic universe. Walmiré Dimeron, historian and former director of Documentation and Cultural Heritage of the Caruaru Culture Foundation, quoted by Sá (2011, p.32) in his book *Traders: Who They Are and How They Manage Their Business*, states:

Caruaru’s cultural trichotomy consists of the market, ‘fórró’ (local square dancing) and clay. The market, however, stands out as the *mother cell* not only of this formation, but also of the identity of our people. Everything that we are today – our way of speaking, of expressing ourselves, of our daily relationships – is impregnated with this inheritance, present since the beginning of the colonization of these lands.

It is because of this cultural richness that the city’s main composer Onildo Almeida, who composed *A Feira de Caruaru* (The Market of Caruaru) in 1957 pays homage to it. The well-known song uses the goods of the market to portray its tradition and was immortalized in the singer Luiz Gonzaga’s recording of it. The market is also known worldwide for the clay dolls crafted by Master Vitalino. The Caruaru Market has grown abundantly and is currently formed of a cluster of

smaller fairs, including the Cattle Market, Handicraft Market, Free Market and Sulanca Market, Meat and Flour Market, which turn over between R\$20 and R\$70 million per week. Depending on the time of year, the market is visited by more than 100,000 people from various states in a single day. Currently, about 30,000 families are sustained by the products they sell at the markets. In 2017, the Caruaru Market was designated as a site of Brazilian Cultural Heritage by IPHAN (National Institute of Historical and Artistic Heritage), recognizing its economic dimension, but mainly focusing on its sociocultural importance.

Figure 6.2: Clay figures for sale in the Caruaru Market



Source: IPHAN, <http://portal.iphan.gov.br/pagina/detalhes/61>

Figure 6.3: One of the busy avenues in the Caruaru Market



Source: Jornal do Comércio, [http://1.bp.blogspot.com/\\_B5q-gGfYR8/VLaAE67MG1I/AAAAAAAAAYdk/n0sVneaX5yY/s1600/feira-dasulanca-caruaru-A10-CMYK-C%C3%B3pia-660x375.jpg](http://1.bp.blogspot.com/_B5q-gGfYR8/VLaAE67MG1I/AAAAAAAAAYdk/n0sVneaX5yY/s1600/feira-dasulanca-caruaru-A10-CMYK-C%C3%B3pia-660x375.jpg)

It is important to emphasize, however, that the market's popular culture is threatened by the pressure to adapt the cities to the needs of capitalism. In the text "Cities and the Geographies of Actually Existing Neoliberalism," Neil Brenner and Nik Theodore (2002) discuss the role of urban spaces in "actually existing neoliberalism," arguing that cities have become crucial arenas where neoliberal strategies are articulated. It is the case that, driven by the economy, urban spatiality has often been transformed to the point of weakening or wiping out the values inherent within markets, defiling their mosaic of social experiences.

Nowadays the market receives the same pejorative treatment its commercial opponents were classified one hundred and one years ago. Anachronistic, backward and inadequate are some of the adjectives that are now appropriate. The market did not keep up with the hectic pace of modernization, and it was almost like a crystallized drop in the course of progress. Losing space to the supermarkets that became bigger and bigger, more assorted, safer, hygienic and comfortable, an arrangement that is the perfect fit for the hurried rhythm of today's individual. (Mascarenhas and Dolzani, 2008, p.83)

Harvey's diagnosis in his book *Ciudades Rebeldes (Rebellious Cities)* is bleak: "The traditional city has died, murdered by rampant capitalist development, victim of its insatiable need to have accumulated capital, avid to invest in unlimited urban growth, regardless of the possible social, environmental and political consequences." (Harvey, 2014, p.13) In this sense, the growth of the Caruaru Market, despite being the main economic engine of the city, has brought a series of problems to the population.

1. Due to its growth in the city center, the traffic has become awful.
2. The market has become a public safety problem: the location is considered safe only during the day and in the periods in which the market is open.
3. The extensive circulation of people who are not concerned about the environment (in addition to the absence of public policies) have made the Ipojuca river, the cradle of the city, the second most polluted river in the country.

The Caruaru Market has ended up conforming to the almost insuperable advances of the modern capitalist world. Even with all

these problems, the Caruaru Market is still an oasis where elements of popular tradition can still be found. It is still a prime location for the reproduction of everyday life, not only in the material sense, but especially in preserving the local identity and, recently, in exercising rights. However, its cultural existence is threatened. As such, we cannot dismiss the market as an important agonistic space of legitimation or resistance to neoliberalism. As we will explain later, the Caruaru Market is currently the midpoint of a controversial debate involving culture, urbanization, politics, and the economy.

### **The change in the site of the Caruaru Market as result of neoliberal psychopolitics**

The Caruaru Market is formed of more than 10,000 wooden stands, arranged outdoors, on a rustic floor. Walking through the market's alleys is a unique experience, even for those who are local. This environment, by itself, provides a characteristic experience of the markets and its stalls, immersed in its smells, tastes and ways. But what about turning this traditional space into a large, covered commercial gallery with aseptic spaces, arranged according to standards that would be akin to that of a shopping center? Using an analogy: have you ever wondered what it would be like if the Grand Bazaar in Istanbul had its traditional place of business transformed in a shopping center? This is what will probably happen with the Caruaru Market. The project of its relocation from its traditional place of operation was proposed by the mayor José Queiroz (2012—16) and its main characteristic is the relocation of the Sulanca Market. City councilmen visited the market and compiled a report which was later presented to the city hall. The mayor, in turn, discussed the issue with the Commercial and Business Association of Caruaru—ACIC. Votes and meetings also took place between the municipal powers and the representatives of the market traders, so that there was a public consultation about the proposal, even though several traders have said that the project was not sufficiently discussed. On the day of the vote in the City Council a protest was held by some representatives of the market traders.

A very positive point is that the market traders, for the first time, although in an incipient way and despite the clashes and different opinions about the relocation of the market, stepped up and were seen as a collective with sufficient power to face the public one, participating in the creation of a policy that would seriously affect them. According to Butler (2017, p.159):

... the gathering already speaks before uttering any words, which by the mere fact of joining, this multitude of people already represents a popular will; and that this representation has a very different meaning from that which is transmitted by one subject to another when he expresses his will through a verbal affirmation.

But, as we will observe later, popular participation, although democratic and effective, is conditioned by the values and limits of the subjects who practice it.

The project was approved by the City Council of Caruaru on July 31, 2015. The casting vote of the councilman “Nino do Rap” was decisive. The congressman, who was against the relocation of the market, changed his position unbelievably “to prove that he was not afraid of the threat he would have suffered related to the approval of the law.” Despite the approval by the City Council the relocation has not yet taken place due to a series of judicial obstacles that remain in process. The new address is on the margins of the BR-104 highway, moving the market from the center of the city to the periphery. There is 60 hectares of land and the capacity for 5,946 vehicles and 380 buses. It would feature a food court and restrooms.<sup>1</sup> The implementation of the project would cost the public coffers around R\$300 million, with most of the money spent initially by the state government of Pernambuco. The new market would be managed by an association of the market traders, that is, by the private sector. Such a change, which could take place under the management of the current mayor Raquel Lyra, would significantly alter the movement of goods and people in the Brazilian northeast, in particular, the sale of typical products and the clothing trade, which currently corresponds to the market’s most prolific sector. The case of the Caruaru Market’s relocation drew our attention because of its neoliberal aspects, in such a way that it can assist us to think about post-neoliberalism. Our research combines the contributions of theory with data collected in empirical reality. In this sense, Boltanski’s observation, regarding studies that seek to redeem the critique of neoliberalism by analyzing the local and global advances of capitalism and the ways in which the state operates, is salient:

... this requires that researchers and analysts keen to follow critical projects do their work in a modest way, that is to say, that they abandon the fascinated contemplation of their televisions, where the “misery of the world” finds a deformed reflection, instead they go to the things

themselves. Let them undertake to continue the empirical study, not only of the condition that is the most needed today, but, and above all, of the new devices of power ... (Boltanski and Nancy, 2016, pp.87–8)

According to this perspective and aiming to understanding the reality of the Caruaru Market, 50 traders were interviewed, and 100 questionnaires were completed over a period of two weeks in June 2017.<sup>2</sup> The application of the research instruments was random, in relation to those who agreed to participate, and occurred in the various sub-sections of the Caruaru Market (18 May Park), with 50% of the data collected specifically at the Sulanca Market. Participants were kept anonymous and all procedures were carried out to ensure their safeguarding and to uphold research ethics. The comments and data collected are revealing. Some of the characteristics of neoliberalism function strongly in maintaining the very system that underpins it. From the case we analyze, I would like to highlight four possible obstacles to post-neoliberalism: a) neoliberalization of subjectivity; b) privatization of public space; c) minimum market regulation; and d) globalization of localisms.

### *Neoliberalization of subjectivity*

Perhaps the greatest fundamental flaw of neoliberal discourse lies in an illegitimate reductionism of social reality, making the functioning of the Market appear in an artificial vacuum. As if the companies and other economic agents were not situated within a natural, social and political framework that shapes them and that condition their action and its possibilities. (Calcagno and Calcagno, 2015, p.135)

Neoliberalizing subjectivity is the starting point for neoliberalism. It is to make the individual lose himself by focusing his existence within the market. As we already know, the clash between neoliberal ideology and the left, being reformed in the tension between north and south (as expressed in the cartography of Boaventura de Sousa Santos), reveals distinct equations regarding the relationship between individual and society. Without entering into the discussion about the existence of collectives as “society,” we may ask ourselves: who is this individual that neoliberalism speaks of? It is an individual (*Individuus*, which means “indivisible,” “which cannot be divided”) in the sense of being cast into a way of being in the world without openness to other

possibilities. Therefore, we must understand neoliberalism essentially as a civilizational model, which promotes a specific *ethos*. Hence the left's focus (with all the practical problems and disastrous experiences that have occurred throughout recent history, especially in Latin America) on emancipation and a social justice that derives directly from the self-consciousness and liberation of the individual. Neoliberal power acts quietly, subliminally, imprisoning the individuals within themselves, preventing them from constructing what Hannah Arendt (1998) calls the "common world."

Byung-Chul Han (2016, p.14), based on Foucault's thought, explains that this power treats the population as a mass of production and reproduction that it must meticulously control. It subjects the subject to a code of norms, precepts and prohibitions, as well as eliminating violations and anomalies. According to the Korean author, the neoliberal modeling creates a subject that seems close to the one we describe when we analyze the Caruaru Market trader:

Neoliberalism, as a mutation of capitalism, converts the worker into an entrepreneur. Neoliberalism, not Communist revolution, eliminates the working class that is subject to outside exploitation. Today each person exploits himself in his own company. Each one is master and slave, in the same person. The class struggle becomes an internal struggle with myself. (Han, 2017, pp.36–7)

Power in this context operates in a secretive and diffused way:

Power as coercion manifests in imposing one's own decisions against the will of the other. A reduced degree of mediation is demonstrated. The self and the other behave in an antagonistic way. The self is not welcomed into the soul of the other. On the contrary, more mediation restrains that other power that does not operate against the project of action of the other, but rather through it. (Han, 2017, p.38)

In this sense, neoliberalism is not only a free-market project, it is, above all, an adjustment of the subject to a way of being in the world. Neoliberal psychopolitics is a powerful weapon for the reinforcement of domination through psychological programming. The case of the Caruaru Market traders is emblematic in this sense. As Colombani (2008, p.169) explains:

“Work is the political technology par excellence to achieve the desired subjectivation process, as a productive device of docile, yet productive, subjects, active while conducive to the flow of capital, but controllable in their unproductive, and therefore undesirable aspects.” From the political-existential perspective of the philosopher Hannah Arendt, we can affirm that these people only survive, because their whole existence is orientated toward the maintenance of life, as they remain imprisoned in the world of necessity and end up not affirming themselves as properly human.

### *Privatization of the public space*

Although neoliberalism proposes, among other things, the minimization of state interference, this does not mean that the neoliberalization process is impeded in its action as a disciplining power that manipulates the forms of life. One of the most important consequences of the *modus operandi* of this power is the absence of political participation: “The neoliberal system has, therefore, an important and necessary by-product – a depoliticized citizenship, marked by apathy and cynicism.” (Chomsky, 2002, p.4) In the context of the Caruaru Market, this is mainly because the traders,<sup>3</sup> as well as other individuals working under similar conditions, experience the drama of not being fully suited to the requirements that would make them employable in the conventional business structure. Therefore, they remain on their sidelines, fighting a daily struggle for subsistence and economic success (Helal et al, 2013, p.107). Hannah Arendt’s diagnosis of the human condition provides an explanation of this worldview. A trader answered when was asked if they had been engaged in the debate about the relocation of the market:

We live to work. From Sunday to Sunday wondering if there will be people coming to buy the next week. There is no time to go to the meeting or to argue. Everyone has their opinion. It will not help at all. They have already decided. The only question is whether it will be to our advantage.

When asked in a questionnaire about their participation in the proceedings of the market relocation, 93% of the marketers answered that they are not interested in discussing the subject because they are very busy trying to guarantee their survival. According to Arendt, in the modern age, labor (activity directed to immediate subsistence needs) would have been placed above of work (activity of production



of durable goods) and action (political activity, which gives human meaning to the people), because the *homo faber*<sup>4</sup> was replaced by the *animal laborans*. These transformations would be related to the changes in the spaces destined to these activities. The distinction between public and private space, so fundamental to the Greeks and the Romans, would have become almost obsolete, allowing the emergence of a hybrid sphere, which Arendt called “society,” a kind of extended domestic space that would span entire nations. It would be the form in which the fact of mutual dependence for subsistence would have acquired public importance, and in which activities which concern mere survival would be admitted into the public space. The market, returning to the case in question, the public space par excellence (remember the dialogues of Socrates in the dialogues of Plato), becomes the space of the private, the “social.” The speech of another trader denounces what he considers to be the loss of this shared space represented by the current market: “They are wanting to privatize the market! They want to make the market into something it is not.” The trader does not realize, unfortunately, that the market has already been privatized, in the Arendt sense. According to the mayor of Caruaru’s proposal, the current traders would be required to pay about R\$27,000 to continue with their stand at the new market. This reveals one of the most striking features of neoliberalism: the market is not for everyone. The current Caruaru Market reflects the diversity of the social world, a place of differences, with all its hierarchies both formal (which are sold from a stall) and informal (for example, the person that sells their products on the floor, on a towel). Neoliberalism reduces complexity and homogenizes social relations, privileging a standard individual who has purchasing power. We must not forget that the market is not only a place of money, but of symbolic reproduction and local identity. Caruaru is not known by the economy of its market, but by the culture and tradition that survived there.

### *Minimum regulation of the market*

The new market would be regulated by the government simply in terms of feasibility and control of the use of the new location, the obligation to maintain security and tax collection. This reminds us of the famous book *Law, Legislation, and Liberty*, where Hayek uses the term “catallaxy” to describe “the order brought about by the mutual adjustment of many individual economies in a market.” Hayek believed that the term “economy” was insufficient, as it meant “domestic

management,” indicating that economic agents would have shared goals. As the economist explains:

As the term ‘Catallactics’ has long been suggested to define the science that deals with market order and, more recently, resurrected, it seems appropriate to use the corresponding term for the market order itself. The term ‘catallactic’ was derived from the Greek ‘kattallein’ (katallassein), which means, not only ‘to exchange’ but also ‘to admit into the community’ and ‘to convert from enemy to friend’. (Hayek, 1973, p.57)

The ex-mayor José Queiroz, interviewed on local television, aptly expresses the catallactic nature of the proposal to relocate the market:

The Treasury Department inspectors went to each of the traders and explained that it is necessary to be registered and, in fulfillment of their obligations, to pay taxes. If someone ‘stumbles’ and does not fulfill their obligations, they are not a normal trader. All those who are registered will have their rights and even those who are not, will be regulated. We have established, by law, that we will only be opening space to third parties—as there are many who have already asked me and would like to participate—after all the traders are attended to. Now, if the trader gives up and opens the space, it will be filled by a third party who is looking for one.<sup>5</sup>

That is, those who do not conform or do not agree with the new market cannot be considered “normal.” They are system anomalies and must be replaced by people who agree to submit themselves. They would probably be part of the reserve army of labor, namely unemployed or informal workers.

The utilitarian belief in a market that is capable of accounting for the wellbeing of individuals falls to the ground when we consider that there are other dimensions of the human to be considered and that cannot be subjected to the “invisible hand of the market,” since its existence is only maintained to the extent that they are advantageous for the reinforcement of the system. The spontaneity of the market described by Hayek particularly favors the economic aspect. According to the data collected, 44% of traders believe that the market’s culture is being preserved in the current location. But 72% believe that the

traditional culture of the market will be lost if the move to the new location occurs. It is interesting to note that the traders themselves agree with this phenomenon, since 85% of the traders responded that they would agree to the market relocation if it would bring more money, even if it meant losing the market's cultural identity. This is the contradictory dialectic of the disposable. Not only are people disposable in a neoliberal market, but humanity is too. Localisms work in some cases as mini-globalizations seeking to consolidate hegemony.

### *Globalization of localisms*

One of the comments made by the traders is that the municipal government has not made any investments in the current market, which led to a disadvantage when facing competition from other markets in the region (from the cities of Toritama and Santa Cruz do Capibaribe):

If we do not have security, when it rains it fills with mud, the lighting is not good... why should we resist the mayor's proposal? I believe the right thing would be to improve the market that we have today. But how can I be against the relocation of the market if they are offering what we do not have?

It is certain that the degradation of its infrastructure (intentionally or not) leverages the rhetorical power of the relocation of the market, anchored in the urgent needs of the merchants. This is compounded by the competition of the markets of the neighboring cities, which have already been transformed into large commercial galleries. Several interviewees spoke of a phenomenon they called "Chinese invasion." According to the traders, the addition of oriental products in the market has been damaging. One of the interviewees explained:

It's difficult to compete with the Chinese products. They sell at a low price and are produced in large quantities. Now, the factories of the region are closing and beginning to sell these Chinese products. It is much better.

It is interesting to note that the market pressure resulting from globalization is reproduced at a local level. This is what I call the "globalization of localisms." In the case of Caruaru, there is intense pressure on the municipal government not to lose space to the two neighboring cities, Toritama and Santa Cruz do Capibaribe. Indeed,

buyers are increasingly abandoning shopping at the Caruaru Market because these competing cities have created gigantic shopping centers that seem more attractive from their point of view. If, on the one hand, these two cities have already suffered the “Chinese invasion,” and have embraced the import and export market, on the other, Caruaru is seen by the traders and the population as a city that was left behind. According to the tradesmen we consulted, the Chinese invasion is inevitable, and it is necessary to follow the same model as that of the cities that have already “modernized.” According to this view, the ideal market is precisely the one that abandons whatever it needs to (culture, tradition, values) and commits itself to maximizing profit. The “real” place is not ours, but the neighbors’.

According to neoliberalized individuals, the only way to make the market subsist is to globalize it, which indicates high power of reproduction and adaptation of the neoliberal “virus.” Furthermore, globalizing is not simply practicing foreign trade, it is adopting the market forms of those next to you if there is evidence that their model is more advantageous. According to our research, 92% of the market participants who answered the questionnaire believe that Caruaru should adopt the Santa Cruz do Capibaribe market model. Localisms work in some cases as mini-globalizations seeking to consolidate hegemony.

I am not against changing the location of the market. Regardless of whether the market is in the same place or if there is a change, what cannot happen is that its value and rich culture be cast aside, otherwise the city of Caruaru will lose its own identity. I believe that resisting neoliberalism will be feasible when spatial development is seriously rethought in the face of urbanization and the market, which, in turn, is permanently and dynamically situated between the local and the global.

## **Conclusion**

Not all regulative public policy that substantially alters the life of the market and the population is anti-neoliberal. Each case deserves to be analyzed from the point of view of the rhetoric involved, since a strengthening of the state can be, under the guise of promoting citizens’ rights, a way of increasing capital gains. As we have seen in the case of the attempt to change the location of the Caruaru Market, the implementation of a control over the traders and their activities seems to be more than a concession to the business sector of the region, but rather the application of the neoliberal mechanism of psychopolitics. The local government itself submits to this device. If it does not meet

market pressures, the Caruaru Market will probably be devoured by the markets of the surrounding cities (turned into gigantic galleries that offer several advantages of shopping malls). If the market is relocated according to the approved project, it turns it into a set of shops that bears vague resemblance to what the market once was. The market would be no longer a market.

On the other hand, immersed in an existential environment where the “society” (in the Arendt sense) prevails, the traders themselves are largely incapable of overcoming the unconsciousness of their apolitical condition, placing subsistence needs above everything else. Selling more and more is the only thing that really matters and culture can be cast aside. The most direct consequence of the social is that culture deserves to be preserved for only as long as it serves to guarantee the reproduction of this system. The foundational value, which makes the Caruaru Market immaterial heritage of Brazilian culture, is lost.

It is illusory to believe that citizen participation in debates, councils and public consultations, through democratic mechanisms, is a lasting antidote against neoliberal subjectivity. The field research has shown that, in the context studied, independent of popular participation, the economy is prioritized to the detriment of culture, insofar as that which is sold (but also the Caruaru Market itself) has become a product of the cultural industry. This is when the “globalization of indifference” reaches the local level. Surprisingly, we observe that the market has become a space for the diffusion of neoliberal psychopolitics. And in case of the relocation of the market in the manner proposed, the death of its cultural spirit would instantly occur, leaving the propaganda of a past that no longer belongs to it, which would instrumentalize its traditional values in favor of his market survival.

I agree with Han (2017, p.117) when he says that the openness to the “Event,” a liberating experience of the submissive subject, is essential for a de-psychologization that releases the subject. A crisis of neoliberalism has as a pre-condition the potential for a crisis of the model of subjectivity that it promotes. The transition to one (or several) “posts” will occur when succumb to the “Other” that liberalism shelters. According to Del Percio (2015), we should not, therefore, naturalize politics, but rather view it as a set of possibilities which includes conflict as an important tool for balancing expectations and interests. Chantal Mouffe (2014, p.131), in turn, says that the current state of globalization would be not “natural” but the result of a neoliberal hegemony, and is structured through specific power relations. But this state can be challenged and transformed because there are alternatives available. It would always be possible to change

things politically because one can always intervene in power relations with the aim of transforming them.

The case of the Caruaru Market shows us that we must consider the peculiarities of localisms and that for post-neoliberalism to exist it is not enough to merely have effective popular participation in the public sphere, it is necessary to first develop an anti-neoliberal ‘conscience’. Ironically, in the case studied, the market should not be the core of the market, at risk of losing its democratic and multicultural profile; it is the socially enriching informality, symbolism, and tradition that makes it culturally strong. In other situations, places, and countries, it may not be the culture that is damaged by this world view. The environment, human dignity, the bonds of solidarity, and other dimensions of the human are lost in detriment of the economic. “Self-care” is necessary. Deleuze (2005) explains that this concept means that a person (of this era) unconsciously holds his consciousness in things other than himself. He finds himself “forgetting his forgetfulness,” as Heidegger puts it. In my opinion, to return to oneself would enable the subject to return and transfigure the world, denaturalizing the market as the center of human life. In the case of the Caruaru Market, the relationship between neoliberalism, culture, and popular participation reveals something very simple: a post-model only makes sense if people are post-market! Even if one speaks of the need for a counter-hegemonic “consensus” (Sader, 2009), a third middle way (Giddens, 2001), or the redeeming of a general willing, the greatest challenge of post-neoliberalism is to break with this kind of subjectivity inaugurated by the moderns and deepened in contemporaneity.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> A summary of the project can be found at <http://feiradecaruaru.com/portal/conheca-o-projeto-da-nova-feira-de-caruaru/>
- <sup>2</sup> In a subsequent survey, we intend to increase the number of participating subjects, including city councilors, the head of municipal government, entrepreneurs, business leaders, civil society organizations, and public prosecutors. For the initial purposes of our research we chose to collect data only from traders.
- <sup>3</sup> According to research conducted in 2011, the traders are mostly children of farmers who were born in the countryside and studied for an average of only three years. Most of them are between 35 and 54 years old (64.5%). Six out of ten traders did not complete basic education and only 13.3% of them had some formal employment before working at the market. (Helal et al, 2013, p.107)
- <sup>4</sup> Arendt explains that the Latin word *Faber*, which is probably related to *facere* (to do something in the sense of production) originally applied to the manufacturer and artist who worked with hard materials such as stone or wood and was also the word used as a translation from Greek *Tekton*, which would have the same connotation. The word *Fabri*, referred specifically to the construction workers and carpenters.

As for the term *homo faber*, which certainly has modern and post-medieval origins, she says she could not determine where and when the expression first appeared (Arendt, 1998, p.136).

- <sup>5</sup> The interview is available at <http://g1.globo.com/pe/caruaru-regiao/noticia/2015/07/prefeito-preve-inicio-das-obras-da-nova-sulanca-de-caruaru-para-ate-120-days.html>

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## **The Contribution of the Catholic Magazine *Espacio Laical* and the Constitution to the Cuban Public Sphere**

*Alexei Padilla Herrera and Armando Chaguaceda Noriega*

In contemporary political, cultural and communicational debates, the idea of the public sphere has a notable presence. According to the classical Habermasian perspective, the public sphere is the realm of social life in which public opinion can be shaped by principles such as free access for all citizens, inclusion, reciprocity, reflection, equality, and the rational justification of arguments. In this domain, people act as public when they discuss topics of general interest in conditions of equality and without coercion. These conditions guarantee, in normative terms, that the citizens can meet freely to express their opinions and points of view (Habermas, 1989). Nancy Fraser defends the influence of public discussions on decision making and believes that the formation of public opinion can be a counterweight to discourses in formal deliberative arenas. She adds that sometimes the arguments put forward by civil society actors succeed in influencing the decisions of executive and legislative powers (Fraser, 1992). Reinforcing that idea, Avritzer and Costa (2004) argue that issues, positions, and arguments defended by the new social actors must infiltrate the state through institutional mechanisms, and thus democratize and put it under the control of citizens.

However, not all real public spheres are democratic, since cultural and material inequalities determine the differentiation between publics and their capacities, especially in spaces characterized by

dependency relations and state interference (Chaguaceda, 2011). It has been pointed out that a merely conversational public sphere will not succeed in subverting power relations or guaranteeing the pursuit of the common good. The Habermasian model has also been criticized because it is confined to the analysis of the bourgeois public sphere and ignores that, together with the formation of the dominant bourgeois public, the publics were composed of peasants, workers, women, and nationalists, who constituted competing public spheres (Fraser, 1992) and complement each other. Therefore, one should not speak of sphere (singular) but of public (plural) spheres that together form the public space.

In later texts, Habermas admits the coexistence of various public spheres and the need to observe the dynamics of the communicative processes that occur outside the dominant spaces of discussion. Now the public sphere is defined as a complex network of a diversity of forums for public discussion—both in formal institutions and outside these, articulated through communicative activity, when different publics come together in organized networks to debate topics of common interest, contrasting points of view, and assuming or reaffirming positions (Marques, 2008).<sup>1</sup>

Whatever position one takes within that debate, the notion of the public sphere reveals its value not only for critical social theory and democratic practice, but also for understanding the limits of democracy within existing capitalism and for the construction of alternative democratic projects (Fraser, 1992), both to the present neoliberal order and to socialist experiences of Soviet court. However, the Habermasian theory did not propose a universal law applicable to any context: it is a normative model to which existing societies relate or not. As has been stated (Chaguaceda, 2011), the concept must be anchored in specific contexts and subjects, given that the analysis of the public sphere in concrete spaces shows its normative limits. Limits appear when one analyzes countries that are not governed by the principles of liberal democracy, such as Cuba.

The peculiarities of the social system established in Cuba in the early 1970s make it necessary to consult some of the sources that discuss the emergence, structure and functioning of the public spheres in the Soviet Union and the rest of the countries that made up the former socialist camp. Most of the empirical research done on the public sphere in socialist regimes has a historical-descriptive character and was carried out after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the break-up of the Soviet Union. In general, these investigations analyzed the

emergence of public spheres integrated by dissidents and intellectual critics. Some scholars (Bathrick, 1995; Lauristin, 1998; Rittersporn et al, 2003; Silberman, 1997; Voronkov, 2003) state that the process of de-Stalinisation in the communist countries of Europe and the USSR, in particular, made possible the emergence of multiple spaces of organization, debate, and exchange of ideas that can be seen as prototypes of the public sphere operating without legal guarantees and under precarious conditions.

Bathrick (1995) proposed a mapping to illustrate the growing differentiation of public space in East Germany from the 1970s until the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989. The author defines three major interconnected spheres: the official public sphere, controlled by the Communist Party (unique); the unofficial or counterpublic sphere; and the media based in West Germany. Other studies recognize how in the official public sphere the leaders sought to legitimize the regime through educational and cultural institutions, trade unions, subordinate Party organizations, state media, study centers, and institutionalized public spaces for debate. They point out how, despite the need for criticism, and that sometimes the leaders recognized certain errors, the state apparatus was unlikely to be criticized, as the state could close the spaces of discussion before any tension arose. In practice it was a fabricated, controlled, uncritical, and restricted sphere. One of the objectives of this official structure was to make the population believe that public opinion was participatory and that the voice of citizens was heard amid decision making. However, attempts were also made to create a public space to neutralize the image of a rigid bureaucracy and a partisan state apparatus that had drifted apart from the masses. The objective was to create a public opinion that would align with the elite's discourse. Through letters with criticisms, petitions, and complaints published in the official press, most of the population was drawn into the practice of public criticism (Rittersporn et al, 2003).

In addition to this diversity of official public spheres, there were others considered as alternatives. Alternative public spheres took shelter in limited spaces and developed different ways of communication. In practice, these were divided into small groups with little influence on everyday life (Killingsworth, 2012). The peripheral position of these critical public environments reinforced fragmentation as the major feature of public spheres in Soviet-type societies (Rittersporn et al, 2003). These alternative spheres existed with the consent of the Party-State and both their level of activity and their expansion showed dramatic fluctuations (Killingsworth, 2012). Periods of apparent openness and expansion of public debate were followed by the

restraint and repression of critical dissidents and intellectuals. Religious organizations were a bastion of resistance to the official ideology of socialist states. Rittersporn et al (2003) point out that, in the German Democratic Republic (DGR) and in Poland, the meeting spaces sponsored by the churches constituted a very influential public sphere. These institutions had infrastructures and networks of communication perhaps more developed than those of the partisan authorities in the early years of the socialist regimes. Linz and Stepan (1967) claim that the Polish Catholic Church maintained a relatively autonomous sphere of government, which generated a complex pattern of reciprocal recognition and negotiations between the high clergy and the state. In contrast, Motly (1978) points out that in the Soviet Union various religious groups (Roman and Greek Catholics, Orthodox, Protestants and Buddhists) in opposed the regime.

As we noted earlier, the media played a key role in the functioning of the public sphere. Party control over the state media and the book industry, the instrumental nature attributed to the press,<sup>2</sup> and the absence of laws recognizing the rights of access to information of public interest have been essential features of the systems of public communication in socialist countries. The process of de-Stalinisation of Soviet society and the dissatisfaction of dissidents and intellectuals with the monopoly of symbolic production favored the emergence of typed publications circulated clandestinely. The main function of *samizdat*, as it was known, was to show the realities ignored by the official press. These publications concentrated a diversity of opinions and a wide range of information—a threat to the ruling elite—as well as acting as a link between people and as a means of communication that could overcome the atomization of society (Motly, 1978).

Motly (1978) pointed out that some of the religious denominations mentioned earlier distributed their publications covertly. One of them was *Exodus*, edited by the Hebrew community, and the magazine *Lithuanian Chronicle*, which provided information on the activities of Catholics and dissidents in Lithuania. British investigator Brian McNair, however, asserts that *samizdat* never threatened party control on the flow of information in Soviet society and that its circulation was restricted to small groups of political and religious dissidents. Although it played an important informative role within these groups, most of the population ignored it or did not care (McNair, 2006). Nonetheless, these publications were the main example of the alternative press in the USSR (Motly, 1978) and the countries of the socialist bloc.

The search for theoretical references and empirical studies on the public sphere in socialist regimes has been a complex and unfinished task. Almost all the consulted authors who investigate the spaces of debate in the countries of the former socialist camp (Bathrick, 1995; Rittersporn et al, 2003; Killingsworth, 2012) adapted the Habermasian notion to particular contexts, without ignoring its normative limits. Hence it is difficult to find an original model of socialist public sphere. According to Valdés Paz (2015, interview), the scarcity of autochthonous theoretical proposals about the public sphere in socialism can be explained by the non-incorporation of the concept in the socialist political culture, and its absence in the official ideology has resulted in the dogmatisms that reject any term or idea of liberal origin.<sup>3</sup> Guanche (2009) also refers to the lack of theoretical proposals on the public sphere of socialism by linking the poverty of existing theories on that subject to the precariousness of its development, as was shown in the previous section. In the past decade and a half, Cuban researchers (Guanche, 2013; Navarro, 2002; Leyva and Somohano, 2007, 2008; Valdés Paz, 2009) have contributed to the theoretical discussion on the public sphere in socialism.

In line with Fraser (1992) and Valdés Paz (2009), Leyva and Somohano affirm that the public sphere in Cuba should not be limited to opinion formation, but act as a place of confrontation between social actors with possibilities of transforming politics. Confrontation “can promote the active participation of citizens to delimit, solve and evaluate the surrounding problems” (Leyva and Somohano, 2008, p.45). The public sphere must be reconfigured, since the reproduction of socialist hegemony necessitates the formation of that sphere of citizen confrontation. The debate, criticism, and confrontation between diverse interests and different worldviews are necessary for the construction of an active consensus (Leyva and Somohano, 2007).

Julio César Guanche, jurist and researcher, defends the constitution of a public sphere where “a social space opens to the intervention of its multiple actors, which denounces and corrects the asymmetries and inequalities that make this public sphere a private enclave of the powerful” (Guanche, 2013, p.3). He adds that it is essential to develop democratic policies that empower the popular sectors to establish egalitarian interactions in a truly public sphere.

Nevertheless, we consider that the most complete normative definition made on the island has been a result of the reflections of the sociologist Juan Valdés Paz. He argues that, in socialism, the public sphere is not the liberal image of a “communicative sphere” nor the neoliberal vision that conceives it as a non-state space. The socialist

public sphere would be “a space intersected by all social systems, to which all are taxed” and where “the public good is defined and performed.” Although “it is an area limited by the current legal order, its powers are determined by popular sovereignty and culture” (Valdés Paz, 2009, p.212).

Valdés Paz’ concept is based on the legacy of critical Marxism and particularly on the ideas of Rosa Luxemburg, who defined the proletarian public sphere as the key space for building the hegemony of socialism. The absence of a public sphere or the limitations that impede its normal functioning would preclude socialist democratic construction. For the author of *El Espacio y el Límite*, the political participation of citizens demands the establishment and expansion of the public sphere in Cuba (Valdés Paz, 2009). Such a commitment implies some prerequisites: a legal framework, an institutional space, political will that supports participation, and the formation of a culture of participation (Guanche, 2009).

In each country, the structuring of the public sphere is a prolonged phenomenon historically conditioned by cultural, political, economic, and other mediations. One of the shortcomings of the classical studies consulted is that they do not refer to the public sphere that existed prior to the adoption of one-party socialist regimes. This is an important question because, at least in Cuba, there was a diversity of spaces for political debate and publications available for different forms of thought, as well as a legal framework guaranteeing freedom of association, word, and press without any restrictions other than the respect of public morality. During the republican period (1902–58), the public sphere was one of the sources that fed the citizenship of the generation that made the 1959 revolution possible, based on principles of social justice, democracy, and national sovereignty (Chaguaceda, 2010).

During the first years of the Cuban Revolution, Cuban public space experienced great dynamism. The media environment was the main arena of debate between supporters and detractors of measures such as Agrarian Reform, as well as the concerns of the Catholic Church about the growing ideological proximity of the revolutionary government to the Soviet Union. Between 1959 and 1962 the universe of private Cuban media was nationalized, and the opposition lost its main space of expression (Valdés Paz, 2009). The Catholic Church had to be content with sending its messages through bulletins and flyers (Trujillo, 2011).

The unity of organizations and sectors related to the revolutionary government would require the necessary means and for all to work together. “The Party’s Revolutionary Orientation Commission

(which led to the current Party Ideological Department) took control of the media and the press. The restructuring of the press imposed partisan discipline and partisan agenda in the newsrooms and on the reporters,” but failed to produce a better journalism than previously (García Luis, 2013, p.81). Although organic to the government, the media mirrored the limited (but real) heterodoxy of thought existing within the revolutionary ranks. An indicator of the level reached by public debate in that period was the controversy about the role of art and culture in the education of the population in 1963 prompted by veteran communist leader Blas Roca and ICAIC’s director Alfredo Guevara in the newspaper *Noticias de Hoy* (Leyva and Somohano, 2007). According to Fernández Retamar (2004), Che Guevara created a magazine in the Ministry of Industries to argue that if the right to dissent was denied to the revolutionaries, the conditions for the most steadfast dogmatism would be created. Thus, Cancio Isla (2002, p.57) concludes that the 1960s press “is truly attuned to the will to open society, and its contents will still be very distant from the ritualization and advertising enthroned at the end of the sixties prevailing in the following decades.”

The entrance of Cuba to the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) in 1972 was based on the establishment of a social, political, and economic order similar to that of the USSR and its European satellites. After the First National Congress of Education and Culture, in 1971, the subordination of culture to the state and to the designs of the Party was established. The theses and resolutions on mass media approved at the First Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC), in 1975, guided the adoption of the Soviet press model. The media, defined as organs of the Party, the state, and the organizations related to both, became instruments of ideological and political struggle (García Luis, 2013; Valdés Paz, 2009). The media monopoly had to show the political, economic, and social achievements in Cuba and in other socialist countries. While a bureaucratic mechanism was established to regulate the critics on specific economic and administrative questions, the analysis of political and ideological questions depended on the guidelines of the Party leadership (PCC, 1975).

The Socialist Constitution promulgated in 1976 (inspired by its Soviet counterpart of 1936) recognized speech and press freedom but subordinated them to the achievement of the construction of socialism, and it established state and social ownership of the mass media. It prohibited the existence of private media, which, in theory, would



guarantee the use of the media to the “exclusive service of working people and social interest” (Constitution, 1976, Article 52).

The constitutional text does not make it clear whether “rights of assembly, demonstration and association” can be exercised outside “social and mass organizations” and that “they have all the facilities for the development of such activities” (Article 53). One of the consequences of the Sovietization of the Cuban state and society was the closing of critical publications and a reduction in spaces for discussion (Leyva and Somohano, 2008), encouraged by the intellectual vanguard of that time. The ideological parametrization (or the imposition of ideological parameters) and the impoverishment of the culture of debate was, perhaps, the legacy of that period (Alonso, 2006). In those years, there was no alternative field for the advancement of Marxist positions different from the Soviet one (Martínez Heredia, 2001).

The influences of the Soviet model encouraged the distrust of Cuban politicians in relation to the cultural sphere that was seen as a potential opposition force. In this scenario, public interventions by intellectuals should address cultural and artistic issues. Social and/or political criticism should be carried out by professional political cadres, experts, or specialists. The transgression of the tolerated limits could mean the exclusion of the intellectual from the public sphere (Navarro, 2002). The disarticulation of cultural policies that responded to the political and aesthetic postulates of socialist realism encouraged the reappearance of social and political criticism in the plastic arts, theater, literature, cinema, and essays.

To contain the influence of the Soviet *perestroika* and *glasnost*, a new offensive of the state against the interventions of intellectuals in the public sphere was unleashed in 1988 (Navarro, 2002). With the growing criticism and freedom of the publications of the Soviet press, in August of that year the distribution of magazines *Sputnik* and *Moscow News* was suspended (Rojas, 2008).

The break-up of the Soviet Union in December 1991 led to an economic crisis in Cuba—not yet overcome—worsened by the strengthening of the US embargo. The crisis itself and the adjustments adopted to guarantee the country’s survival significantly altered the Cuban social fabric. The opening to foreign capital, the development of international tourism, the free circulation of foreign exchange, the reception of remittances, and the resurgence of small private businesses consolidated the role of the market in the economy and created a gap of inequality among Cubans with access to the foreign currency and those who depended on wages and state assistance. The concept of

“working people” did not account for the diversity of identities, projects of life, or the plurality of forms of thought that, since the previous decade, had begun to emerge from the various sectors of society. In the margins of the political system were the actors who defended the *status quo*, those who advocated a regime change that would put Cuba back on the tracks of liberal democracy and economy, as well as those who called for democratization without abandoning socialism. The latter constituted an alternative to neoliberalism in Latin America as well as to the continuity of a model of socialism that restricted freedoms and rights.

When the most critical stage of the crisis was over, some publications in the cultural sphere changed into spaces of debate about controversial topics, including civil society, civic participation, political culture, religion, and migration. Magazines such as *Temas*, *La Gaceta de Cuba*, *Criterios*, and the Catholic ones *Vitral* and *Palabra Nueva* contributed to the shaping of broader and plural discourses (Leyva and Somohano, 2008). There are essays from this period about the concepts of civil society, developed both by Marxist scholars linked to the Centro de Estudios de América (CEA), an institution subordinate to the PCC, and by Catholic intellectuals such as Dagoberto Valdés and Enrique Estrella (1994). However, this spring of tolerance did not have stable development and duration. The publication of these discussions led to another moment of tolerance that did not last long. The most emblematic case was the repression against CEA researchers (Hoffman, 2003). In March 1996, the CEA was abolished by order of the Party Political Bureau, after the state press questioned the relevance of a discussion (Castro, 1996) and labeled the participants as members of a fifth column (Valdés Vivó, 1996). The Communist Party’s monopoly was reaffirmed in the debate and promotion of issues with high political sensitivity, in addition to preventing the consolidation of an alternative current within its ranks. This stance remained mainly throughout the next decade and was characterized by the personalization of power and the greater ideologization of public debate and communication.

On July 31, 2006 Fidel Castro suffered intestinal bleeding and his brother Raúl assumed the leadership of the state and the Communist Party. In 2007, the Party encouraged popular consultations and urged citizens to openly express their views on the various internal problems affecting the economy and society. The consultations lasted until 2010, and some of the opinions and suggestions of the participants were included in the guidelines about the economic and social policy of the Party and the Revolution, a guiding document for updating or reforming the Cuban economic model. In evaluating the

results of the first popular consultation, the president reinforced the importance of public debate and the participation of the population in the economic and social transformations that the country had to initiate. He also acknowledged that the best solutions emerged from the exchange of divergent opinions and added that there was no need to fear discrepancies in a society where there were no antagonistic social classes (Castro, 2008). However, the results of this controlled debate revealed the limitations of information, articulation, political culture, and incidence of Cuban citizenship (Chaguaceda and Azor, 2011).

Although in his pronouncements Raúl Castro appeals to deepen democracy and dialogue, the political practice of the partisan elite legitimating any proposals remained.

These proposals could be modified or removed during the consultation with leaders and other members of social mass organizations. These consultations seek to rearticulate the social pact between a Party-State—whose ideology has not undergone significant changes—and a more diverse and plural society. Twenty-five years after the end of the Soviet Union, the political regime prevailing on the Caribbean island retains characteristics like those of the Eastern European regimes (single party, state ideology, political and police control) in the functioning of public everyday life. At the same time, after almost three decades of crisis and reforms within the system, certain features of social, cultural, and economic pluralism have been observed as a result of economic reforms, political liberalization, and openness to the outside world. While the monopolistic power of the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC) continues, leadership based on charisma<sup>4</sup> is being replaced by institutionalization, and compulsory mobilization is being replaced by new patterns of political acquiescence. It is also more common to implement pragmatic political solutions that do not break with official ideologies and there is still selective repression against those who oppose the system. The convergence of the described features describes a political regime in transition toward early post-totalitarianism.

The adaptation of the mapping proposed by Bathrick (1995) for the observation of Cuban public space allows us to identify four main areas: a) official public sphere; b) intellectual cultural sphere; c) oppositionist public sphere; and d) critical tolerated public sphere (1995). The official public sphere would be integrated by formal deliberative arenas: the vital organs of the Party, the parliament, ministers and state councils, municipal and provincial popular people assemblies, social mass organizations' forums, academies, state means of communication, and cultural and educational institutions. The intellectual public sphere has

a semiofficial character here because most of its members maintain links with state cultural or academic institutions with access to the internet and email, technologies that allow the establishment of national and international information exchange networks. In addition to literature, and social and cultural research, this sphere includes artistic expressions such as cinema, plastic arts, theater, and music. Not infrequently it has generated pockets of tension with the authorities.

The opposition sphere is made up by organizations and individuals that advocate the transformation of the Cuban political system in a peaceful way. Banned from the public space and the state media to publicize their actions, ideas and proposals, Cuban opponents go to the international press or use virtual platforms. In the past few years, *estado SATS*,<sup>5</sup> a space of debate coordinated by Antonio Rodiles, has stood out. Another significant vehicle is the *14 y Medio*,<sup>6</sup> an independent virtual newspaper, founded and directed by the renowned activist Yoani Sánchez, who is also author of the *Generación Y* blog. Finally, it is the critical tolerated public sphere formed by debate and publishing spaces that gather intellectuals with a critical position in relation to the government that propose the democratization of the real political system while recognizing the legitimacy of the Cuban authorities. Many of these voices manifest through personal blogs or websites such as *Havana Times*,<sup>7</sup> *Observatorio Crítico*<sup>8</sup> and *Cuba Posible*.<sup>9</sup>

Despite this diversity, the Cuban public space has not yet overcome its plight and fragmentation. The plight is given by the very constitution of spheres, their argumentative basis, the material conditions, since most of the spaces are indoor, some private, where few people enter. The fragmentation itself is evident in the disconnection between the different fields and discussion vehicles since some people who cannot attend certain spaces and are not allowed entry in others. It is often a fragmentation created by the official policy that actors reproduce to stay “inside the game”; as the evidence of events—in particular some outside the country, such as Latin American Studies Association (LASA)—and the very nature of the ideas espoused by them have repeatedly indicated the possibility of respectful dialogue/debate and even the existence of common grounds, which are then blurred/repressed as the official pattern is adopted. In general, these spaces resemble the French 18th-century model of the public sphere, where an autocratic regime coexisted with spaces of debate open but restricted in access, disconnected from each other, and with relatively little impact on current policies.

The state media monopoly aggravates the fragmentation of the public sphere by ignoring discussions on issues of public interest, including

those organized in semiofficial spaces such as *Último Jueves* (Last month's Thursday).<sup>10</sup> Without access to the internet and other sources of information, most citizens do not know the existence of arenas of public debate outside those coordinated by the Party and traditional organizations, and lose the opportunity to participate in the formation of public opinion. Some of the mediations affecting the conformation of the public sphere in Cuba are: the limits of the structures to foment and channel the debate; the absence of a means to engage in a critical discourse that dialogs with power; and the presence of mentalities that reject exchange between subjects with diverse and contradictory ideas (Leyva and Somohano, 2007).

According to Habermas, in authoritarian regimes communicative exchanges through the internet can challenge the censorship that tries to control or repress the public opinion (White, 2008). While the fragmentation of the public face-to-face remains, the virtual environment is consolidated as a space of tensions, where important debates and disputes take place between actors from different sectors of civil society. The gradual widening of access to email and the internet, the promotion of distribution networks and consumption of alternative cultural products, popular consultations convened by the Party, the emergence of physical and virtual discussion spaces, and the appearance of dozens of digital publications are examples of the dynamism that the Cuban public sphere has gained since Raúl Castro took power. At the same time, the appropriation of information and communication technologies (ICT) threatens the control of the Cuban government over the production and distribution of information. For Rafael Hernández (2014), internet access made the traditional media lose its monopoly of information and it would be a “political illusion” to think that issues not addressed by the official press will remain silent. The diversity, the political plurality, or the realities that the official press ignores emerge through blogs, digital platforms, and publications in social networks. Díaz (2013) and Geoffray (2013) affirm that since many critical voices began to use ICT to overcome isolation, they have contributed to the configuration of a more branched and integrated virtual public sphere.

Since the 1980s, religious entities have used their magazines, newsletters, and flyers to introduce alternative voices to the official discourse, including criticisms of state policies and programs (Crahan, 2013). In 1991 the entry of religious people to the Communist Party was approved, and 1992 constitutional reform eliminated references to scientific atheism in the charter, restoring the secular character of the state. The consolidation of the Catholic press took place during the

economic crisis of the 1990s, with an increase in religious practices in Cuban society and an improvement in Church–state relations. *Palabra Nueva* and *Vitral* were the two most public Catholic magazines and their critical headlines rekindled tensions between the Party and the hierarchy of the Church. With the support of ecclesiastical authorities, the laity of the Church has turned religious publications into vehicles for the dissemination of political subjects and ideas that are deprecated by the official media. In October 2010, the Church had dozens of parish publications, 46 newsletters and magazines, 12 websites and seven electronic bulletins with an audience of 250,000 readers (Grogg, 2010). Farber (2012) says that, although less than 5% of the adult population is reached by the Catholic press, these publications have been the most significant alternative to the regime’s media monopoly and have set up new audiences. Among these publications, the Catholic magazine *Espacio Laical* has been one of the most outstanding vehicles of the critical public sphere tolerated by the government. Founded in 2005 by Cardinal Jaime Ortega and led by the Lay’s Council of the Archdiocese of La Habana, the magazine proposed “to create a space for the different spheres of social, political, economic and cultural activity, with the commitment of insert ourselves and contribute... [to] an increasingly prosperous and fraternal society.”<sup>1</sup>

However, the insufficient number of Catholic intellectuals willing to send collaborations prevented the magazine from being consolidated as a Catholic publication in the style of the Italian magazine *30 Giorni*<sup>12</sup> (González, 2015, interview). During the advisory processes required by the Party, the editors of *Espacio Laical*, Roberto Veiga and Leinier González, considered the possibility of making the journal a facilitator of social dialogue, taking into account the diversity of actors that did not have spaces to publish their opinions, expanding the scope and inclusion of the magazine. Thus, in a context characterized by state control over public spheres, they felt the need to make visible a plurality of actors who were outside the official institutional framework (González, 2015, interview). Between 2008 and 2010, the magazine started to present more politicized speech (Corcho, 2014; Crahan, 2013; Padilla, 2016). In different texts and articles published until early 2014, it openly defended that change, as well as the strengthening of economic reforms initiated by President Raúl Castro, and the changes in the political and legal order to promote people’s involvement in the shaping of their own destiny. In 2013 around 4,500 copies of the magazine were published; every three months 3,000 were circulating in churches and facilities of Havana’s Archdiocese, the remainder were sent to other archdioceses of the country; the magazine also has its own

website ([www.espaciolaical.org](http://www.espaciolaical.org)). By 2013, the site was receiving around 20,000 visits each month. Additionally, an email bulletin was used to inform the readers with little or no access to the internet (González, 2014 cit. Corcho, 2014). In April 2006, a digital supplement to deliver the contents produced between issues also started.

In 2012 the magazine ceased to be an official organ of the Council of Laity—whose leadership did not approve the political turn of the editorial line—and renewed its editorial board, which maintained the preponderance of Catholic laity but incorporated intellectuals who did not profess that faith. In this new phase, the editors reaffirmed their commitment to dialogue and consensus among Cubans with divergent political positions. In addition to continuing to critically and constructively accompany the progress of economic reforms, they advocated a political adjustment that would facilitate the flow of all political pluralism in the nation. It would continue an open-door policy to encourage citizen participation in discussions sponsored by the magazine (*Espacio Laical*, 2012). From there, some opponents of the government began to participate in the debates.

On October 29, 2011, the intellectual Alfredo Guevara, former president of ICAIC and with institutional and personal ties with Fidel and Raúl Castro, led the conference *Dialogar, Dialogar*. Guevara expressed his views on the economic adjustments promoted by the government, criticized the bureaucracy, and advocated respect for diversity and tolerance, as promoted by *Espacio Laical* (Guevara, 2013). What was most significant were not the words of the speaker but the presence of Cardinal Jaime Ortega, lay leaders, intellectuals, and academics linked to state institutions, opponents, and ex-political prisoners. At the end of his presentation, Guevara answered questions from the audience, including those of dissident economist and former political prisoner Oscar Espinosa Chepe. Chepe thanked *Espacio Laical* for organizing civilized debates, without offense, without exclusions or absurd prejudices, because, he felt, ideological diversity exists in Cuba. Despite the natural ideological disagreements between a state official and an opponent, the economist also thanked Guevara for the open, illustrative, and democratic character of his conference.

On March 30 2012, at the Centro Cultural Félix Varela in Havana, Cuban-American Carlos Saladrigas, an important businessman and chairman of the Cuba Study Group, gave a lecture entitled “Cuba and its diaspora: attitudes and policies to be adopted by the diaspora to reintegrate into Cuba” (Saladrigas, 2012). This was one of the rare occasions when a Cuban exile who was linked to anti-Castro organizations spoke publicly in Cuba. In this second meeting were Party

members (for their own interest or sent to monitor the event), priests, laymen, opponents, academics, diplomats and correspondents of the foreign press (Ravsberg, 2012). Access was free. In the crowded room there gathered around 200 people. You could see alternative bloggers such as Yoani Sanchez or Miriam Celaya; independent journalists such as Reynaldo Escobar and Miriam Leyva; dissident economists such as Oscar Espinosa Chepe; activists for the racial integration such as Juan Antonio Madrazo and Leonardo Calvo, and the new dissident's generation, such as Eliecer Ávila or Antonio Rodiles (Muñoz, 2012). In contrast to the silence of the Cuban media, the foreign press covered Saladrigas' lecture and the debate between him and the members of the audience (García, 2012). According to Fernando Ravsberg, BBC correspondent in Cuba, the interventions of the members of the audience made evident the controversy between the different points of view: on one side the defenders of the free market and on the other side, critical communists of the government that refuse the Cuban-American capitalist's participation in the Cuban economy and insist on the construction of a true socialism system. About the politicians that attended the meeting, he said that they did not have much experience in debating with an adversary but he praised the fact that persons with antagonistic ideas can gather and share their differences with respect (Ravsberg, 2012). The presence of Saladrigas in Cuba was a step for his inclusion in the national public debate (Arreola, 2012).

The multiplicity of subjects, ideologies and currents of thought that converged in *Espacio Laical*, through the publication of articles, interviews and dossiers of questions on issues related to the press, the future of the Communist Party, and the rule of law, among others, formed an arena of public discussion based on rules and dynamics close to those described in the Habermasian model of the public sphere. However, the most evident legacy of the magazine was to show and to legitimize the dissent in a more diverse and plural society.

Between 2010 and 2014, activists, bloggers, intellectuals close to government, critics and dissidents, university students, officials of state institutions and Party militants, Cuban religious leaders, and academics residing abroad collaborated directly with *Espacio Laical* by sending papers or participating in face-to-face discussions. According to Veiga (2015, interview), Cuban emigrants wanted to make the most of the opportunity to exchange ideas with their fellow citizens living on the island. The magazine defended the diaspora's participation in the debates about the present and the future of the country. Collaborators and participants accepted the rules of the debates in a civilized way,



based on respect of diversity of thoughts. That dialogue reflected a pragmatic prudence of the editors and the Church, who wanted to maintain good relations with the government. It also closed doors to overt opposition, and related ideological positions. However, academics like Rafael Rojas, Haroldo Dilla, and Carmelo Mesa Lago, critics of the economic model and institutional Cuban policy, published articles in the magazine. But at the same time, social-democrat or Catholic thinkers, like Manuel Cuesta Morúa and Dagoberto Valdés—known by their opposing activism—who maintain moderate political positions towards the government and are intellectually highly productive, were not invited to publish their papers in the magazine. However, the interventions of the participants in the debates—including the dissidents—were entirely published.

We believe that *Espacio Laical*, as part of the public sphere, gave dynamism to the Cuban public space and created a network between public spheres from which collaborators emerged (to publish and to give lectures). The participation of Roberto Veiga and Leinier González in discussions organized by semi-official publications (such as *Temas* and *Criterios*), and the presence of Rafael Hernández in events sponsored by *Espacio Laical* portray the mobility of actors between different nodes of public discussion. Like most Cuban Catholic publications, *Espacio Laical* was not registered in the National Register of Serial Publications, which prevented its distribution in bookstores and newsstands, and it being made available to readers in public libraries. This state of quasi-secrecy makes it difficult for the magazine to gain a larger audience. The influence of this publication was limited to the intellectual and religious spheres.

Political scientist Esteban Morales (2015, interview) also believes that the debate was incomplete, because important academics and representatives of civil society did not collaborate with the magazine or take part in the debates. For Valdés Paz (2015, interview), himself a collaborator, the editors were able to connect actors with different visions, promote a dialogue between them, and spread it. The relationship established between groups of reviewers, the exchanges between them, the magazine itself, and public exhibitions constitute an insufficiently connected micro-network. Reception studies would be needed to prove that *Espacio Laical* articulated a larger network. Knowing the limitations that the distribution of the magazine would imply outside the Church's spaces, its editors decided that the publication would be sent directly and essentially to the academic field, the intellectuals, key actors within the Cuban government and Party, as well as all people interested in discussing political, economic, cultural,

social and religious issues (González, 2015; Veiga, 2015, interview). According to Veiga (2015, interview), the collaborations of specialists in areas deemed strategic for the development of the country captured the interest of the authorities, who began to look at the magazine with more interest.

This interest and the improvement of the distribution channels allowed *Espacio Laical* to be read by the political class. Nevertheless, Pablo Odén Marichal, Reverend of the Episcopal Church, has confirmed that he knows the magazine but does not believe that it has affected political activity or that the debates in the National Assembly take into account what is said in that publication (Marichal, 2015, interview).

Although no political leader has praised or objected to the work of the magazine, arguments between both detractors and defenders of the Cuban government exemplified pluralism of the Cuban public space. These controversies reinforce the idea of the public sphere as an arena for ideological dispute. Unfortunately, in these disputes, the intervention of unofficial spokespersons (but supported and oriented by political authorities) is not to encourage dialogue about differences, but to question the political debate or any citizen initiative that emerges outside the political system (Padilla, 2016).

In an interview published on the official website *Cubadebate*, Director of *Temas* Rafael Hernández referred to the different spaces and publications that promote social criticism. Hernández emphasized the importance of religious magazines such as *Espacio Laical*, and stated that he had cooperated with the journal more than once and defended its legitimacy (Sánchez, 2013). In the words of Valdés Paz (2015, interview), the great success of *Espacio Laical* was to be the greatest space of plurality the country had at that time. Neither governmental institutions nor mass organizations provided a space for pluralized dialogue in the way that *Espacio Laical* did. It included Cubans residing on the island and those who had emigrated, supporters of the Cuban revolution and oppositionists, as well as others who, despite advocating the continuity of socialism, are excluded from public debate. The magazine not only had an impact on the Cuban public sphere, but also marked a new possible path.

## Conclusions

The notion of the public sphere refers to social models ruled by the principles of a liberal democracy and with a legal framework that guarantees the free exercise of association, expression of ideas, and their

dissemination by any means. However, research has shown that the de-Stalinization process of Soviet-style societies favored the flourishing of autonomous and semi-autonomous debate spaces, mainly among intellectuals.

Since the Cuban revolution, especially after the adoption of the Soviet model in the 1970s, the history of the transformations of public space has been characterized by cycles of openness and closure; moments of tolerance, and practices of coercion and repression. In Cuba, the existence of a public space composed of semi-official and relatively autonomous public spheres is observed. Within this universe, academic and cultural publications, along with some edited by the Catholic Church, have contributed to the configuration of a more diverse public discourse that, because of its critical nature, distances itself from official political discourse. However, it is a precarious public space, without legal protection, lacking in political recognition; a result of a mixture of thrust from below and tolerance from above, at any time reversible.

In this context, the Catholic magazine *Espacio Laical* contributed to the expansion of public debate. Between 2008 and 2014, this publication was the focus of the debate on social issues and a critical accompaniment to the process of economic reforms initiated by President Raúl Castro. *Espacio Laical* configured and sustained a true public sphere, belligerent and plural—an arena in which Catholic thinkers, liberals, and Marxists could accept each other, and discuss with civility and respect. It was a space of limited pluralism, based on the links with the Church and the type of discourse assumed by its editors, but still much wider than that of other Cuban publications that critically analyze the reality of the country.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Although Habermas initially expressed his pessimism about the role of traditional media, in the 1990s he recognized the complexity of its participation in the discursive processes of legitimation and political participation (Maia, 2009). Without forgetting the mediations that affect the production of its contents, the German philosopher affirmed that in the public sphere the media acts as a kind of boundary and permeable space between the different sands that make up the center and the periphery of the political system (Marques, 2008). The media and information technologies play a key role in the constitution of public spheres, especially when the public involved are in different locations and time zones.
- <sup>2</sup> Lenin defined the functions and principles of the revolutionary press. According to him, the press should be an instrument for information, organization, and social mobilization (García Luis, 2013; McNair, 2006). In 1905, Lenin advocated a centralized press model (Hopkins, 1965) in which the media would act as propaganda vehicles and cause collective agitation.

- <sup>3</sup> It is probable that before the 1990s the Habermasian model was little known in the international academic field. His book *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit. Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*, published in 1962, was translated into English as *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991).
- <sup>4</sup> Fidel Castro occupied the apex of the pyramid during his long presidency, during which he enjoyed all-encompassing powers. After his death, in 2016, attempts have been made to turn his thinking into ideology, with open discussion of “fidelismo.”
- <sup>5</sup> [www.estadodesats.com](http://www.estadodesats.com)
- <sup>6</sup> [www.14ymedio.com](http://www.14ymedio.com)
- <sup>7</sup> [havanatimes.org](http://havanatimes.org)
- <sup>8</sup> [observatoriocriticocuba.org](http://observatoriocriticocuba.org)
- <sup>9</sup> [cubaposible.com](http://cubaposible.com)
- <sup>10</sup> A space for debate organized by the magazine *Temas*, it aims to stimulate critical reflection and diversity of perspectives on specific issues, to examine current problems of a cultural, social, and ideological nature that have an impact on the situation of Cuba and the world, and to facilitate a flexible and flexible discussion on these issues, for a broad audience, not necessarily specialists; [www.temas.cult.cu/ultimo-jueves](http://www.temas.cult.cu/ultimo-jueves)
- <sup>11</sup> [www.espaciolaical.org/contens/ind\\_qs.htm](http://www.espaciolaical.org/contens/ind_qs.htm); With the change of editorial board after the departure of Roberto Veiga and Lenier González (in the latter half of 2014), the magazine’s objectives have undergone some modifications; this chapter refers to the magazine’s approach before that change.
- <sup>12</sup> *30 Giorni* is a monthly magazine, established in 1988, which discusses ecclesiastical geopolitics.

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# Argentina: The Philosophical Resistance to the Conquest of the Soul<sup>1</sup>

*Enrique Del Percio*

## **Historical context**

In 1976, a terrible dictatorship was established in Argentina, even before Foucault (2007, p.265) claimed with crystal clarity that the fundamental difference between classical liberalism and neoliberalism was the substitution of the *homo economicus*—related to the exchange—by the *homo economicus* as entrepreneur of himself (lecture delivered on 14 March 1979); and also before Margaret Thatcher confirmed Foucault's analysis stating that: "Economics are the method; the object is to change the heart and soul." In the same year, Milton Friedman received the Nobel Prize in Economics. The explicit purpose of the Military Junta was to promote a profound cultural transformation, based on the premise that the causes of the alleged "underdevelopment" were not so much economical but cultural and political.

Nevertheless, as García Delgado and Molina (2006) pointed out, the problem is not related to a sort of inevitable structural poverty, due to the culture of our people. It is a matter of a decline in society, produced by the policy orientation of the dictatorship. Until then, the income distribution was similar to that of the countries from Southern Europe with an almost frictional unemployment. Until the *coup d'état*, Argentina had a poverty rate of 8% and the best distributive structure of income in Latin America. However, 1976 was a turning point; the surge of the neoliberal model promoted a process

of over-indebtedness, wealth concentration, unrestricted opening of markets with an unfavorable exchange rate for national industry, labor flexibilization, with the insertion of a competitive globalization of “savage capitalism” that “strengthened the asymmetries and transfers of resources from the periphery to the center. This concept differs from thinking about inequality as a problem related to culture, corruption and poor institutional quality.” (García Delgado and Molina, 2006)

Despite the overwhelming adverse evidence, it is still commonplace to blame all the ills of our society on that culture, the maximum expression of which would be Peronism. In fact, the great majority of disappeared people during the dictatorship were Peronist political, trade union, and social leaders. The motto of the Ministry of Economics during the dictatorship was “towards a change of mentality.” The current Argentine situation, in terms of advances of neoliberalism as well as resistances to it, cannot be understood without referring to the dictatorship. In Poratti’s words,

the *coup d’état* of 1976 does not only put an end to a government, a political system and project, but also to a ‘world’ in which Argentinians were living at least from the independence project of 1810. In those days, there was not an abrupt differentiation between generations and, in many aspects, people could identify themselves, diachronically, with a historical line beyond the particular generational characteristics. (Various authors, 2009)

These aspects go along with others that appeared in other areas, such as the implementation of new computer and communication technologies and, as a consequence, individual and social fragmentation. The impact of these technologies on daily life was decisive to the emergence of what some authors, like Sloterdijk (2002), called “mass individualism.” No doubt, this is a necessary factor in explaining the rise of the neoliberal subjectivity in developed countries. Yet, in Argentina, the existence of political, social, trade-union, and ecclesiastical movements based on popular roots, with solidarity as a fundamental value, hampered the conquest of the “heart and soul” in 1976; and they are still now an obstacle to be overcome by sectors interested in imposing a neoliberal model. It is impossible to explain any isolated phenomenon of popular resistance to the hegemonic attempts from neoliberalism without analyzing the common conceptions and understandings found in Argentina. Indeed, the popular culture substrate in Argentina is made up, mainly, by the confluence of different cultures: Andean, Guaraní

Indians, Afro, and Criollo (native). All of them are characterized by their relational and solidarity conceptions, intrinsically opposed to a subjectivity that conceives the individual as an entrepreneur of himself/herself.

### **Cultural traditions and neoliberal subjectivity**

In recent years, we have observed a retrieval of those subjectivities considered as the matrix of our culture. In this respect, it is worth noting the importance that some lines of thought developed some decades ago—such as philosophy and theology<sup>2</sup> of liberation—are rebuilding. At the same time, new theoretical approaches like the decolonial perspective are emerging and gaining presence in several disciplinary areas, such as philosophy, literature, social sciences, political sciences, economy, and history. It is remarkable to note the boom of these perspectives despite the opposition of the traditional academic spaces, and of a great part of the mass media. This chapter attempts to point out some of the distinctive characteristics of these theoretical approaches. To understand them in depth, we will compare them with European philosophies. For the sake of brevity, only an outline will be presented trying to help us to understand reality, but it cannot account for the whole reality.

#### *Different philosophies*

In the famous thesis XI on Feuerbach, Marx stated that “the philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it.” If we accept that social reality is largely a discursive construction, we should conclude that the action of interpreting the world is, in turn, a way of constructing and, therefore, of changing the world. Moreover, as there is no zero point—a place out of the world from where it could be interpreted—every interpreter is the product of previous interpretations. Hence, when the philosophy of European matrix is referred to as “the” philosophy, the intention is to establish a *peculiar way* of conceiving and constructing the world as if it were the *unique valid way* of doing philosophy, forgetting or ignoring other philosophical perspectives. It is worth nothing that, reciprocally, when we mention the Andean, Tupí-guaraní or Bantu philosophy, for instance, we are not referring to a “pure essence” that should be rescued from oblivion; because we, the interpreters of those other lines of thoughts, are already “influenced” by the European philosophy in which we have been educated. Therefore, there is

no pure or “uncontaminated” thinking, and far less in Argentina, where foreign invasions and migratory flows—and, therefore, cultural contributions—from many areas have been coming for at least five centuries. Impositions, resistances, dialogues, and cultural crossings of every type generated—and are still generating—diverse ways of knowing and producing reality. To do philosophy in Latin America in general, and in Argentina in particular, does not consist in copying uncritically the academic production of the North, or in romantic attempts to rescue the roots of a native philosophy. It consists in thinking about what we are not: Westerners with a presumed right to dominate the Earth in the name of God, owners of reason, of democracy and market; or descendants of the native peoples with arcane knowledge, intended to save the planet from predatory capitalism.

This particular way of being places us in a good position to understand and assume that every thought is a situated thought because the gravity of ground not only involves things but also thoughts. In Kusch’s words:

... the ground, conceived in this way, is not a thing, or something that can be touched, but it weighs. It is the only answer to the question about the culture. The issue is to ask about the meaning that the supposed universality has for those who do not understand the problem. There is no other universality than the condition of being fallen on the ground, no matter if it is on the Andean highlands or the jungle. (Kusch, 1976).

It is not about the ground/fundament on which we are (which would lead us to an essentialist thought), but the ground where we *are* being,<sup>3</sup> a ground without which any relationship with the others and the cosmos would be possible.

Regarding the ways of doing philosophy, the European matrix is a philosophy that comes from various academic fields. Philosophy became a profession like any other one; and, as a profession, it belonged to the domain of a technique. For this reason, the academic philosophy tends to privilege the technical aspects (*how* to philosophize) over the experience-based aspects (*about what* to philosophize), contributing to generate the illusion of the possibility of thinking in a “pure” form, disregarding any relation to a certain time and space. As Kusch (1976) stated:

This transference of the problematic to the visible field  
– with the help of the technique – provides us certain

capacity for handling the means and reality, contributing precisely, to the loss of the act of philosophizing. It can be helpful when doing philosophy that is not the same as philosophizing; because the former is reduced to a myriad of techniques accumulated over time in the Western world where technique was created. Thus, philosophizing is nothing more than the handling of a technique, and therefore, the professionalism of the philosopher becomes encrusted, self-sufficient, and useless in America ... a sterile activity or better said, sterilized and aseptic due to academic reiteration.

### *The problem of the fundament*

The problem of the fundament—of things, politics, law and society—is where we can strongly notice that thinking is, always, a geo-culturally situated thinking; and, thinking the world is, in turn, to participate in the construction of the world. In effect, when the modern subject asks themselves why they are the entity rather than “nothing,” they note that there is no an ultimate fundament of reality, that things and ourselves might not have been. Then, that subject (conqueror and owner, belonging to the European cultural matrix) tends to think that everything is *absurd*, that nothing makes sense. Instead, the Latin American people tend to think that if there is no fundament, then their existence is gratuitous (*gratuit*) and, therefore, can or cannot be meaningful; but the important matter is that things and people are-being (be-being<sup>4</sup>). The notion of gratuitous implies an attitude of gratitude as it happens, for example, in the Andean cultures in which they thank the *Pachamama* and *Inti*<sup>5</sup> by holding ceremonies in which ritual offerings are given because of the blessings received (Estermann, 1998).

Since the average European considers their existence as substantial, it is difficult for them to think the substance as derived from a relation: that which does not have a substantial existence does not exist. This is the conclusion drawn by some intellectuals who try to philosophize, based on the findings of quantum physics: if there are no elementary particles (atom or whatever), there is nothing. According to one of Houellebecq's (1999, p.79) characters: “we should renounce to a concept of elementary particle having intrinsic properties when there is not any observation. In this case, a profound ontological vacuum has to be faced, ... renouncing definitely to the idea of an underlying reality.” Why not think that if there is no substance it is because there

is a relation; or, likewise, if there is no fundament, it is because there is gratuitousness? Unlike the main streams of European thought, the Andean, Bantu, and Eastern philosophies have no problem in accepting this fact (Dussel, 2001).

To shed light on this concept, we present the following example: the ecosystem is, for a European, either a sum of entities with a substantial existence that are related one another (a tree plus another tree, plus a river, plus the air, plus the earth, plus the animals... and so on), or it is conceived as a sort of mega-substance (*Gaia*, *Gea*) in which things, plants, fish, birds, minerals and ourselves are only parts of that great substance. Instead, in Andean metaphysics, things exist because they are in a relation: the *Pachamama* is not a substance that exists by itself—it is itself a relation (Estermann, 1998), a relation that is prior to substance. Similarly, in Bantu philosophy, a child has to be educated by the entire people, and a tree needs the whole ecosystem—to use the Western category—to grow. In other words, the child and the people exist, but not substantially but in relation, as the tree with respect to the ecosystem, and reciprocally.

Nowadays, societies are aware of the lack of a substantial fundament—a lack of fundament that goes beyond the mere uncertainty—assuming the radical contingency of the individual and life in common. In sum, they discover the radical contingency of the entire existence: it is the entity, but it could be the nothing too. Although several thinkers have been pointing out this matter for some time, only now these concerns are being addressed since they characterize the metaphysic *élan* of our hegemonic societies. All societies have a way of approaching the being and existence: the mentioned *élan* is not exclusive of the Europeans. Probably, the most radical question regarding the being has been made within the European matrix, since the most radical question concerning the nothing has probably also been European (Casalla, 1998). The fact is that, for other peoples, like Latin Americans, these questions have never concerned themselves so much, precisely because, for them, things *are not*, they *are-being*.

*“The rose is without ‘why’; it blooms simply because it blooms.”* If this phrase by Silesius touched Heidegger so much, it was not because in other regions nobody had posed this matter. On the contrary, it was because people tend to think more about what worries them than about what is taken for granted. Therefore, the concern about the fundament is a characteristic of those metaphysical *élan* who believe that what does not have fundament is absurd. But it is not a characteristic of those who think that what does not have fundament, is just because it is gratuitous. In fact, the entire Western philosophy cannot be included

in this model. However, we accept the validity of *geo-cultural and epochal paradigms*—as Scannone (2005) called them—which would exert more or less influence on the spirit of the times, depending on the different authors’ perspectives.

*The neoliberal dilemma: Individualism or collectivism*

Classical authors of neoliberalism, such as Hayek, Nozick, or Popper, pose a basic dichotomy: either what exists (the *substance*) is the individual or what exists is the collectivity. One or the other: there is no such thing as a superior synthesis of this antagonism. For that reason, every concession made to the collective, even in terms of “social justice,” is only the beginning of a road that leads to serfdom (Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, 1944). In political terms, the option would be liberalism or socialism. Latin American popular thinking does not share the Western obsession about finding in everything and to everything the essence or substance; instead, it is part of the philosophical traditions that consider relations prior to substance. From this viewpoint, it is possible to find adequate concepts to describe some Argentinian political alternative positions, which are generally and hastily defined as “populist” because they do not fit in the molds predetermined by classical liberalism, neoliberalism, or socialism within the European matrix.

*Society and individual from a relational perspective*

Indeed, from a relational perspective, it is possible to affirm that the people, the community, exist without denying the individual and vice versa. However, dominant European thought struggles to accept this concept. They would say that, if a relation exists, it is because there is “something” (substance) that relates to another thing. This explains why so many excellent contemporary political philosophers exert themselves to find the fundament of society and politics. When they do not find it, instead of accepting that things are just like that, they end up denying society and politics. If there is no fundament, it means that there is gratuitousness. Philosophical thought opened to other ways of understanding reality—such as the assumption of fraternity as the main concept to tackle politics and society—shows how sterile the obsessive search for a fundament is.

The category “relation” prior to substance is how our peoples understand the world and society. This does not mean that they support an “anti-substance” thinking. They consider that there are things and



that they have their substance, but assume that substance derives from the relation and not the other way around.

It is worth insisting that these ideas are the philosophical expression of knowledge and practices that peoples express more experientially than theoretically. In Alejandro Moreno's words (2005),

a man of the people is not a being in the world but an *experiential relation* that exists. It is not subjectivity, rationality or individuality but relation. In the relation, singularity, rationality and subjectivity deconstruct and construct – but not reconstruct – themselves.

It is not about overcoming the antinomy of collectivity versus individual, but to make explicit the permanent tension between them. Society is not the addition of subjects/substances, neither is the individual just a part of a mega-subject.

In this respect, a critical and non-naïve analysis of popular thinking, such as that developed by Kusch (2008), leads us to understand some prevailing conceptions of Argentinian popular sectors. Along with their load of resistance to individualistic, competitive and entrepreneur neoliberal subjectivity, they have the potential to resist and to propose that is worth analyzing. Clearly, naïve standpoints that consider all that is popular/Latin American as good, and everything modern/European as bad should be avoided. This type of approach does not have empirical validity, theoretical sense, or ethical foundation, so is not worth analysis. However, it is important to consider those aspects of popular thinking that give us the basis for examining the contemporary situation of Argentina. That said, this popular/relational conception adopts the ideals of modern democracies synthesized in the liberal trilogy of liberty-equality-fraternity, but re-signifies them by placing fraternity at the top of the reflexion.<sup>6</sup>

Romulus and Remus, Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, Tupi and Guarany, Manco Capac and his brothers: all around the world, we find myths of origin related to struggles among siblings, especially between brothers, that sometimes end up in fratricide. The daily experience of any parent of two or more children can confirm that siblings fight with each other. However, against all evidence, mothers insist on telling their children not to fight, but to love each other as siblings. Moreover, when two friends want to express that their relationship is very close and strong, they say that they are like brothers.<sup>7</sup>

The point is that sisterhood/brotherhood or fraternity may be understood in two different senses: what it actually is and what we think

it should be. In the first case, the struggle among siblings shows us a fact: the horizontal relationships encourage the conflict. In the second case, what we have is a desire: to avoid the conflict so that everyone can be happier. If the fraternity concept is extrapolated from the domestic field to the public one, when mentioning universal fraternity, we refer to either: a) the original condition of society—there is no father and no mother—therefore, conflict is always present, in a latent or manifest way; or b) the invoke of an ideal, an unattainable goal—a harmonious society in which everyone can freely display all their potential.

Accordingly, fraternity has two faces like Janus: one face looks with hope to the future we should construct, and the other one alertly observes the past from which we have been constructing this present. One face dictates an order; the other describes a datum. Paradoxically, the realistic face gives us the datum (the “given”) that nothing is given in advance and, consequently, everything is a matter of constructions that are never definitive; but they are the dynamic result of struggles and consensus, of dialogues and impositions. This conception both harmonious and conflictive is part of the most rooted political ideologies in Argentina, such as Peronism and radicalism, so difficult to understand in other countries.

Every extrapolation from the private to public arena has its risks and issues. For this reason, many people have discarded this concept as a useful political category. Hence, it should not be forgotten that fraternity is a catachresis: it does not refer to family. The temptation of thinking it as a metaphor is very strong. That is why its meaning is often trivialized. However, it is so profitable for understanding political ideologies and the practices of our social, union movements that it is worth running the risk of using it with the due precautions. The first risk is that, within a family, the verticality that parents established tends to dissolve the conflict. Instead, in the public field, there is not, and there has never been a father or mother: there is no person or group that may exercise “naturally” the parent’s role of establishing the law or of dissolving every antagonism. Universal fraternity warns us that life in common is a construction that depends on us, a primary and ideal reality to be reached: in the tension between these two ends, the collective existence is constructed, which does not allow any naivety. It shows us that we are people in its double sense: as *populus* or harmonious totality of those “above” and those “below”, of patricians and plebeians<sup>8</sup>.

Life in common is a collective construction. We are definitely not beautiful souls capable of living in a world free of conflicts once the “others” have been annihilated, the bastards that do not allow us to enjoy

this perfect world. There is no option: we have to take responsibility for ourselves. This is where fraternity may cause a disturbance. In consequence, it is set aside in comparison with “strong” principles such as liberty, equality, or justice. The problem is that those principles refer to “what ought-to-be,” while fraternity forces us to confront “what is,” what we are, or what we are being. Liberty and equality are no longer attributes of the substance “man” to become goods that can be obtained, kept, or lost. This fact disturbs those right-wingers who believe that societies are “naturally” stratified, as well as those left-wingers of enlightened vanguards who consider the subalternized people as children to whom they have to explain their condition of subjugation and to show the means to emancipate themselves. It also annoys others who prefer to ignore their responsibility hoping that “someone else would do something.” Fraternity forces us to face the fact that we are always necessarily responsible: we must respond to the others. If someone knocks at the door and there is an adult in the house, they would be the one to answer; but, as there is no adult, even our silence, our option of remaining silent is indeed an answer. All the same, it is rather ineffective because we cannot live always in silence and inside our houses, afraid of who may virtually knock at our doors. The excluded people from the feast knock at the doors of the satisfied who enclose themselves in private neighborhoods and build walls along the highways they commute back and forth from the city. Yet, the poor, the indigenous, the afro-descendants, the marginalized of every kind still knock at their doors every time they are left outside. From this perspective, fraternity leads us to re-think society and, thus, to resignify liberty, equality, and justice.

### *Liberty becomes liberation*

According to this relational perspective, liberty cannot be thought as a fixed status, but as a process. We “are” not free as if it would be a part of an apparent nature or human essence; but we are being more or less free as a result of struggles, agreements and consensuses that are always unstable. The history of Western thought shows a constant concern in relation to the defense of individual freedom from the power of institutions, especially political and religious ones (but not so much from the economic institutions) and, in consequence, power is considered the opposite of freedom. In contrast, from our point of view, power is the opposite of impotence, and liberty is the result of a process of power construction, particularly with respect to economic

and financial powers. As freedom is not a fixed status, but a part of a process, thus, freedom becomes liberation.

In other words, if we omit our unavoidably fraternal human condition, we may think that our freedom has been provided who knows by whom and since when, and that “your freedom ends where my nose begins.” In this case, to be completely free, the only inhabitant in the planet should be me, being the rest of the people the limit, the obstacle to the full and absolute exercise of my freedom. However, with fraternity we notice that it works otherwise. History indicates that liberty and particular liberties are conquered and kept by fighting shoulder to shoulder with others. Therefore, it is not a matter of possessing a substantial attribute, but of being part of a collective process. There are always references to life and to what is in common/ and to life in common, not to the being, but to the *be-being* (*estar siendo*). It is not a matter of finding a supposed “essence” of liberty, but of understanding that the definition of liberty, as it happens with every political concept, is a construction that results from a play of power, which, when considered assuming our fraternal condition, will bring to light elements of a strong heuristic and performative nature.

### *Equality as social justice*

The continuity and ubiquity of conflict and the supremacy of relation over substance show that it is not possible to achieve a “state of equality,” a society which is “essentially” equal. Instead, from this perspective, it seems more proper to understand this longing or desire for equality as struggles for social justice. We do not define social justice here. The same as what truly matters—love, freedom, time, life or space—social justice cannot be grasped or restricted within the boundaries of a conceptual definition. However, we will try to describe the prominent dimensions of social justice with respect to fraternity.

### *Distributive justice*

The social democracies of the middle of the last century, and the most widespread discourse of international agencies have privileged indicators such as the Gini coefficient and other similar indicators to “measure” social justice. Nevertheless, social justice cannot be reduced to a mere equality or equity with respect to wealth or income distribution. Considering the huge current inequalities of wealth and income, democracy and life in common are at risk in our planet.

However, distributive justice is not enough to achieve social justice; two other dimensions are also required.

### *Acknowledgment*

A homosexual man or woman, indigenous native, afro-descendant person, a Jew or a Latino can have as much money as a white and heterosexual man, but they are going to be discriminated against because of their ethnic condition, religious choice, or sexual orientation. Their rights would not be acknowledged de jure or de facto, and thus, they become victims of an injustice. Since this topic has been sufficiently analyzed by political theory and philosophy and, more precisely by cultural and gender studies, we will not expand on it.<sup>9</sup>

### *Contributive justice*

The professor, the executive, the retired public servant who receives a good pension and every year is honored does not suffer injustice from the two above-mentioned dimensions. Neither does the unemployed worker who receives an allowance or the businessman's wife who "lives for the family." Nevertheless, they know that they can contribute much more to society in general in several ways, not only economically or financially, but they do not have the opportunity to do it. This dimension, called "general justice" by medieval philosophy, was forgotten by Western modernity, because it considers the individual as a substance instead of a relation (with oneself, the others and the cosmos). We are referring to the dimension of social justice that consists in ensuring each one the right to their self-realization through their contribution to the others' realization.

Modern philosophy and science have an evident incapacity to notice this constitutive dimension of human beings (Mate, 2011). For that reason, they tend to reduce the need to do something for others to the previous dimension (seeking recognition) or to a form of narcissism. However, this is not the case: we all know people who dedicate their free time to work as volunteers without anyone knowing it. Someone who knits warm clothes to give to charity anonymously or those who donate money in secret are examples of it. But beyond these clear cases, a doctor who saves a life, do they not feel satisfied because of the mere fact that they have saved a life? Or is it the eagerness for recognition that drives them? In fact, it is not necessary to give more examples of this independent dimension of justice since the reader

has surely experienced sometime the feeling of being happier giving than receiving.

To sum up, if we adopt the hegemonic conception of freedom, we can easily understand power as the opposite of liberty. However, thinking about power in terms of liberation will lead us to interpret power as a necessary instrument for generating a social change. For that reason, the classical tension between liberty and equality dissolves away in Argentine popular political thinking, because liberation/process (not liberty/state) is conceptually assumed as the path to social justice.

An aspect to consider regarding social justice in Latin America in general, and in Argentina in particular, refers to the democratization of access to desired goods. That is, broadly speaking, the enjoyment of elites is linked to the non-enjoyment of the majority. That is part of a game generally accepted. In terms of a Republican song during the Spanish Civil war, it would be as follows: “Time is coming up / to turn the tables / for the poor to eat bread /and the rich just shit.” However, this is not what popular political parties from this region propose. They claim that the rich should still eat their bread, and that the poor should eat bread of the same quality, seated at a similar table and drinking the same wine as the rich. This is unbearable. This disrupts the rules of the game, which states that in order for a person to enjoy themselves, another should have no joy. For that reason, the first statement that the neoliberal rulers express is that “the party is over.” “They made you believe that you could live like that forever” is an expression repeatedly affirmed by “anti-populism” politician and social communicators.

### **Subject, people, state: toward a continental post-neoliberalism**

Universal fraternity entails the absence of a parent that provides meaning to life; meaning is the result of conflicts,<sup>10</sup> struggles and agreements among siblings. It is the result of a hegemonic construction, and not a pre-existing fundament. The fundament of society as such does not lie in anything stable; it is not a “substance,” it is constituted by the relational interweaving, which is, obviously, dynamic and contingent. In that dynamic, some sectors impose their conception of reality as “the reality” or, at least, as the right and true conception. Nevertheless, politics, economy, sexuality, as well as equalities and disparities, are not given by nature. Nothing is established once and for all. It is also about accepting that the field of *the political* cannot always be based on

dialogue—which is, instead, always recommendable for the field of politics and policies. The political field is founded without fundament.<sup>11</sup>

In core countries, there is always someone who believes that the problem of the absence of fundament can be solved through dialogue and consensus in relation to political decision-making processes. If we forget, indeed, the conflictive dimension of fraternity, we may easily end up taking the naïve stance that holds that “every conflict may be channeled if the parts involved defend their interests with intelligence.” This would be possible if the parts concerned were able to defend their interests wisely, but—as history and daily experience show—conflict tends to cloud the intelligence and, frequently, it is replaced by the most destructive passions. However, this is not the main obstacle for the channeling of conflicts. In fact, there could be an impartial third party that stays reasonable, and somehow manages a solution beneficial to all concerned. The problem is that nobody actually knows their own interest. There are a lot of tales and myths about the bad luck of those who have their desire fulfilled. That desire which we think is “in our own interest” is hardly such. Generally, it is the interest of hegemonic sectors of society.

Unfortunately, it is not true that “people understand each other by talking and can come to satisfactory agreements with all parts concerned.” This is not so, because, to make that possible, it would be necessary that all of them: a) know what they really want; b) know how to express effectively what they want; and c) that others understand fully that demand (Žižek, 2013). This problem escalates when we refer to collective demands instead of individual wishes: the undetermined third party takes part there. Thus, even if some people know what they really want through a deep knowledge of their selves, and the other person could understand and satisfy their demand through an open and sincere dialogue, there will always be others directly or indirectly affected by that decision.

The neglect of these aspects leads to the minimization of contemporaneous political, social, and economic conflict, becoming a matter of public debate in which people try to agree on propositions and definitions in order to achieve agreement and consensus. The bad news is that this matter is far more complex. The trap of neoliberalism as the dominant ideology of consumer capitalism—instead of traditional liberalism linked to a capitalism characterized by accumulation—is to make us believe that we always know what we want and that such wish emerges spontaneously from inside of every person. Yet, there is also good news: conflict is not a synonym of a “struggle to the death,” it is what makes us live in a certain society. An example that may be helpful

to explain the core of this thesis: without rivalry among football teams, that sport would not exist. The problem is that, in a society, there is not minute zero—a starting point—a previous moment to the match in which rules could be agreed. Instead, we are constantly playing according to rules that are imposed by those who have the power to do so; this is how hegemony functions. It is true that the lack of rules would be worse: the law is always an imposition of the strongest, but even they must somehow pretend that they are complying with the law. The inexistence of law is equivalent to the constant and explicit fulfillment of the mere will of the strongest.

The abovementioned leads us to pose the problem of the state. From Hobbes onwards—including the outstanding contribution of Hegel—as societies secularize, the state gradually takes the place of God. A God modeled on image and likeness of the modern subject: male, one, sovereign, omnipotent. In consequence, if God is One and only secondarily Triune, the state is also One in first place and Triune in second place (the separation of power into three branches of government: legislative, executive and judicial). God is sovereign; it is *super omnes*, it is over everything, *ergo* the state is sovereign. God is omnipotent, the state is omnipotent. In this context, the reference to popular sovereignty is a matter of mere demagogy that lacks any fundament.

However, if instead of considering God as One, unique, exclusive, excludable, *super omnes*—a God of a totalizing totality—God is thought as Triune (a God that is a relation rather than a substance in the way the Latin American popular religiosity conceived it), and the state is considered a relation, new horizons can be opened. Up to now, sovereignty has been regarded as an attribute of the state. On the contrary, considering the state as a relation, sovereignty appears to be also constitutive of such relation and not an attribute of the substance. By this perspective, the sovereignty of the state can be understood “internally” (*ad intra*) as the relation among the three elements that make it up: territory, population and government. Thus, the government’s interaction with the people can be analyzed in terms of popular sovereignty; and when government and people interact with the territory, it can be studied in terms of ecological sovereignty.

From this standpoint, a state is, “externally” (*ad extra*), more sovereign when it is better connected to other states. Nowadays Argentina, to be truly a sovereign country, needs to interact closely with the countries of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR). There is no true chance of being really sovereign without a relation with other states. This does not mean that there will not be conflicts among the



state members of a supranational organization. A fraternal conception of sovereignty does not suggest that states must behave properly with the others. It is just that no one can take the place of the parent because relations are horizontal; asymmetrical but horizontal relations, in the same terms as relations among siblings are constructed.

The foundational ideal of the leaders of the independence process, such as San Martín, Artigas, and Bolívar, was to construct a united Latin America. It was not a whim, an abstract idea suggested by academicians, or the result of an ideology: it was an ideal consistent with the most profound understanding and feeling of our peoples. In that context, there was not then or now any other more effective way of facing the interests contrary to the full realization of every person and people.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Translated into English by Lidia Unger, María Mercedes Palumbo, and Laura Celina Vacca.
- <sup>2</sup> One of the best-known expressions (though not the only one) is the popular theology of liberation which is in the basis of the doctrine established by Pope Francis (Cuda, 2016).
- <sup>3</sup> The verb “to be” (*ser*) is a particularity of the Indo-European languages that dramatically hampers the dynamic and unstable comprehension of the existence perceived, for instance, in the notion—widely used by Kusch and the Latin American philosophers—of “be-being” (*estar siendo*). Kusch (1922–79) is intentionally quoted here because he is one of the “damned philosophers.” Just the reference to the author during dictatorship—and even later—meant the exclusion from the academic field. Any internet search is enough to show the significant increase in interest in this author and in many others related to the “philosophy of liberation,” such as Enrique Dussel, Juan Carlos Scannone, Arturo Andrés Roig, Mario Casalla, Carlos Cullen, and Armando Poratti, just some of the Argentinian philosophers more representative of the different perspectives in this line of thought.
- <sup>4</sup> According to Kusch, *estar siendo* is the concept that defines the Latin American mode of existence. It must be noted that the term *estar siendo* is untranslatable to English; “to be-being” is the most accepted interpretation in the academic field. Likewise, the idea of *ser* (to be)—as the concept that defines the European mode of existence—is untranslatable in non-Indo-European languages.
- <sup>5</sup> *Pachamama* would be equivalent the Western concept of ecosystem and *Inti*, of the sun, but, in both cases, the reference is related to relational and complementary entities and not to substances, people or “things.”
- <sup>6</sup> It is understood as fraternity/sorority, given the importance that the popular thinking assigns to the complementarity principle. Within this principle, the masculine cannot be thought without the feminine, or vice versa (Estermann, 2008).
- <sup>7</sup> Strictly speaking, it is a catachresis—a figure of speech, a sort of metaphor. This expression refers to a word used with a different meaning from its original one, with the purpose of describing something that lacks a special name. For example, when we say the “neck” of a bottle or the “arm” of an armchair, we are not talking about the “neck” or the “leg” in the original sense, like the neck or leg of a living

being. For a detailed analysis of the implications of the concept of fraternity, see Del Percio (2014).

- <sup>8</sup> Briefly, *plebs* refers to a part of society composed of the poorest, but curiously, this term has the same etymology as *pleno* (full), *plenitud* (plenitude). We may ask ourselves whether this etymology is leading us to think about plenitude in relation to lack, and harmony in relation to conflict.
- <sup>9</sup> For an excellent critique on policies of recognition of indigenous people and Afro-Americans promoted by international organizations, see Gómez Michel (2014).
- <sup>10</sup> Regarding conflict as constituent, see Marchart (2009, p.126).
- <sup>11</sup> For an introduction to the “post-foundational” thinkers, especially “post-structuralists,” see Stavrakakis (2010) and Marchart (2009). With respect to the problem of the fundament in the Ancient Greeks from an Argentine popular philosophy point of view, see Poratti (1993).

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# Fleeing (Post-)Chávez Memories: The 1990s and the Black Friday Generation

*Magdalena López*

There is no original past to redeem; there is the void, the orphanhood, the unbaptized earth of the beginning, the time that from within the earth looks upon us.

Ana Mendieta

## **Introduction**

Over recent years, we have witnessed the end of the so-called Latin-American pink tide. After the neoliberal decade, leftist governments that occupied power in Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Uruguay, and Venezuela might not have fulfilled the political and social expectations they generated at the beginning of the 21st century. Some recent articles even refer to the failure or setback of the left.<sup>1</sup> The uncertainty generated by this end of an era compels us to inquire about the paradigms that sustained some of these post-neoliberal projects. In particular, Laclau's theory on populism offered a conceptual foundation for the legitimization of these governments, positing that politics serve to discursively constitute an antagonism between two subjects: on the one hand, the people, and on the other, the one anathematized as anti-popular, elitist, oligarchical, imperialist (Laclau, 2005, p.99). Venezuela, as any other country in the region, reveals the devastating consequences of the construction of political binary imaginaries, not only those of the state power but also those

from its opposition. As we face the collapse of the Chavist hegemony, by now bereft of a concrete alternative horizon, it is helpful to review the subjectivities and affects that did not enter the polarized political discourses of the last decade. Memories of the 1990s offer a particularly productive field, as it was in that period when disputes for the interpretive legitimacy of the current socio-political crisis were first staged.

### Memory conflicts

After the early—and still unexplained—death of Venezuelan writer Alejandro Rebolledo on August 18, 2016, a debate about the “literary value” of Rebolledo’s only novel, *Pim Pam Pum* (originally published as *Pin Pan Pun* in 1998) erupted on social media, reaching visceral tones. In a way, it initiated a rekindling of the debate that the work had triggered in the late 1990s, when its juvenile and irreverent proposal, to a great extent disconnected from the national lettered tradition, burst onto the literary scene. On this occasion, though, the debate about *Pim Pam Pum* was magnified by the historical perspective provided by the 17 years of Chavist rule. Aesthetic considerations got mixed with discussions about memory and the “true” rendering of the years immediately prior to the political change. In its appeal to memory, the official discourse has erased or Satanized the period of Venezuelan two-party democracy in order to legitimize its own hegemony as a social and historical claim pending since the 19th century.<sup>2</sup> The majority of intellectuals, however, has resisted Chavism by means of a romanticization of that period, turning it into a legacy that must be salvaged from populist “barbarism.”<sup>3</sup> Both the recurring “we were happy and we didn’t know it” and the call to achieve Simón Bolívar’s epic feat are two sides of the same coin; two approaches that aim at encapsulating the hermeneutic paradigm of the nation in a pristine past. The dispute about memory stems from a nostalgic affectivity that seeks the permanent restoration of that which was lost in terms of absolute truth (Boym, 2001, p.xviii). The appeal to the past, which has sustained the political hegemony of the official imaginary, has served for the intellectual opposition to attempt—and acknowledge the impossibility of—the recovery of its own hegemony (Beasley-Murray, 2010, p.177). The embrace of a remembered authenticity expels those antagonistic and illegitimate elements with respect to the national narrative. A melancholic reasoning imposes boundaries and understands memory in the dichotomic terms of political polarization, such as civilisation versus barbarism, and oligarchy vs. the people.

## The Black Friday Generation

There is a way to read the 1990s, though, which reveals departures from the two nostalgic discourses. Neither the official Chavist paradigm nor its lettered opposition fully capture the subjectivity of the youth of that decade, who now feels scarcely represented, in those discourses that abound in the virtues of liberal representative democracy and those that underscore the epic quest for independence that began in the 19th century. Bearing in mind the arbitrariness of any generational characterization, which might attenuate differences in ideology, class, ethnicity, and gender, I propose to use the term “Black Friday Generation” to refer to the Venezuelan youth born in the late 1960s and most of the 1970s. Black Friday alludes to the year 1983, when the national currency suffered a spectacular devaluation that shelved for good the myths of the successful Venezuelan modernity and the exemplariness of its democracy for the region. This historical event activated the consciousness of its own country for this generation, and in turn inaugurated a state of permanent crisis.

Three main characteristics allow us to define the Black Friday Generation. First, its unremitting experience of the failure of the modernizing project during a series of historical events: Black Friday (February 18, 1983), the *Caracazo*<sup>4</sup> (February 27, 1989), the first coup (February 4, 1992), the second coup (November 27, 1992) and the electoral victory of Hugo Chávez, which marked the end of social democracy (December 6, 1998) and the beginning of the “Bolivarian revolution” (1999 to the present). Second, its in-between situation, book-ended by seemingly different and opposite historical contexts and political projects. And third, the assumption of a constitutive alienation with respect to previous generations. On this last point it is worth noting that many of the generation’s subjectivities show, as Raquel Rivas Rojas posits, a “radical disagreement with the imaginary of roots,” a “rejection of identity” with “very little antecedents in the local [literary] tradition” (2013, p.11). This characteristic of the Black Friday Generation, which estranges it from the meaning of the nation, removes the generation from previous modes of knowledge and value systems, resulting in an alienation from any code of belonging which, in a way, is equivalent to the subjectivity of the migrants.

In the book *Emergencia de Culturas Juveniles*, Rosanna Reguillo-Cruz affirms that social movements are sustained by two opposite forces: a centripetal force that “keeps bodies rotating around a core” and which “manifests in a constant return to a past that got lost, somewhere along the path,” and a centrifugal one, “which keeps bodies away from

core and in a tangent line” and that expresses itself in “movements of withdrawal, self-marginalisation in the face of a present that is perceived as chaotic and hopeless.” (Reguillo-Cruz, 2000, p.153) In what follows I propose to revisit the ways in which some writers of the Black Friday Generation have elaborated an alternative centrifugal archive of the 1990s from juvenile perspectives. With different nuances, not exempt of centripetal forces and different class positions, the novels *La Última Vez* (2007) by Héctor Bujanda, *Bajo Tierra* by Gustavo Valle (2009), *Valle Zamuro* (2011) by Camilo Pino, and *Pim Pam Pum* (1998, 2013) by Alejandro Rebolledo propose stories disconnected from national mega-narratives and avoid the substitute operations of nostalgia. Based on a close reading of these four novels, I will set forth an itinerary that starts with the attempt of an impossible recomposition of the past stemming from alienation, to the full acceptance of a centrifugal subjectivity, ungraspable for the predominant yet conflicting discourses about the memory of the 1990s.

Despite political change and the passing of time, we acknowledge that the hostile and chaotic Caracas of the end of the century is still recognizable. Little seems to have changed between the present and the past city, a city of poverty, violence, rubbish, lines to buy food, inflation, disproportionate electoral propaganda, and forecasts of disaster. We witness an urban landscape suspended in a perpetual present, unaffected by the new millennium; a suspension that translates into the existential milieu of the majority of protagonists: students or permanently unemployed young men, or those who ramble the city without purpose. These narratives reveal contextual continuities, not only between the neoliberal and the Chavist period, but also, as we will see, between the 1990s and the previous decades. We thus encounter a paradox at the heart of the Black Friday Generation: as their perspective breaks away from the inherited foundations of the nation, its reading of the past does not express a rupture with the present of Chavist (post)hegemony. There is no justification, then, for nostalgia. It is precisely for this reason that this generation departs from the dominant imaginaries and abandons the ideological frameworks that determine the interpretation of reality and the past. In the meantime, the Black Friday Generation acknowledges the continuity of a catastrophe that affects both late 20th century neoliberalism and, implicitly, 21st century socialism.

## The fathers of the “archive fever”

In a historical context delimited by financial crisis, shortages worsen by neoliberal cuts, social violence in the wake of the Caracazo, two coup attempts, and the 1990s emptying of political language (Reguillo-Cruz, 2000, p.22), the young protagonists of Bujanda and Valle’s novels try to keep afloat by means of a search for their fathers. They display a centripetal motivation, so to speak, which aims at finding sense by turning toward the origins. Both novels present absent fathers: one disappears after the burial of his elder son, dead by AIDS; another is supposedly killed while working in a subterranean excavation in the subway. These characters never get to find their fathers, though; the trip toward the original seed, the search “for the tunnels of the ancestors” (Valle, 2009, p.211) implies a growing estrangement from reality. In the case of *La Última Vez*, historical references to the Caracazo are central to describe the atmosphere of paranoia, madness, and violence of the months immediately prior to Chávez’s ascension to power (1999). In *Bajo Tierra*, the main historical referent is the Vargas landslide in 1999,<sup>5</sup> right before the new century.

Luis Duno has pointed out the recurrence of an imaginary of sickness and natural catastrophe “to respond to the generalised anxiety caused by the socio-political reordering of the last decades.” (2009, p.401) There are, however, three reasons why this interpretation of the phenomenon is problematic. In the first place, it connects sickness and catastrophe to political polarization (the *other* being a sick person or destructive agent); second, it links pathological metaphors with 19th century literary biologicistic discourse; and third, Duno seems to understand that the emergence of these imaginaries occurs in the midst of contexts of radical transformation. While the first approach reduces the hermeneutical framework of sickness and catastrophe to the dichotomies of polarization, the second reveals an enlightened epistemic matrix, under which literature retains a function of social regulation. Finally, the third notion seems to assume the official narrative of emergence of a Bolivarian revolution, which effectively would amount to a radical rupture with the past similar to the French Revolution, the example posed by Duno. Contrarily, I would like to underscore a kind of narrative that resists the binary logics of polarization and promotes the reading of the continuities between the 1990s and the present; a present in which literature has forfeited a guiding function. These novels narrate their insufficiency both to order as well as to represent the affectivity of turn-of-the-century Venezuela. Any diagnosis of the nation fails because the hermeneutical collapse



affects writing as well. Thus, the narrator of *La Última Vez* admits that “nothing in this story has been easy. I have tried to unsuccessfully arrange an impossible quantity of events” (Bujanda, 2007, p.118). Fictional imaginaries float adrift in a dimension in which topics such as sickness and natural disaster become ungraspable metaphors. While they do not dodge historical consciousness, they resign the explanatory sufficiency of naked historiographical or social data.

I would like to pick up here on Javier Guerrero’s (2012) allegorical reading of the Venezuelan family in order to discuss the nation and its violence. The figure of the (disappeared or spectral) father is particularly productive to consider how and from which position one thinks about the exclusion from the codes of belonging to the country. Allegory must not be understood here in the way prescribed by Frederic Jameson (1986) for third-world literature. Fathers in these novels do not fit the norm of Bolívar, Chávez, nor their condemned opponents; rather, they can be better read under Ignacio Álvarez’s terms: “National allegory is not necessarily a reflection of the real conditions of our existence or a blind adherence to any type of nationalism. *It is rather the place where political inquiry settles*” (Álvarez, 2004, p.4, my emphasis). Such inquiry would then be different from the discursive Manichaeism of the national, and cautious of any ideological reordering.

The main character of *La Última Vez*, José Ángel, is a journalist who in 1998 tries to discover what happened with several missing weapons after the 1992 coup d’état. In parallel, he tries to find out the whereabouts of his father, who abandoned him, his mother and sister in the cemetery right after the burial of his older brother. José Ángel’s investigations about the rifles and about his father José Ramón end up converging in the same plot line when his father is identified as a guerrilla member involved in an obscure confrontation between the police, the army, the narcos, and the guerrilla for the missing weapons. José Ángel is astonished by the possibility that José Ramón, who disappeared three years ago, might be in reality a member of a clandestine unit of the Bolivarian Movement for Justice (Movimiento Bolivariano por la Justicia, MBJ). The image of a hyper-virile father who shoots guns utterly contrasts with the image José Ángel keeps of his father, a man who had spent the last 20 years in college studying law without ever obtaining the degree while always taking the worst part in court cases. For the narrator, then, his father is a totally fragmented figure, constituted by the polarities of a familiar-legal failure and the hyper-virility of a guerrilla fighter. In Lacanian terms, José Ramón is clearly not capable of structuring any symbolic or legal order, not even under the new guise of his father, whose nonentity is summarized in

the narrator's conclusive sentence: "The only thing that José Ramón did well in all his life was to disappear" (Bujanda, 2007, p.46). Paternal insufficiency is reinforced by his rejection of his elder son, whom he abused and beat because of his homosexuality. When the son dies of AIDS, the father's shock is so great that he literally vanishes from family life. The true "monster," then, to use Guerrero's terms, is not the gay son but the homophobic father-turned-guerrilla fighter. The abuse and abandonment of his sons combines with the image of the ailing body of his son: ulcerated and scrawny after surgery, affected by diabetes and pneumonia. The exhibition of violence on that body does not aim at the normalization of the family, but rather uncovers an intimate process of long-term destruction. José Ángel pieces together childhood memories to determine when the familiar disintegration began. Some of the episodes of the past include failures in employment, political crookedness, genealogies of suicide, double lives, and grandiloquent fantasies. Among these memories, the allusion to the Caracazo is the most intense. The narrator's brother is buried close to the "new pest," the area of common graves for the unidentified corpses of the Caracazo in the Cementerio General del Sur. The latent presence of anonymous countrymen murdered is reinforced by the walls of the building where José Ángel lives with his mother, pierced by bullets in 1989 (Bujanda, 2007, p.76). The Caracazo thus becomes omnipresent and stifling, gradually causing the mother to go insane. In turn, José Ángel discovers that the missing weapons are being used by different and apparently opposite social actors, including the narcos and policemen, the army and guerrilla bands complicit with the media. Far from announcing a true political-social transformation, this fact implies merely to "move some pieces in the bedroom so everything remains the same" (Bujanda, 2007, p. 134). For the narrator, the coming replacement of the political casing is as somber as everything that surrounds his father. Not only does he never find the father, but also he is himself demoted and ends up losing his way in a city affected by several explosions. By then, though, several works of graffiti cover the country, foretelling the future: "You must choose: destruction or destruction" (Bujanda, 2007, p. 99). This recurrent sentence first appears in a letter that a mysterious commander Maigualida of the MBJ had sent to José Ramón. Upon reading it, José Ángel tries to decipher the discourse of an illuminati that invites his father to join an "indestructible process" that will spread through the galaxy driven by God (Bujanda, 2007, p. 119). Although given the rampant corruption, a coup by the military and groups of the MBJ seems imminent; the political change that José Ramón embraces would perpetuate and even aggravate the catastrophe. The novel does

not underscore the regenerative aspect of the revolutionary movement but rather its destructiveness as demonstrated in such millennialist discourses. Paradoxically, in her obsessive drive for destruction, commander Maigualida is a product of the past, on which she depends, even if it is by negation, to sustain her legitimacy. The delirium of the commander, shared by the father, and the mother's madness, trapped in the terror of the Caracazo, do not enable José Ángel to find meaning in what happens to him. Such interpretative impossibility is evident in the final dissolution of the family: his sister migrates to Spain and ends all communication with José Ángel, and the mother is confined in a psychiatric institution. Due to the open ending, we ignore whether the main character flees the city or commits suicide. It is clear that José Ángel's path toward his father becomes centrifugal, and that the protagonist ends further away from his father than he started.

Significantly, when José Ángel deviates from the hard-boiled editorial line of the newspaper where he works, his boss removes him from the investigation and relegates him to the archival section. For Jacques Derrida, the relationship between the archive and power is based in the latter's retention of memory (2001, pp.13–14). What the French author termed “archive fever” is summarized by Murguía as “placing oneself at the origin in order to always return to it. This eternal return evades the very impulse of life: the act of abandoning origin one's origin” (2011, p.27). In Bujanda's novel, the archive–punishment reveals the deathly impulse of authority over a memory, which José Ángel inherits without partaking in it. Thus, his boss rebukes any attempt for journalistic autonomy:

Are you forgetting who feeds you? It was me who gave you a fucking chance to grow in this company and develop a serious journalistic career. We gave you the green light, we blindly trusted in you, and that's how you pay us back? (Bujanda, 2007, p.133)

“Archive fever” connects in this manner with the search for origins through the father figure, a fruitless search that only generates estrangement from the country and the acknowledgment of an unliveable reality.

The word “apocalypse” encompasses the meanings of *destruction* of the old order and *revelation* of a truth (Fabry and Logie, 2010, p.12), but Bujanda's imaginary does not include the second sense. The archive only reveals the redundancy of its own power. José Ángel's stubbornness to find the origins of his tragedy preserves the desolation of the past

in the present, and turns the future into impossibility, because “there is no after-trauma” (Fabry and Logie, 2010, p.18). Paradoxically, the apocalypse does not signal the end but rather prolongs it indefinitely.

In Valle’s *Bajo Tierra*, which also narrates a search for a missing father, the investigation into the origins is also problematic. Sebastián C is a 30-year-old student on a “spiritual, physical and metaphysical drift” (Valle, 2009, p.19) and whose father (a Bolivian immigrant) disappears in the tunnels of Caracas subway when Sebastián is 12. In December 1999, Sebastián and his friend Gloria, whose father also vanished some years ago in Trinidad during a work trip, decide to descend to some subterranean tunnels guided by Mawari, an indigenous beggar who had to abandon his lands in the Orinoco delta due to the exploitation of mining industries. Their original pretext is to help Mawari find his wife and son and a subterranean path to the sea, which the Mariche natives may have used to escape the Spanish *conquistadores*. However, Sebastián and Gloria are in reality driven by the hope of finding their respective fathers. Sebastián is fascinated by Mawari’s physical resemblance of his father:

I fantasised that Mawari was a simulation of my old man, his impossible double. And I wanted to believe (I swear) that he might take me to where he was. Somehow I convinced myself that his search coincided with mine. (Valle, 2009, p.104)

Again, the father figure is offered as motivation for a centripetal trip toward origins. In Sebastián C’s words:

down here everything is anchored in the past. You don’t even live a present or a meanwhile, even the air seems to be dominated by a slow and foreign time, which is not yours, not anybody’s, only belongs to these caves. And I am not exaggerating when I say that this suffocating space, narrow as a trap, constituted everything, absolutely everything. As if these stone walls had swallowed time, as if they contained it and did not let it scape. (Valle, 2009, p. 173)

As if a trip to a frozen past, the young man finds a “cavern of readers” who seem “engineers of prehistory” (Valle, 2009, p. 175): some 15 indigenous people sit and “read” handwritten letters aloud in an incomprehensible language; then they register them in a rolled-up scroll of papyrus and store them in one of the underground galleries.

In this way, the trip toward the center of the Earth becomes a discovery of a sort of primordial archive, made of thousands of letters from the 1990s that never reached their destination. We soon learn that Mawari is a former shaman who has guided these indigenous people there to carry out that activity, persuading them that they would only be able to reconstruct their past by stealing the words from the white people. But the archive, in truth, serves Mawari to take revenge from those who forced him to abandon his land, lose his family, and live like a beggar in Caracas. In contrast to him, his companions are illiterate, and they merely imagine what the letters say, “translating” them into their own language. Ignorant of the written text, they have been deliberately manipulated by the former shaman. The narrator comments that the letters constitute “the memory and the un-lived past.” (Valle, 2009, p.183) Thus, Mawari’s archive alludes to a kind of uprooting which compulsorily demands the recovery of what was lost. This recovery, however, as a product of a desire for vengeance, is deadly. It constitutes the collection of fossilized, un-lived, and even frustrated memories for the senders and addressees of those letters from the 1990s. The “Cosmic egg” that Mawari tries to reproduce in the subterranean caves following a mythical memory does not bring liberation to the natives who are literally subjugated by the obscure archival practice.

The journey below the ground of Caracas is punctuated by a series of accidents that inevitably threaten the characters’ lives. Gloria gets lost in one of the tunnels and Mawari presumably dies under the rubble of the landslide of Ávila. Only Sebastián C seems to survive as he is abruptly expelled by the Vargas Landslide, from the center of the Earth toward the sea. His accidental discovery of the mythical exit to the Caribbean does not display utopian traits. Rather, the main character witnesses the ravages of a three-day continuous deluge: houses and trees drag by the water, drowned animals and bodies shattered by the force of the stream. The expulsion from the core of the Earth to the sea marks the ultimate centrifugal movement in the story and alludes to the alienation that traverses the subjectivities of the 1990s. Even more than Bujanda’s novel, *Bajo Tierra* marks this alienation as a common element of the characters: the immigrant father, the indigenous people exiled by mining operations, the Chinese who own a bar in Caracas, the Trinitarian governess of a grubby boarding house, Gloria, who abandons Canoabo for the capital and whose ancestors migrated from Stockholm. While previous generations seem to have had some options to accommodate themselves to the circumstances, the current cohort finds it impossible to integrate into society. For all the efforts of Sebastián C to regain his family’s past, despite the authoritarian

drive of Mawari's archive, it all comes to nothing. Sebastián C's father is never found, adding to the thousands of missing people after the Vargas landslide in 1999. The natural disaster, metaphor for the ending of the novel, represents the violent dislocation of the characters and the myriad of orphans already existing before these last days of the 20th century. As in *La Última Vez*, we find an open ending in which "there is no after after trauma." The young main character is left with only an apocalyptic landscape of loot and ruins, of wounded and missing people.

### **Animal revelation**

Camilo Pino's novel is also set in an apocalyptic urban landscape. The plot, which unfolds between 1988 and 1989, presents Alejandro Roca, a high-class young publicist who quits his job even though he lacks any other prospects. In contrast to the precarious condition of the characters of the other two novels and their search for origins, Pino's novel narrates a rather frivolous quest. Alejandro wants to write a novel about an old hippy sect that established a commune in the inner country to impress Romina and his other friends. The story invites us again to visit the past, not just the immediate past of the months before the Caracazo but it also takes us back to the 1970s that, in contrast with the 1990s, represent the apotheosis of the Venezuelan project of modernization. At the time, a group of youngsters, including some North-Americans, founded "a commune in Boconó, an idyllic and isolated village in the Andes, which remained anchored in the past" (Pino, 2011, p.21). Utopia makes its appearance here in a past temporality imagined as a primary space that contrasts to the Babel-like Caracas, somewhat similar to Mawari's lost origins in his native community in the Orinoco delta. As in *Bajo Tierra*, Alejandro's reconstruction of the past does not end well. A young girl from the commune, the daughter of a *hacienda* owner of the region, fell pregnant by an unknown father, as they all practiced "free love." This enraged the family and villagers, triggering the murder of the hippies and the destruction of the commune. Alejandro travels with Romina and a couple of friends to Boconó to compile information about the events. The pastoral inner country reveals to be a semi-feudal space under the rule of Alejandro's uncle and other *hacienda* owners, with the complicity of the army. Governmental authority fades, as revealed in a delirious episode in which the uncle and a soldier target practice on a billboard of the presidential candidate Carlos Andrés Pérez. The reference to the politician is not random, emblematic as he was of what Fernando

Coronil termed the “magical State” in his homonymous book (2013), referring to the way in which the Venezuelan state is constituted in the collective imaginary as providential given its control and distribution of wealth derived from the oil reserves. Carlos Andrés Pérez’s second term as president after the 1988 elections seemed to herald the return of the “magical State,” which he himself had built in the 1970s. However, his electoral victory was followed by the announcement of budget cuts of a neoliberal bent, ultimately causing the end of his rule and of two-party democracy. Thus, the archive that Alejandro constructs for his novel also documents the failure of a (national) communitarian utopia back in the 1970s.

The shattering of the utopia is revealed in the apocalyptic imaginary of Caracas to which the young friends return after their research in Boconó. Different elements present in the other novels reappear in this urban landscape: the 1989 Caracazo, AIDS, the prophecy that the Ávila ridge will split in two, and finally, a sort of “natural disaster,” materialized under the guise of an infestation of *zamuro* vultures in Caracas valley. In contrast to Bujanda and Valle’s novels, in Camilo Pino’s *Valle Zamuro* the itineraries across this apocalyptic scenario are circumscribed to the higher echelons of society, quite different underworlds from the hovels in Avenida Baralt in *La Última Vez*, or the sections of the Los Caobos park packed with paupers in *Bajo Tierra*. In *Valle Zamuro*, social marks introduce the futility of a youth totally isolated from the rest of the country. The climax of social alienation occurs during the Caracazo, when the group of friends decides to hold a pajama party on the day the curfew is declared and constitutional guarantees suspended. Inspired by the vague news available, they declare theirs to be “the looting party,” and take over the castle-house of an eccentric local millionaire. The luxury of the party finds its parallel in the so-called “Coronation,” the pharaonic inauguration of Carlos Andrés Pérez celebrated a few days before the announcement of a package of neoliberal measures, and the subsequent social explosion. The contrast between these two celebrations and realities triggers Alejandro’s anagnorisis. As he tipsily walks away from a party after an adolescent sentimental quarrel, he is detained by a military patrol and experiences the hellish repression unleashed in those days, even being forced to throw the corpse of a homeless person into the Guaire river. During his nocturnal wandering, he witnesses another episode of target practice. On this occasion, the militia men “fusillade” a gigantic illuminated Santa Claus that garnishes the Ciudad Tamanaco Shopping Mall, a “warm up” for the task that awaits them during the night. Shortly after, Alejandro is taken to the Helicoide, an unfinished

mammoth structure situated in a poor neighborhood, initially intended to be the biggest mall in Latin America, where the army and the political police lock, torture, and execute the detainees. The images of the volleyed Santa Claus and the shopping mall-turned-detention center reveal the unterritorialized character of Venezuelan modernity, its biopolitics of consumption that allows the division of lives between disposable and non-disposable, between those that belong and those that do not belong to the national project. In the inner “outside” represented by the Helicoide, the protagonist firstly encounters people from different social classes, as well as “revolutionary” leaders as socially privileged as himself. The horror that transpires the place is immune to political rhetoric. A beggar imprisoned with a group of young leftists shouts back at them

that, if anyone, he is the one who knows about reality, he who knows all the realities of the city, who while they lived in their revolutionary bubbles ... has been living under bridges, sucking dicks to be able to have lunch. (Pino, 2011, p.208)

Reality acquires a density that blocks any ideological reductionism, an intensity impossible to be seized and that is alluded by an animalistic imaginary. Alejandro learns that one of the torture techniques practiced upon the prisoners is to lock them naked in a tight space with scavenger birds, where they suffer the prospect of a horrible death under the vultures’ pecks. As the ordering mechanism of modern Venezuela collapses in the late 1980s, human beings come closer to, even touching, animal life, the kind of life that takes over the city as the narration unfolds. While at the pajama party some of the youngsters had dressed up as vultures, ridding the signifiers of death of meaning, a state necropolitics settles in the depths of the Helicoide, turning the hierarchies between human and non-human irrelevant. The bodies of birds shot at by anonymous marksmen before the Caracazo are replicated in the bodies of those men tortured and murdered during the state of emergency. *Zamuro* vultures acknowledge the “bare life” of the detainees and merge with the “popular body,” which Alejandro and his friends, locked in their high-class underworld, had not previously noticed. Animality—like illness and natural catastrophe in the novels examined previously—does not burst in to herald a denouement; here, that which resists discourse demonstrates a protracted biopolitics. Hence the narrator states: “the *zamuro* vultures have been here for a long time and we did not notice,”



we are actors in junk TV ... obsessed with ourselves, determined to delay the grand finale until one day it arrives and bang!, it explodes in our faces, and not even then do we realise that we have been calling for it for years. (Pino, 2011, p.190)

Despite this quotation, the “grand finale” never happens. Alejandro is released from the Helicoide due to his social status and abandons the country after a brief recovery. The final pages of the novel offer his perspective during his trip to the airport: the Caribbean sea glows elusively upon passing the poor foothill suburbs of Caracas. A new catastrophe has replaced the plague of vultures, the “Black Slick” along the highway that “will eventually cover of the structures of the city” (Pino, 2011, p.221). Thus, in *Valle Zamuro*, as in *La Última Vez* and *Bajo Tierra*, the apocalypse does not bring any final outcome. Rather, we witness a disastrous continuity, uninterrupted by the Caracazo, which expands to the present of the reader in the early 21st century. The apocalyptic tone does not only allude to a destructive process, however—it also signals a *revelation*. The protagonist’s infernal experience at the Helicoide forces him to see the inner “outside” in which life is disposable and that predates the Caracazo. One of the characters notes: “what occurs here happens everyday in the shanties” (Pino, 2011, p.165). Such revelation does not include a programmatic proposal, but motivates the character to flee the country. Thus, Pino’s novel decodes an historical event such as the Caracazo, co-opted by the Chavist narrative as a foundational moment of its emancipatory movement, by revealing the complicity of the army with the terror of those days. But the novel also demystifies the fantasies of modernity and consumption of pre-Chávez Venezuela. As in Alejandro’s unfinished novel about the hippy commune, there is no utopia to recover from a past that continues to dictate the centrifugal displacements of the nation’s youth.

### **Fleeing the archive**

Written in the 1990s without the advantage of retrospective hindsight of the other authors, *Pim Pam Pum* turned prophetic. What is more, Rebolledo’s is perhaps the most contemporary novel of the group under study in this essay, given the way it bluntly rejects any nostalgic impulse and forfeits teleological intentionality. The main character, Luis Lapiña, is a young man who abandons his philosophy studies at college to live a leisurely life of sex, drugs and friendship in late 20th century Caracas.

This is but one piece, though, of an ensemble and fragmentary novel that maps a whole generation. Different narrative voices reflect the experiences of different young characters that cross paths in the city. A fake kidnapping, a party at the Country Club, a police operation that ends up in an execution, the death of a dog, the theft of an embassy's coat of arms, the purchase of a gun, the selling of a motorbike, the emigration of an ambitious reporter, the social vulnerability of a radio host... these are some of the disorderly stories that unfold in the urban landscape. But Rebolledo's novel is not merely a generational story, it is also a narrative proposal. Both the descriptive elements and the central plot about a failed kidnapping become irrelevant in front of the weight of language, the excited language of the urban tribes through which the different characters self-constitute. We discover nomadic subjects, alienated from the structures of the state. Youngsters "laugh their heads off" and de-territorialize any national referent, whether it be Carlos Andrés Pérez or Hugo Chávez, the Copei political party or the Bolivarian Movement. Luis affirms: "South America, Latin America, what the hell is that? Nobody cares" (Rebolledo, 2013, p.17). Once these subjectivities assume their alterity with respect to the predominant codes of belonging, the sense of community becomes different from that of previous generations. It should come as no surprise, then, that the Venezuelan literary establishment has rejected a proposal so distanced from its ideological and aesthetic parameters. We are left without origins to find or utopias to build. In contrast with the works of Bujanda, Valle, and Pino, the drifting of some of Rebolledo's characters is not limited to their social class. Their radical estrangement causes a transversal displacement across different social spaces throughout the city. Some characters are aware of the disparity, which is often portrayed with caustic humor, but they do not use this fact to establish collective bounds. If there were one element that brings these characters together, it would be the drugs that push them to move and coincide in a slum or in the Country Club. Selling and taking drugs replaces the "magical state" in the configuration of a sense of community. The movement of the youth is not framed by a modernizing teleology, but by the oscillations of immediate desire. Thus, the turbulence of drugs provides the rhythm of the novel: the slowing down of marihuana, the explosiveness of acid, the rushing of cocaine. Drugs become the distinctive element of a hopeless turn of the century, but they also signify the possibility of liberation from the "Humanist North that set in motion the populist politics" of both pre-Chávez Venezuela as well as of 21st century socialism (Valero, 2001, p.124). I would like to summarize the evasion of any "ideological

fastening of discourse” (Duchesne, 2007, p.76) on this ambiguity. The (self)destructiveness but also the self-government of the bodies parallel both their compulsive consumption—of drugs but also of all the referents of popular culture of late capitalism—and their chaotic decoding in a series of affective impulses. In the novel, the Black Friday Generation is defined as a circumstantial being-together, even in conflict. The fleeting forms of juvenile coexistence are determined by sexual pleasure, tripping of drugs, sudden rage, or fear. Toward the end of the novel, Luis abandons the capital and moves to Margarita Island. Shortly after, he decides to commit suicide in a humorous and ambiguous scene, in which we end up ignoring whether he succeeds. His move to the island in the Caribbean Sea and his intention to end his life foreground, once again, the late 20th century centrifugal intensities in what refers to uprootedness. Interestingly, Rebolledo’s novel also presents the figure of an absent migrant father from Spain and of a young man who emigrates from Cabimas to Caracas. While the latter does not manage to settle in the capital and finally moves to the US, the Basque father of Luis seems to achieve a certain degree of social mobility, though ultimately frustrated by his “good for nothing” son. Thus, the story confirms the generational rupture and apocalyptic landscape that characterizes a present without closure. As one of the characters notes, “I don’t know how I got here, nor I am interested in knowing. There’s nothing behind. Nothing exists, except today” (Rebolledo, 2013, p. 40).

In sum, in the past few decades in Venezuela there has been an abundance of nostalgic discourses aiming to bestow legitimacy to the past in order to sustain or dispute the sociocultural (post-)hegemony of Chavism. The imaginaries of polarization, typical of the logics of populist antagonism, appear ossified in a past that cripples politics for common good and the definition of the nation. Unable to provide answers to both the post-neoliberal and the current Chavist crisis, these imaginaries equip themselves with a dichotomical hermeneutics that insists on establishing exclusions. Faced with this scenario, the revisiting of the 1990s Caracas youth that we find in some Venezuelan novels allows us to recognize certain centrifugal subjectivities in the archives of the nation. From their interstitial and groundbreaking perspective, the Black Friday Generation foregrounds perceptions of historical continuity denied by the discourses of nostalgia. By means of the representation of an apocalyptic Caracas at the end of the 20th century, Bujanda, Valle, Pino, and Rebolledo’s novels point at a permanent crisis that determines the estrangement of the young protagonists. It is precisely this uprooting that allows subsuming

different meanings of what is common (and what is not), dynamic and alien meanings, alien to the ideological definitions that violently fracture the social fabric. Far removed from utopian mega-projects and binary logics, these young characters exhibit a democratic trait absent in the state's discourses and in a part of the opposition's: the "explicit acknowledgement of being carriers of no absolute truth in the name of which it is possible to exercise discriminatory power" (Reguillo-Cruz, 2000, p.14).

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> See for example Martín Caparrós, "¿Fracasó la izquierda latinoamericana?" *The New York Times*, December 16, 2016; Massimo Modonesi (2015) "Fin de la hegemonía progresista y giro regresivo en América Latina," *Viento Sur* 142; Marcelo Leiras, Andrés Malamud and Pablo Stefanoni (2016) *¿Por qué retrocede la izquierda?*, Buenos Aires: capital intelectual; and the dossier "Crisis de la izquierda latinoamericana" in *Foreign Affairs Latinoamérica*, July–September 2016.
- <sup>2</sup> For an analysis of Chavist historical teleology, see Ana Teresa Torres (2009).
- <sup>3</sup> On the intellectual reaction against Chavist hegemony, see my article "Sobre el culturalismo neoconservador y los gobiernos de izquierda en América Latina," *Condistingtosacentos. Investigación y reflexión sobre América Latina* (blog), December 4, 2013, [www.condistingtosacentos.com/sobre-el-culturalismo-neoconservador-y-los-gobiernos-de-izquierda-en-america-latina/](http://www.condistingtosacentos.com/sobre-el-culturalismo-neoconservador-y-los-gobiernos-de-izquierda-en-america-latina/)
- <sup>4</sup> The *Caracazo* or *Sacudón de febrero* (February jolt) was the outbreak of violent riots, looting and the subsequent brutal police repression in Caracas and other inner cities in February 1989. Conservative estimates report 396 deaths (Ochoa Antich, 1992, p.35).
- <sup>5</sup> The so-called *Deslave de Vargas* (Vargas Landslide) refers to a series of landslides in the Ávila mountains and floods in Caracas and Central Litoral area in December 1999. Between 10,000 and 30,000 people were killed or disappeared.

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# Re-imagined Community: The Mapuche Nation in Neoliberal Chile

*Gerardo Gómez Michel*

## **Introduction**

Academic discussion has profoundly reviewed the effects of neoliberalism in Latin American countries, defined its origins and metropolitan directives, and even celebrated the programmatic responses that in some countries such as Venezuela and Bolivia have allowed a glimpse of interrupted neoliberalism—not without facing serious problems such as the severe crisis of post-Chavism and the conflicts of Evo Morales regime with some indigenous peoples and its recent setback in recent elections. Revising the case of the long and uninterrupted conflict between the Mapuche people and the Chilean state allows us to see in its extreme rawness the current struggle between global capitalism and the indigenous communities harmed by this system. Chile is not only an example of the strict implementation of the neoliberal model in the 1970s—the first major practical experiment of what would be called the Washington Consensus in the 1990s, which all Latin American countries (except for Cuba) signed to escape, under the guidelines of the IMF and the World Bank, from the decade of economic stagnation caused by the debt crisis in the 1980s. It is also an example in Latin America where a neoliberal state frontal attack on an indigenous people was perhaps forceful, focused, and effective: the so-called agrarian counter-reform of the Pinochet regime of 1974 and Law 2,568 of 1979,

which repealed the continuity of land title deeds (*Títulos de Merced*). Even when the fall of the dictatorship and the return to democracy in Chile could open a scenario of hope for the Mapuche community, the reality has proved them wrong. Despite the opening of intercultural policies and improvements in the institutionalization of indigenous rights (with the enactment of Law 19,253 and the consequent creation of the National Indigenous Development Corporation (CONADI) in 1993) when faced with the protests and demands of the Mapuche people—particularly in regards to the recovery of ancestral territories—the state response continues to be that of the neoliberal model of imprisonment and violent repression. It is difficult not to conclude that the Law 18,314, known as the Anti-terrorist Act, enacted during the dictatorship in 1984 and mostly created as a form of institutionalized repression for the political opposition to the regime, still effective even 28 years after the fall of Pinochet, remains as an infamous legal framework that allows the Chilean state to criminalize any type of social mobilization that could affect the hegemonic raw production and exporting model consigned to large private corporations (domestic and foreign). In addition to legal persecution, the framework offered by the Anti-terrorist Act allows a discourse articulation in the media that delegitimizes the Mapuche struggle on the recovery of territories taken from their communities, legally and illegally, since the time of the military occupation in 1883. As effective as this has proven to be, for much of Chilean public opinion (and even that of some scholars, such as the award-winning historian Sergio Villalobos) the Mapuche's demands and protests are part of destabilizing, anti-modernist, regressive forces, which are wild, premodern, violent, criminal, and defamatory. In this sense, Goodale and Postero (2013) comment that, in the current scenario of Latin America, the challenges to the globalized neoliberal order coexist with exacerbated patterns of violence and exploitation that seek to drown radical forms of social change (some alternative forms of governance have been consolidated to a greater or lesser extent, such as the Zapatista autonomous communities in Mexico or the San Basilio palenque in Colombia).

In this sense, the uninterrupted conflict between the Mapuche nation and the Chilean state is an integral part of the colonial and the 19th century legacy inherited by neoliberalism in Latin America; inheritance that maintains racial, cultural, and linguistic prejudices, fermented with the ideas of ethnic homogenization under the signs of miscegenation and the (forced) integration to the Chilean national culture but, nevertheless, maintaining a structural exclusion. These contradictions, the diminishment of the Mapuche culture upon the

Western-mestizo culture in favor of the supposed horizontality of the Chilean imagined community—typical concepts of 19th century liberalism (Anderson, 1993)—have pushed a community with strong ethnic-cultural identification to align their claims with other anti-neoliberal challenges in the region.

In this chapter, we want to review some of the most severe points on the conflict between the Chilean state and the Mapuche nation, their challenges and responses to state repression, and how they project a possible future for their people within the Chilean nation. First, we will revisit the origins of the eviction and consequent dispossession suffered by the Mapuche people after their military defeat of 1883. At that time, their lands decreased from 11 million hectares to only 5% of that original territory, which continued to shrink until the end of the 20th century (Seguel, 2007). Reviewing the deepening of this problem during the Pinochet dictatorship we will reach the present time to review the struggles for the recovery of their ancestral territories and the direct confrontation with the extractive projects promoted by the Chilean state and the neoliberal economic policies—the most notorious among those are the Ralco hydroelectric dam and the forestry companies Mininco and Bosques Arauco (Franch, 2013)—which, regardless of the governments' ideologies, have been uninterrupted since the coup of September 11, 1973. In the following section, we will analyze the development of the contemporary mobilizations of different Mapuche collectives at the end of the last century, their positioning in Chilean public opinion, and some of the positive results achieved, particularly in regards to the creation of the CONADI and some actions that in the context of the Indigenous Law have permitted the recovery of land for the Mapuche people. We also indicate the great limitations of these state policies, which, seizing the vindicating discourse of interculturalism, do not actually (or perhaps even intend to) build a solid foundation for a structural solution to the problem of land tenure for the native peoples of this country.

The reaction to the protests allows us to explore in the following section that ubiquitous face of the neoliberal states: repression and social discipline through the exclusive use of force and the implementation of the emergency rule in the face of any threat (or protest) to the status quo. As José Alwyn points out, the recently inaugurated Chilean democratic government—with the consequent expectations in relation to the political (and legal) treatment of social movements—in 1992 convicted under the charges of occupation and illicit association 144 Mapuche members of the All Lands Council (*Consejo de Todas las Tierras-Aukiñ Wall Mapu Ngullam*) for actions to recover land in conflict



(Aylwin and Yáñez, 2007). Since that time until today, despite the international protest and the domestic debate around the Law 18,314, the Mapuche people who have chosen radical actions to recover lost territories (many of them illegally) have been prosecuted under the Anti-terrorist law and therefore received much harsher sentences. Within this legal framework, the Mapuche can (and are) treated as bare life subjects (Agamben, 1998) and sometimes their bodies sacrificed without legal consequences.

In the last part of this work we analyze some of the resistance strategies articulated by diverse Mapuche collectives to resist the current state of affairs. Here we examine responses from trenches built on the margin of political mobilization—although immersed in a broader framework of vindication that definitely falls within the political struggle of the Mapuche nation against the Chilean state—like the organization of urban collectives of descendants of the great Mapuche migration to Santiago, which through community workshops reconstruct the ethno-cultural heritage of the Mapuche nation outside the ancestral territory of the south of the country (Abarca, 2005). Moreover, we analyze some literary expressions articulated by Mapuche poets, scholars, and journalists that are re-imagining the Mapuche nation and their historical struggle. It is important to note that these intellectuals are building a locus of enunciation that epistemologically resists the ignominious stereotypes Chilean state and society have used historically to exclude them from the national project. The re-emergence of the Mapuche ethnical positioning, as expressed by Pedro Cayuqueo, a journalist from Temuco, referring to the younger generation of Mapuche people, is not a search to return to “the *lost community* portrayed by anthropologists and social scientists or the *rural reservation* idealized by leaders and poets,” but that of a “Mapuche voice charged with modernity and future” which “establishes the welcome of the Mapuche and the goodbye to the *mapuchito*”<sup>1</sup> (Cayuqueo, 2012; emphasis in the original). In this sense, we will pay special attention to the re-construction of an ethnic memory that opposes the disintegration of ethnic minorities’ identities that neoliberalism intensifies, largely through forced migration to large urban centers where conditions are extremely adverse for these minorities. This phenomenon indicates the ineffectiveness of the supposedly inclusive intercultural policies of recent years. Despite the worsened scenario—which is on a continuum started by the victory of liberalism in the 19th century—the Mapuche nation continues to rearticulate itself with immense sacrifices.

## From the “Pacification” to the dictatorship

1883 marked the end of the conquest war of the Mapuche territory (the so-called “Pacification of the Araucania”) by the Chilean state and the beginning of the loss of 95% of the lands that at that time comprehended the *Mapu*—the Mapuche nation territory—(Seguel, 2007). Beyond the usual implications of demand for primary products, the desire of the Chilean state to insert itself and have a competitive place in it, taking advantage of more territory for its exploitation; despite the discourses of integration of all the confines of the territory of the nation state<sup>2</sup>; what marked the Mapuche defeat was, as in any war of conquest between nations, military superiority. Sergio Caniuqueo comments on the last Mapuche offensive of 1881:

Without a doubt, all the *Winka*<sup>3</sup> had to be destroyed, but the Mapuche people did not innovate in weapons, although there was the possibility of doing so via corsairs or the smugglers who entered the border. Not getting involved in an arms race or appropriation of military technology; without weapons of greater destructive power it was easy to calculate that the Mapuche resistance was a matter of time. (Caniuqueo, 2006)

In the next 45 years the Chilean state took possession of almost all the Mapuche lands. From 1884 to 1929 the government carried out the program of *reservations* where the Mapuche nation was relocated in 475,422 hectares (of 11 million original territory) and granted 3,078 land title deeds (*Títulos de Merced*). This meant a double strategy of the Chilean state to cancel any possible organization and counter-offensive of the Mapuche people. With the extreme reduction of territory, the socio-political unity of the Mapuche nation was broken, forcing them to move from a very efficient horizontal community organization scheme to become individual owners, which also led to the breakdown of long-range family ties.

After annexing this vast territory, the government began the sale of properties for a colonization project for national and foreign groups made up of Chileans, Germans, Swiss, French, and Italians. However, the colonists’ pressure on the Mapuche lands continued and “between 1929 and 1948, 832 indigenous communities were apportioned into 12,737 hectares” (Toledo, 2003), enabling a greater loss of land. The relationship with the foreign colonists was diverse, and while the Germans avoided getting involved with the Mapuche, the Swiss

had a friendlier relationship, which did not prevent the process of accumulation of capital (and land) in favor of the foreigners to whom the Mapuche ended up serving as “agricultural worker and his wife as a domestic servant in the house of the colonists” (Caniuqueo, 2006).

This process of continuous dispossession had a significant moment of mitigation—although limited and later annulled—during the presidency of Salvador Allende. With the Law 17,729, which continued with greater effectiveness the Agrarian Reform of Frei Montalva presidency in 1962, the government of the Popular Unity “curbed the process of partition of the Mapuche communities and established the expropriation as a way to return lands to them” (Duquesnoy, 2012). According to the Report of the Mapuche Autonomous Work Commission (Comisión de Trabajo Autónoma Mapuche, 2003), in this period an important aspect of this law is that:

The project aims to significantly increase the Mapuche lands through the following mechanisms: return of the land usurped, which for documents that were delivered within the Commission would be around 50,000 hectares; expropriation of lands that were part of land title deeds and are in the possession of individuals, which would constitute an approximate area of 100,000 hectares; and effective integration of the indigenous peasant to the process of agrarian reform and, also, to industrial and commercial activities, after the necessary training...

In summary, during the period of Salvador Allende, which lasted between November 4, 1970 and September 11, 1973, 574 farms were expropriated in the Provinces of Malleco and Cautín, with an area of 636,288.3 hectares. The properties expropriated in favor of Mapuche communities or with Mapuche participation were 138, with a total area of 132,115.78 physical hectares, equivalent to 7,407.77 hectares of basic irrigation

After the brutal Pinochet coup in 1973, the expropriated land was returned to the landowners and the community leaders suffered fierce repression. However, the Mapuche activities did not stop; on the contrary, they kept maturing more and more during the dictatorship and they articulated a discourse that integrated, in addition to territorial claims, the defense of their culture and ethnic identity. Even so, the offensive of the dictatorship against the Mapuche mobilization—and the Chilean people in general—had dramatic consequences. The

Law Decree 2,568 of March 22, 1979, authorized and promoted the partition of Mapuche grounds granted under land title deeds, disrupting communities by making them individual owners and inserting them unfavorably in the free market model of Chilean oligarchs. As Rodrigo Levil Chichalhue (2006) explains:

This law addresses and deepens the same objectives of all division laws: to convert the Mapuche communities into individual owners and to end the restrictions on their lands in order to homogenize the Mapuche population along with the rest of the small farm owners. It is provided that once the division is made, the lands and their owners will cease to be considered indigenous, as indicated by the Law in its first Chapter.

Under this law “2,000 communities were apportioned in some 72 thousand individual land lots. What remained in the hands of the Mapuche from their “ancestral” territory was definitely divided into private plots” (Duquesnoy, 2012). This process of deterritorialization carried out through the Pinochetist agrarian counter-reform would worsen the phenomenon of Mapuche migration to urban centers, most of them to Santiago, a matter we will review later. As a result of the neoliberal policies implemented by the dictatorship and continued during the so-called Concertation governments in the following 20 years, four companies hold two-thirds of the forest plantation territories throughout Chile (Levil, 2006). Alongside this process of accumulation sponsored by the state, the Mapuche nation have suffered an enormous territorial loss, which has pushed them to a greater and more radical mobilization for the recovery of land usurped.

### **Mapuche mobilization and state repression**

The return to democratic life in 1990 meant the initiation of dialogue between the state and the Mapuche nation (as with other indigenous peoples of the country), which was unimaginable during the dictatorship. Nevertheless, this circumstance was not the beginning of their demands; on the contrary, it came at a time of acute crisis due to the almost disappearance of land owned by the Mapuche communities by that time. Within this agenda of state openness, the Law 19,253 (October 1993), known as the Indigenous Law, was promulgated and the National Indigenous Development Corporation (CONADI) and the Indigenous Lands and Waters Fund were created

during the government of Patricio Aylwin (Franch, 2013). It is worth highlighting some actions promoted by the CONADI in favor of the development of the Mapuche people in the first decade of the Concertation governments:

- 1 The destination, through different plans and programs, including the transfer of fiscal lands, the acquisition programs of properties in conflict and grants from the Land and Water Fund of Conadi, of around 75,000 hectares of land for Mapuche individuals and communities between 1994 and 1997.
- 2 The support, through the Conadi Development Fund, for the implementation of indigenous economic, social and cultural development initiatives.
- 3 The constitution of three areas of indigenous development (ADI), two of them in the Mapuche territory (Alto Bio Bio and Lago Budi) and the allocation of resources for their implementation. (Aylwin, 2000, p.284)

Yet these actions were far from making a noticeable difference in the situation of the Mapuche people. The balance of these years reveals the great limitations of the indigenous law. Aylwin (2000) points out that, for example, in 1996 of the 1,357 mining concessions to national and foreign companies in Chile, 144 were on lands of Mapuche communities and 75% of the rights of surface water available in this territorial space had been granted to non-indigenous individuals and only 2% corresponded to the Mapuche communities. During the period of President Eduardo Frei (1994–2000), the dialogue between the Mapuche and the Chilean state was fractured as a result of the contradiction between what the indigenous law states—for example, article 13 states that “Indigenous lands will not be alienated, seized, encumbered or acquired by prescription, except among communities or indigenous people of the same ethnic group” (in Franch, 2013). Conversely, in the end the government granted the ENDESA-Spain consortium the Ralco hydroelectric project in the Alto Bio-Bio where lands inhabited by Pehuenche<sup>4</sup> communities are located without any consultation or agreement.

This long-term conflict—between 1996 with the beginning of the “negotiations” and 2004 when Endesa finally flooded the reservoir—is one of the most paradigmatic in terms of the tense relationship between the Mapuche nation and the Chilean state. It signals the profound meaning of the reality that exists in Chile currently: the subordination

of the society and the state to the demands of productivity imposed by the neoliberal system in this country. The imperative production of electricity (founding part of modernity) promised by Endesa's dam scheme—a Chilean company privatized in the framework of neoliberal measures during the dictatorship—in the Alto Bio-Bio represented a project that the state was not willing to stop, although it had to go over the rights of Mapuche communities in the area (Morales, 1998); rights that were approved in Congress just three years before. During the negotiation stage between the company, the government, and the Mapuche people, the resolution of the Pehuenches was that they did not want the dam installed. In a June 1996 letter addressed to the Director of the Environment National Agency (CONAMA), a state entity that had to decide whether to approve the megaproject in relationship with the environmental impact (relying on a study carried out by Endesa itself), Mapuche representatives argued from different angles what the proposed relocation would be for those affected by the flood of lands:

- Moving some families would affect the integrity of the entire community because the division will cause the discontinuity of traditions in which all the members of the community should participate.
- The project would flood old cemeteries of the community.
- The project would fracture a life trajectory linked to the land where they lived.
- Endesa had breached promises in a previous project (Pangué).
- The lands that were offered to them in exchange did not have the conditions to sustain the Pehuenche mode of traditional productivity.
- The offer of jobs does not compensate for the loss of their culture.

Their list of reasons closed with the most valid argument possible: “For all the above, the Project Ralco proposed in the study presented by Endesa must be rejected, because we want to continue living in our lands according to our culture as we have always done.” And maybe thinking that the conditions in the country had changed with the constitutional confirmation of being a multicultural state, they finished the letter this way: “We hope that this time our opinion will be taken into account and not ignored as usual is” (in Relmuán 1998). One year after receiving this letter, CONAMA approved the project, not only against the will of the Pehuenches, but also bypassing the recommendations of a group of scholars from the Universidad de la Frontera that served as advisor (among others) of the CONAMA. The dramatic outcome of this conflict was that in April 2004 Endesa

authorized the filling of the reservoir one month sooner than expected without notifying the Pehuenche communities flooding their cemetery (Franch, 2013). That is to say, “as usual” the Mapuche people decision was ignored in favor of a profitable project for the business sector, for the state, and for Chileans. Moreover, this net of socio-political actors through the law and the media would label as terrorists those Mapuche who were radicalizing their protests upon the unstoppable advance of neoliberal modernity and progress.

A particular event in 1997—connected to the big forestry companies, the other great threat to Mapuche territories—illustrates how the democratic Chile would deal with the Mapuche mobilizations, enabling the usual repressive strategy of the neoliberal state of our times: emergency rule against the threat of terrorism. On December 1, a group of Mapuche protesters scorched three trucks belonging to the forestry company Arauco. The detainees were judged under the anti-terrorist law and were sentenced to many years in prison (Duquesnoy, 2012). The special trial prosecution followed that

the Regional Mayor of that time, Oscar Eltit, qualified the felony as serious, of terrorist connotation, for which he opened a requirement in the Court of Appeals of Temuco under the Law of Internal Security of the State to those who are responsible. (Franch, 2013)

Pedro Cayuqueo denounced in 2007 how the emergency rule applied to the Mapuche protesters was disproportionate and unjust, pointing out that “ten years after the arson attack in Lumaco, 300 Mapuches, among them women, the elderly and children, were still imprisoned after having passed through several prisons in the country” (in Duquesnoy, 2012). If prosecution, conviction, and imprisonment under the anti-terrorist law is the most visible and severe face of state repression, the punitive program that the government has taken against the mobilizations and protests extends the emergency rule toward the entire Mapuche community with indiscriminate exercise of police violence. A report of the Human Rights Observatory for Indigenous Peoples describes common abuses committed against the Mapuche people by *Carabineros*, the National Police Corps, “in the line of duty:”

Extremely violent detention. / Violent eviction of Mapuche commoners. / Unlawful beating during arrest and detention. / Shots during raid injuring several Mapuche people. / Freedom of movement impediment to people

within a community by actions of registration and control. / Mistreatment during detention. / Entering farms and extraction of livestock belonging to Mapuche people. / Shoting against houses of a community by an unknown group that is suspected to be personal of *Carabineros*. / A driver accompanied by a *Carabineros* official tried to run over a member of the Mapuche community. / Physical and verbal maltreats (racist and discriminatory epithets) during raids. / Systematic harassment during research (permanent identity checks, follow-up on the leaders). / Arrests with heavily armed personnel. / Eviction and detention of numerous people in the morning, including women, the elderly and children. / Shots with anti-riot shotguns during raid, injuring a 12 years-old child impacted with 7 shots. / Punches and racist insults during detention. / Detention and beatings of students during a peaceful protest. (Beaudry, 2009)

In this repressive context, the Mapuche people have also been radicalizing their protests, in particular those related to the recovery of ancestral community lands, with actions that include occupation of premises, in which they are particularly exposed to police repression and in some cases even to death. Franch refers to the case of two community members who were killed by *Carabineros*:

22 years-old Matías Catrileo on January 3, 2008 and 24 years-old Jaime Mendoza Collío on August 12, 2009... The investigation of the two murders confirm that the shots were received by the Mapuche commoners when they turned their backs to police officers. (Franch, 2013)

Furthermore, in 2010 there were 58 Mapuche people prosecuted and/or convicted under the charges of “terrorist arson, frustrated homicide with terrorist character, terrorist threat and terrorist illicit association,” these cases denote the application of the anti-terrorist law exclusively to members of the Mapuche nation during the decade 2000–10 (Franch, 2013).

The severe and unjust prison sentences caused by this legal framework have given rise to Mapuche protest within prison confinement that runs parallel to the mobilizations (peaceful or violent) in the streets—hunger strikes have been initiated by several Mapuche prisoners under preventive detention or convicted under the anti-terrorist law. This



political action has had a double functionality in the spectrum of the Mapuche mobilization: on the one hand, it has affected public opinion, dismantling to some extent the negative and condemning vision of the Mapuche movement built from the media and state discourses. The peaceful and particularly dramatic nature of this type of protest, in addition to its long-time extent, has had positive repercussions since it has made the Mapuche struggle visible and favored the involvement of other social and political actors such as NGOs and the Catholic Church. On the other hand, the hunger strike as a political strategy has been constantly articulated by the Mapuches from an angle that emphasizes the community character of their struggle. Thus, in 2010, 34 Mapuche commoners held a collective hunger strike for more than 80 days demanding that their legal cases were not double prosecuted by ordinary and military courts. Among the achievements obtained was an international protest in favor of the Mapuche struggle in several Chilean embassies abroad, in addition to the government examination of aspects for the applicability of law 18,314 (Franch, 2013), achievements that, in the political-judicial framework that we have described, represent significant advances. Moreover, the domestic visibility of the protests, mobilizations, extreme persecution, and condemnation, along with the hunger strikes, has had an effect not only on Chilean and international public opinion, but also on the identity awareness of many urban Mapuche people, and has promoted an expansive claim for the Mapuche nation in recent years. This has been creating an urban movement parallel to the mobilizations in the ancestral territories of the south—not without conflicts, as we shall see later—which highlights the other side of the extreme deterritorialization the Mapuche people has suffered for decades: migration, discrimination and acculturation related to the urban exile phenomenon.

### **Migration: From deep fracture to identity reconstruction**

From the 1930s, due to the increasingly adverse conditions suffered by the reservation communities in southern Chile, Mapuche people began to migrate to urban centers especially to the city of Santiago. This phenomenon worsened in the following decades, especially with Pinochet's agrarian counter-reform. In this situation of gradual and continuous territorial and economic disadvantage, the Mapuche people also have had to face a nation state and a society that historically have ignored the legitimacy of the ethnic and cultural claim of the Mapuche. With modernity's arguments—which decidedly declares

that “there is no doubt that they resigned to ancestral rights, that they accepted domination and that, adapting to it, they have looked to the future” (Villalobos, 2000, p.A2)—the Chilean homogenizing discourse assumes that the displacement (exile) of the Mapuche from their communities to the city would provoke the slow but inevitable Westernization (acculturation) of the indigenous people and their consequent insertion in the national project. However, historical reality has shown that despite the contact, exchange and cultural adaptation of the Mapuche people—that is, their historical and forced negotiations with Western modernity—in the city (nation), their place in the imagined community that is Chile still is relegated to peripheral spaces.

In general, the conditions that historically have pushed the Mapuche people out of their communities are poverty and insufficient land for its inhabitants. A migrant says in this regard: “Ten years ago, in the year 1990 I came because of lack of work, the land is not the same as in the past, not anymore, the land is diminished and in addition there is little and unproductive” (Abarca, 2005). As in almost any other migratory context, the conditions Mapuche people face arriving in the city are usually very adverse:

Here [in Santiago] they must share their misadventures with other isolated groups, which usually are unqualified workers, with humble and intermittent jobs, who live in overcrowding houses, giving space to promiscuity and a series of indicators that describe extreme poverty. In the capital of Chile, in places like those described, lives the greatest concentration of the Mapuche population of the country, which had to leave their impoverished homeland to look for some job that would allow them to survive. (Paillalef, 2012)

Faced with this unfavorable situation many Mapuche migrants in Santiago have opted for civil organization in the city. Still being aware that some will not return to the south they refuse to surrender their roots, as explained by a migrant who has been in the capital city for 50 years:

I always worked for the unity of the people ... To work for the development of the urban Mapuche. Because for us it is difficult to return to the south, some may perhaps, those who have land but I no longer have any. The little land that my father had was something of 25 hectares and

we were several brothers. We inherited 5 hectares each, so we agreed and we left everything to the two brothers who were there, who worked the land. (Aravena, 2008)

Even without land, for this migrant, uprooting does not mean the loss of identity because he maintains contact with the ancestral territory as a form of belonging to the *Wallmapu*, which means the whole space of the Mapuche nation:

I did not ask for land in the distribution and I do not have land, but that does not mean I'm not Mapuche. No, because we are always cooperating with people who have problems. I've made eight trips to the Alto Bio Bio bringing help to the people, clothes, food. (Aravena, 2008)

At the same time as that relationship with the southern community has been maintained, over the years there has been a parallel promotion of a solidarity consciousness toward the Mapuche people of the city, although without neglecting the aspect of cultural conservation:

So here we are more dedicated to the urban Mapuche because we have many people who live in very poor peripheral communities, so we want them to have decent housing, education and health, all those things ... I wish I could prosper, that is our hope. Another one is not to lose our culture, to spread our language. For example, I still speak *Mapudungun* (Mapuche language) but young people do not. (Aravena, 2008)

The return trip—even if it is temporary to visit relatives, or so that the children of Santiago have contact with the community, the landscape, and traditions—is persistently repeated in the testimonies because it is part of an imaginary that strengthens the identity of the urban Mapuche: “We go back to see our people and to visit those places where one came from, where I used to run when it rained and I went out to look for birds, I went fishing and when I go there I like to do that” (Abarca, 2005). As Geraldine Abarca explains, after carrying out several workshops with Mapuche migrants from La Pintana collective, in Santiago, the memory and the idea of the place of origin, of the ancestral *mapu* (territory) is vital for the migrants in Santiago because:

The people of the land have left in the south a sort of “cultural niche” where they find their ancestors, their relatives, the *Mapudungun* language, the memories associated with the rites and the practices they were part of in that way of life linked to agricultural work. (Abarca, 2005)

Despite the conscious efforts to maintain their heritage, discrimination in Santiago suffered by migrants or their children born in the city has often led to the denial of culture and origin. One aspect of this phenomenon of acculturation is the weakening of the intergenerational transmission of *Mapudungun*. Some parents decided not to teach their language to children to avoid ethnic or employment discrimination. Sakin, a Mapuche girl from Santiago, explains: “I think they did not teach us *Mapudungun* because of a very racial question, they realized that the Mapuche were very badly looked at.” In another example of this issue, a migrant father explains the case of his children: “None of them can speak our language, they do not want to, I have not taught them either, however when going to school they treat them as Indians, but we are not Indians, we are just Mapuche” (in Abarca, 2005). At this point we must emphasize the role of cultural claims and promotion that civil organizations have had within the collectives of Santiago. Partly thanks to the financial support of the Chilean government, partly due to a revitalization of the Mapuche identity as a result of the mobilizations of southern Mapuche communities in the capital city demanding the repossession of ancestral territories and the consequent visibility in the media and urban society, from the 1990s began the creation of projects of cultural recovery among the Santiago collectives, in which the use and teaching of *Mapudungun* has a special place next to the celebration of Mapuche religious rites.

The case of Mrs E.H., born in Santiago, is paradigmatic and at the same time an echo of many others. She comments: “From the year 1995 I began to internalize about the Mapuche people for what came out on television about them. There I also learned about CONADI.” (Aravena, 2008) The “internalization” she mentioned is actually a process of rearticulation of her cultural and ethnic identity, which had suffered a significant deterioration throughout the years, particularly since the early death of his mother when she was eight years old. Despite living for a time in a community in the south, and maintaining contact with her family, whom she used to visit, the isolation she suffered in Santiago and the alienation in an adverse society “froze” in her, so to speak, the use of their mother tongue:

Of course, I remembered my language and used to speak it by myself. But it was a suffering, because it hurt my soul not to be able to talk with some else ... Sometimes, I also went to the south by train, to see my father. When I was in the rural buses, I was catching up everything the Mapuche who were sitting in the buses talked about, but I never practiced it. (Aravena, 2008)

Although E.H. expresses in a dramatic way her estrangement from *Mapudungun*, her testimony highlights a feeling of personal pain that shows just part of the more complex side of this phenomenon—the intergenerational and regional conflict between the southern Mapuches and those from Santiago. In general, for those who were born in the southern communities, who learned and spoke *Mapudungun* daily, and who continued to use it after their migratory experience to the capital, the fact that a Mapuche from Santiago does not speak the language is cause for reprobation when not of discrimination. Geraldine Abarca comments on how this problem was presented in the workshops of La Pintana collective when she requested a translator during an exercise:

In this single fact, I observed that the speakers of *Mapudungun* rebuked those who were born in Santiago for not having learned to speak their parents' language and the non-speakers answered that their parents had not taught them. Somehow, they represented their parents at the table of migrants. In the end, they recriminated each other talking all at the same time and shouting from table to table. Allegorically, I observed the break between migrant parents and children born in Santiago. (Abarca, 2005)

Returning to the case of E.H., she finally founded an organization in the commune of Lo Prado and comments on her personal experience in relation to *Mapudungun* language:

I am the founder of my organization that today is called *Nehuen* (which means strength) and then I start to well recover the language because at first it seemed as a poorly spoken Spanish because of so much time passed in which I did not practice our way of speaking, then I recovered it, but still not 100% (in Aravena, 2008).

Beyond her individual story is a remarkable case where from this personal “internalization” would emerge a collective cultural recovery project that touches other urban Mapuche migrants and their children. Doing so they are proclaiming “we too have our own language, our way of speaking, we want society to see that we are alive and present.” (Aravena, 2008) Another significant aspect of this identity amending is that it is articulated from multiple angles and positions from the Mapuche community in urban exile (and also from rural areas). Although the process of transmission–reconstruction of Mapuche memory and identity we reviewed here has arisen in the domestic environment, it runs parallel to the intensive work of artists and intellectuals that together helped in the positive self-evaluation of the difference to the Western–mestizo culture and, consequently, has allowed the Mapuche nation to position themselves before the Chilean society.

### **Artists and intellectuals re-imagining the Mapuche nation**

In contrast to the reiteration in the present of the fossilized history and stereotypes carried out by the state and the Chilean media renewing them before public opinion to delegitimize, make invisible, or discredit any ethnic, cultural, or territorial claim by the Mapuche people, for several years a new generation of Mapuche journalists, writers, and scholars have carried the task of refuting the negative view of the Mapuche history written by Chileans. Therefore, they have undertaken the project of rewriting their history but, perhaps more importantly, they have devoted themselves to the task of presenting it to Chilean society in general, and to their own people in particular. In 2012 an editorial note from a Mapuche journal (*Revista Ruffián*) in a special issue dedicated to the urban Mapuche migrants—which are called *Warriache* by the “real” Mapuche from the south as a way to distance them—they state who they really are and how their struggle is the same as the one of the whole Mapuche nation:

We, the Mapuche of the 21st century, are the grandchildren of those grandparents who migrated to Santiago in the 60s, to leave the impoverishment that left years of usurpation to the Mapuche territories ... Most of us are the first to have university studies and we dare here in the city where we have established ourselves within local communities ... to every day form our identity as Mapuche people, dealing

with Westernization, with capitalism and other evils of consumer societies. *Warriache* they call us, and we proudly dare to write of ourselves and our people, of our struggles, of the poverty that exists in the south, and of our beloved people, who refuse to disappear. (*Revista Rufián*, 2012)

In this sense, as a social minority par excellence, the Mapuche urban community—certainly also the rural one, although with a different kind of activism, for example in relation to the social and political struggle for the recovery (peaceful and violent) of ancestral territories in the Chilean south—has been building a movement of cultural and ethnic claiming. In the first place, distancing itself from the folklorist vision, which is alienating and reductionist, placing them in an anachronistic past and present of a premodern character; and on the other hand, resisting the discourse that tries to condemn them to the margins of a society that continues to perceive the acculturation and acceptance of the model of Westernized Chile—economic, cultural, political, legal, religious, social, ecological, linguistic ways—as the only form of integration.

In another example of the Mapuche claim in the city, some contemporary poets situate themselves more directly in the process of appropriation of the new space in which they live or were born. With the poem entitled “Mapurbe,” David Aniñir (2009), a Mapuche poet born in Santiago, positions *Warriache* people in the city at the same time as he claims to belong to the Mapuche nation:

We are concrete Mapuche  
Under the asphalt our mother sleeps  
Exploited by a bastard.

But the identity is not only linked to the exploited land of its people, under the asphalt, but the poem resorts to other element extremely important for the Mapuche cultural identity, the lineage:

Mother, old Mapuche, exiled from history  
Daughter of my benevolent village  
From the south you came to birth us  
...  
We are the children of the children of the children  
We are the grandchildren of *Lautaro* taking the bus  
To serve the rich  
We are relatives with the sun and thunder  
Raining over the stabbed earth. (Aniñir, 2009)

Aniñir enunciates a violent criticism about the conditions faced by the Mapuche people in urban exile, not only with a disadvantaged position at work—the common jobs accessed by the Mapuche migrants are as baker, construction worker, gardener, laundress or maid, “serving the rich”— but in general about their experience in the city which is marked by ethnic and cultural discrimination that often leads to self-denigration and sometimes to the denial of their origin. This situation, for example, caused close to a thousand Mapuche people, between 1970 and 1990, to legally change their names and/or surnames for fear of discrimination in the city:

In this name-changing, Mapuche self-definition is expressed as an extreme process of denial of the Mapuche cultural identity... In this sense, the cases that we identify as rejection of identity show us how discrimination, dispossession and distortion of the Mapuche history and cultural codes make the subjects deal with their identity in a painful way. (Millaray, 1995)

Besides, maybe still dealing with their historical memory in a painful way, the contemporary Mapuche writers and intellectuals are looking to repair the damage that master narratives, as that of the Chilean National History, have inflicted in their people. One paradigmatic example of this work is that of Pedro Cayuqueo, a Mapuche journalist mentioned previously, who has been constructing a counter-narrative in his chronicles to confront the official history and its nationalist founding discourse. He replies to a famous historian, “General Cornelio Saavedra, the great architect of the occupation of the Mapuche territory in the second half of the 19th century,” who coined the official phrase “The Pacification of the Araucania” and its connotations: “Three centuries of war with Spain, the Araucanians [Mapuche] finally accepted the call of civilization and progress” (Cayuqueo, 2012). His answer does not hide a hint of anger and resentment:

At what point did Chilean official history begin to bother me for real? I suspect that when I took my university admission test and found, in the specific area of History and Social Sciences, the phrase of Saavedra again ... How could historians call “pacification” a brutal genocide, an ethnic cleansing authorized by the Congress and financed with funds from the public treasury? (Cayuqueo, 2012)



If, on the one hand, Cayuqueo explicitly exposes the distorted view of the official history, on the other hand, his chronicle proposes arguments different from the official ones so that the readers of his column (written in Spanish), or the readers of the collections of his chronicles—*Sólo por ser indios* of 2012 and *Esa ruca (house) llamada Chile* of 2014—can understand the reason for some issues that are generally condemned by Chileans. For example, to the constant question of why the Mapuche people insist on differentiating between Chilean and Mapuche, if they are not also Chilean, another well-known Mapuche writer, Elicura Chihuailaf, responds in the following way:

I was born and raised in a Mapuche community in which our view of the everyday life and transcendence is assumed from our own way of understanding the world: in *Mapudungun* and in the imposed Spanish; in the skin-brownness in which we recognize ourselves; and in the memory of the irruption of the Chilean State that “gave us” its citizenship. Invasion verifiable in the proliferation of latifundia surrounding the reservations where we were displaced. (Chihuailaf, 2012)

But the condemnations made by the Mapuche writers not only refer to the imposition of the Spanish language but perhaps even more to the Chileans lack of will to recognize Mapuche culture and language as part of their nation. As Cayuqueo (2012) explains in another of his chronicles:

Two peoples, two societies that speak different languages, can get to dialogue as equals? For now, the Mapuche people take the job of learning yours. In it, without going any further, I write this column. Will you speak or write ours one day?

Obviously, the question is rhetorical, the author of the chronicle knows the answer beforehand, not because it is directly answered by the society or the Chilean State—which since the Pinochet dictatorship, has actually taken steps (at least legal-administrative) toward an improvement of the situation of the indigenous people but which has not yet changed the structural adverse situation of the Mapuche in Chile.

Such a situation—linguistic subalternity aggravated by physical repression and territorial dispossession, undoubtedly all linked to an ethnic-cultural context—reveals what Walter Mignolo (2000)

calls the “colonial difference,” a notion that unmask many of the myths of the intercultural relations of contemporary neoliberal states with their indigenous peoples. In this sense, the Mapuche nation, whatever degree of sociocultural negotiation they have achieved with Chilean modernity, are situated (not only geographically but also) epistemologically in the subalternity of the Mapuche communities from the south. But Cayuqueo does not lose the opportunity to remind the Chileans, and the Mapuche people, that historical facts prove that this situation is not, as it never was, “normal,” but positioned in the national consciousness since the hegemonic discourse of the Chilean state, and curiously not since colonial times:

There was a time when being an authority and not speaking the language of my grandparents was not only politically incorrect in Chile. It also made you useless when dealing with “Kingdom’s affairs”. On the contrary, a good command of our language could well open the gates of Heaven. Or Lima, the capital of the Viceroyalty. Don Ambrosio O’Higgins knew it, the governor of the General Captaincy, Bernardo’s father, another of our acquaintances, who also learned fluently *Mapudungun* during his childhood in Chillan ... To speak the language of your main border adversary and business partner was an inevitable requirement if you wanted to come to power. (Cayuqueo, 2012)

The Mapuche chronicler, as other Mapuche writers and intellectuals do, constantly builds bridges in his texts between the silenced historical events of the Mapuche past, individual and community stories, myths and traditions, and the present of his people in today’s Chile, full of injustice and of contradictions, as well as a determined and renewed Mapuche insurgence.

### **Conclusions: a better future?**

The identity reconstruction of the urban Mapuche represents one of the resistances of the Mapuche nation to the neoliberal state. It is a reaction that tackles one of the most persistent aspects of a problem that has worsened in the later decades: The acculturation process when migrating from the ancestral territories to the city. Paradigmatic in this sense, this cultural strategy is not disconnected from more violent aspects of the struggles the Mapuche nation is currently carrying out and which frames more radical actions such as taking land by force

and the consequent state repression. Besides conflicts and internal fractures within the movement due to geographical or generational disagreements, the Mapuche people have the great challenge of being able to articulate a political project of autonomy within the Chilean state. Remarkable in this context is the work of the Mapuche intelligentsia with sociologists, historians, professors, artists, among others, who undertake a triple task: first, they have initiated a dialogue with scholars—domestic and international—to encourage a debate around the Mapuche conflict; second, they are carrying out a formal reconstruction of the Mapuche history, but this time from within, leaving behind the classic ethno-cultural approach from Western anthropological vision (from outside); and finally, this production of knowledge can have repercussions in Chilean public opinion, as in the Mapuche community, which can benefit now from accessing not just the family or community level oral tradition but also materials that can reinforce their identity reconstruction from positions of social prestige such as publishing circuits of national scope.

For example, to mention just one of these intellectual projects, in the book suggestively titled *Listen, Winka...! Four essays on Mapuche National History and an epilogue about the future* (2006), three historians and a sociologist programmatically address the historical reconstruction of the Mapuche people against the grain of Chilean national history. With a vision from within, and not for that reason lacking objective rigor, the authors promote knowledge and debate around the causes of the conflict between the Mapuche nation and the Chilean state. But above all, the text seeks that this knowledge does not get isolated from the current actuality. Particularly in the last section, that paradigmatic “epilogue about the future,” there is a lucid balance of what Chile’s return to democracy has meant for the Mapuche struggle:

Today we cannot say that a certain political bloc is our potential ally. For some time, it was thought that the Concertation government could be, because the opposite right wing (Alliance for Chile) has shown its intolerance on the subject, a lack of knowledge of history and a denial of the rights that we have as people. But the Concertation learned well from the dictatorship to repress social movements, to undermine their bases and delegitimize demands; They have learned to handle populism and keep his population in ignorance. (Marimán et al, 2006)

But beyond the profound criticism of the state, the authors constantly allude to the possibility of an exit to the problem built on dialogue, overpassing the state's irresponsiveness to structural changes demanded by subaltern minorities as indigenous peoples are. They propose dialogue and debate with Chilean society as a whole:

However, it is more strategic to call the ordinary citizens and invite them to reform things from their own space, to generate demands from everyday life. This may lead to a political movement with more organized groups that can make projects and demand changes. Let's talk, discuss, agree, recognize our prejudices and our ignorance of the other, because, apparently, a shared project to shake off those who oppress us can bring us closer to the well-being we all seek. (Marimán et al, 2006)

In this sense, the final proposal of the authors allows us to understand that the confrontation between the Mapuche nation and the Chilean neoliberal state now represents the summary of a problem and a phenomenon that the national states in Latin America have historically postponed: a relationship of respect and equality with the indigenous peoples of the continent. The Mapuche resistance—like so many other struggles of indigenous communities today, and of many other collectives extremely affected by neoliberalism in various countries—is proof that, despite the bicentennial efforts of nationalist homogenization, ours continues to be a region where multiple cultures and ethnic groups coexist. We just need to act accordingly to make it more just.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> As in many other countries in Latin America, the childish term for indigenous people as '*indito*' (little Indian), in this case the '*mapuchito*' Cayuqueo points out, refers to a verbal strategy used by Europeans to diminish natives' subjectivity to a child-like state that persists until our times.

All the in-text citations in this chapter come from Spanish-written sources and will be our English translation.

<sup>2</sup> Which was a false argument as, thanks to the parliaments of Quillín (1964) and Negrete (1726), the Mapuche nation and the Spanish Crown agreed that the territories to the south of the Bio-Bio river were sovereign and therefore were not part of the territory of the new independent Chile (Bengoa, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> *Winka* in Mapudungun, the Mapuche language, means foreigner. It was used originally to name the Europeans but today in Chile is used mostly to reference Chileans, both white or mestizo.

- <sup>4</sup> *Pehuenches*, Mapuche people that inhabited the South-Central region on both sides of the Andean Mountain range.

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# Neoliberalism and the Negotiation of the American Dream in Contemporary Latina Narratives

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## **Latinos and the persistence of the American Dream**

The present chapter seeks to contribute to this volume by examining the ways in which elements of neoliberalism are presented and assessed in the works of contemporary Latino fiction writers in the US. Although it is possible to often find competing definitions of neoliberalism in the media and academic literature, we broadly define neoliberalism here as an economic philosophy that favors free market competition, limited or minimal government intervention in economic and social affairs, and unrestricted international trade and finance as the best way to achieve economic growth and economic prosperity (Palley, 2004; Harvey, 2005). In the US, neoliberalism's earliest, most vocal and prominent supporters included the Business Roundtable, the Heritage Foundation, the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, Milton Friedman, and the Chicago School of Economics (Harvey, 2005). Since the 1980s neoliberalism has been, to varying degrees, the leading economic philosophy in American political life (Monbiot, 2016).

Neoliberalism's influence in the US has not been limited to economic policy. As an economic ideology, neoliberalism has had a profound impact in modern American cultural life due in part to its overlap with



some of the basic tenets of the American Dream cultural narrative. As a utopian ideal, the American Dream narrative has historically served as a central ethos of American aspirations about class mobility and economic success. Novelist Thomas Wolfe emphasized this possibility of material gain as a central component of the American Dream in *You Can't Go Home Again*:

So, then, to every man his chance—to every man, regardless of his birth, his shining, golden opportunity—to every man the right to live, to work, to be himself, and to become whatever thing his manhood and his vision can combine to make him—this, seeker, is the promise of America. (Wolfe, 2011, p.508)

Although there has been much criticism as to whether the promise of class mobility and financial success embedded in the dream could be reached today, or whether it was ever realistically attainable by the majority of the US population, the American Dream remains a potent narrative in contemporary America. This dream continues to inspire many citizens and immigrants alike to work hard and aspire to attain a higher income, a prestigious job, home-ownership, as well as economic security and independence (Hochschild, 1995). Neoliberalism has blended well with the American Dream in emphasizing self-reliance, personal responsibility, and individual risk as part of the common sense fabric of everyday life and as needed beliefs and behaviors to achieve economic independence and social mobility (Rank et al, 2016; Winslow, 2017).

The American Dream and its promise of economic achievement continues to be an influential ideal for members of the Latino community in the US, both among the second and third generation Hispanics as well as more recent immigrants. A recent poll conducted by Atlantic Media and Pearson Opportunity and a 2014 survey done jointly by the *Washington Post* and the University of Virginia found that Hispanic Americans lead, while compared to other ethnic groups in the US, in their support for the basic premise of the American Dream—that anyone who works hard still has a fair chance to succeed and live a comfortable life (Vasilogambros, 2016; Constable and Clement, 2014). The polls suggested that, among Latinos, the confidence in the belief of merit-based economic success was most palpable among recent immigrants and second generation Latinos who observe economic success among their peers and in the generations that follow. However, this faith in economic meritocracy and advancement contrasts sharply

with the harsh realities of life for many Latinos in the US. For Latinos in the US, these realities include incomes and college graduation rates well below the national median and the persistence of urban poverty in many Latino-majority neighborhoods.

This discrepancy between the economic aspirations and realities of Latinos in the US is a theme that has been underexplored in the scholarship on contemporary Latino literature. Other themes, such as biculturalism, the hybridity of identity, migration, as well as cultural assimilation and fusion, have traditionally received more attention in academic research and literary criticism about recent Latino American narratives (Kevane, 2003). To bring more attention to the socioeconomic dimension of these narratives, the purpose of this chapter is to analyze the way in which neoliberalism, through its embedment in the American Dream, is portrayed and adapted in selected examples of contemporary Latino fiction. Two literary works that exemplify how perceptions of neoliberalism adapt when viewed through the lens of the American Dream are *Dreaming in Cuban* and *The House on Mango Street*. Both of these novels have received favorable critical reviews and, through expanded readership over time, have positioned themselves as influential contemporary Latina fiction novels (Kevane, 2003). In these novels, Christina Garcia and Sandra Cisneros develop themes on how the American Dream and neoliberalism are experienced. The literary work of both Latina authors was written in and portrays contemporary times in which the effects and implications of neoliberalism have been palpable. In addition, these novels capture perceptions of neoliberalism that are emblematic of experiences that occur among two important subsets of Hispanic populations in the US—Cuban Americans and Mexican Americans. The following subsections explore the aspirational socio-economic themes and propositions developed within these two novels.

### **Economic dreams in *Dreaming in Cuban***

First published in 1992, *Dreaming in Cuban* tells the story of three generations of women and their individual responses to the Cuban Revolution. The novel has been well received by Latino American scholars and helped establish Cristina Garcia as an influential writer of the contemporary Cuban American experience (Kevane, 2003; Stavans, 2008). The *New York Times* book review of *Dreaming in Cuban* acknowledged the favorable reception of the book by commending the hybridity in language and style evidenced through its narration of events happening in the US and Cuba:

*Dreaming in Cuban* is beautifully written in language that is by turns languid and sensual, curt and surprising. Like Louise Erdrich, whose crystalline language is distilled of images new to our American literature but old to this land, Ms. Garcia has distilled a new tongue from scraps salvaged through upheaval . . . It is the ordinary magic in Ms. Garcia's novel and her characters' sense of their own lyricism that make her work welcome as the latest sign that American literature has its own hybrid offspring of the Latin American school. (Davis quoted in Garcia, 1992)

Beyond its appealing hybridity in language and narrative style, the novel is uniquely valuable for the purposes of this chapter because its plot and central characters offer competing perspectives on socioeconomic ideology as well as contrasting interpretations about the value of the American Dream.

In a similar fashion to Isabel Allende's *The House of Spirits* and Julia Alvarez's *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accent*, Garcia's *Dreaming in Cuban* narrates the story of a family whose life is transformed by broader historical events. The broader historical event in this case is the Cuban Revolution. The story, told in the first and third person, is mostly presented from the perspective of three strong female characters: Celia del Pino (mother of Lourdes), Lourdes Puente (mother of Pilar), and Pilar Puente. Celia is a staunch defender and believer of the Cuban Revolution, its ideals, and the leadership of Fidel Castro. Celia is also suspicious of the selfishness of capitalism and feverishly opposes American intervention in Cuba. Lourdes, on the other hand, flees Cuba as a result of the revolution, opens a bakery shop in New York, and becomes a successful entrepreneur. She believes in the neoliberal, free market system, in the opportunity that immigration to America brings, and seeks to defend the US from the spread of socialism. Pilar is caught in the middle between her mother and her grandmother. She becomes a young aspiring artist in the US who is critical of the excesses and superficiality embedded in modern capitalism. She continuously reminisces about the sayings and memories of her grandmother to contrast herself with her mother's ideals. Pilar goes to Cuba seeking to find what she believes is a missing part of herself and her own identity, which can only be found with the company of her grandmother, Celia. In the end, Pilar discovers on her own the repressiveness of communist Cuba. She decides to come back to the US after realizing that her own artistic freedom would be compromised in a Cuba where all art and cultural expression must serve only the purposes of the revolution.

Throughout the novel Celia del Pino's socioeconomic views are shaped by conditions prior to the Cuban Revolution. We learn through Celia's letters to Gustavo, a former Spanish lover, of the glaring social inequality and misery of the poor in the Cuban countryside prior to the Cuban Revolution during the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista from 1952 up until his overthrow by the revolution in 1959:

I'd forgotten the poverty of the countryside. From the trains, everything is visible: the bare feet, the crooked backs, the bad teeth. At one station there was a little girl, about six, who wore only a dirty rag that didn't cover her private parts. (Garcia, 1992, p.54)

This passage highlights Celia's sensitivity to the plight of Cuba's most economically vulnerable populations and her dissatisfaction with Cuba's status quo during the Batista years. In another letter to Gustavo, in which Celia reminisces about their time together in Havana, Celia also reflects about her perceived failure of the capitalist economy under Batista, about the inequality it created, and about the emptiness of the materialism embedded in it:

I remember our spring walks through Havana. The destitute were everywhere, spread out on the benches in the Parque Central, asleep on yesterday's newspapers. Remember the young woman with the dangling wooden leg and the single oxford? The beggar families from the countryside looking for work in the iron-fenced mansions of Velado? The smart couples in their convertible driving by without a second glance? ... Why is it that most people aspire to little more than comfort? (Garcia, 1992, p.98)

As the story progresses, we learn that these views become central to Celia's support for the revolution and Fidel Castro.

The novel skips over the actual battles that occurred during the Cuban Revolution and, instead, resumes its plot once Fidel Castro has taken over as the new leader of Cuba. The revolution brings new hope to Celia as she internalizes many of its promises. In contrast to the first part of the novel in which Celia appears trapped in distant memories of Gustavo, her Spanish lover prior to her marriage with Jorge del Pino, Celia's life is recharged with the revolution's aspirations and socioeconomic changes brought by the communist takeover: "No one is starving or denied medical care, no one sleeps in the streets,

and everyone works who wants to work.” (Garcia, 1992, p.117) In another passage, Celia adds that the hardest part of the early years of the revolution was not the rationing of goods and services but rather the need to contain her excitement from her anti-Castro husband Jorge:

Those first years were difficult, not because of the hardships or the rationing that Celia knew were necessary to redistribute the country’s wealth, but because Celia and Javier had to mute their enthusiasm for El Líder. Her husband would not tolerate praise of the revolution in his home. (Garcia, 1992, p.118)

In these two passages, we also observe Celia’s support for government-led redistributive economic policies associated with communist and democratic socialist governments as the best way reduce poverty and misery, in contrast to the trust placed in the efficiency of free markets and limited government interference traditionally advocated by neoliberalism.

Celia’s support for the revolution gradually grants her a more prominent role in the communist regime. Celia becomes a local judge presiding over the People’s Court in her local neighborhood and a coast guard against foreign invaders and enemies of the revolution:

Three nights per month, too, Celia continues to protect her stretch of shore from foreign invaders. She still dresses up for these all-night vigils, putting on red lipstick and darkening the mole on her cheek, and imagines that El Líder is watching her, whispering in her ear with his warm cigar breath. She would gladly do anything he asked. (Garcia, 1992, p.112)

Celia’s intellectual and emotional attachment to the revolution transform her primary social role from being a mother and housewife to becoming one of the communist regime’s ideological and physical gatekeepers.

The Cuban Revolution has the opposite effect on Celia’s oldest daughter, Lourdes. Shortly after the revolution, Lourdes immigrates to the US with her husband Rufino and their daughter Pilar. While they arrive in Miami, Florida, eventually they relocate to New York City. Lourdes is happy to adopt the US as her nation and she sees her migration as an opportunity for rebirth and as a chance to prosper in America’s market-driven economy:

Lourdes considers herself lucky. Immigration has redefined her, and she is grateful. Unlike her husband, she welcomes her adopted language, its possibilities for reinvention ... She wants no part of Cuba, no part of its wretched carnival floats creaking with lies, no part of Cuba at all, which Lourdes claims never possessed her. (Garcia, 1992, p.73)

Lourdes's reinvention through immigration allows her to strive for and eventually attain some level of success. She opens her own bakery shop called Yankee Doodle in New York and aspires to become a leading entrepreneur by franchising it nationwide:

Lourdes ordered custom-made signs for her bakeries in red, white, and blue with her name printed at the bottom right-hand corner: LOURDES PUENTE, PROPRIETOR. She particularly liked the sound of the last word, the way the 'r's rolled in her mouth, the explosion of the 'p's. Lourdes felt a spiritual link to American moguls ... She envisioned a chain of Yankee Doodle bakeries stretching across America to St. Louis, Dallas, Los Angeles, her apple pies and cupcakes on main streets in suburban shopping malls everywhere. (Garcia, 1992, pp.170–71).

Lourdes exemplifies the ethos of the American Dream, as described by Thomas Wolfe in the introduction to this chapter, through her pride in her business ownership and her relentless pursuit to transform her local shop into a major American franchise. Lourdes's pride in the ownership of her business and in her achievement of the American Dream is also manifested through the letters and pictures which she sends to her mother Celia back in Cuba. However, these letters and pictures about the success of her bakery in New York also let her mother Celia know of her relentless support for American capitalism:

Lourdes sends her [Celia] snapshots of pastries from her bakery in Brooklyn. Each glistening éclair is a grenade aimed at Celia's political beliefs, each strawberry shortcake proof—in butter, cream, and eggs—of Lourdes' success in America, and a reminder of the ongoing shortages in Cuba. (Garcia, 1992, p.117)

Just as Celia takes on the role of guardianship against the possibility of foreign invaders in the Cuban coastlines, her daughter Lourdes

assumes the role of protector of American capitalism. Lourdes serves the local police department as a community service officer at night and is perpetually concerned about the potential communist threat against American capitalism. She perceives the media, the universities, and the Democratic Party as sources of potential socialist infiltration which must be cautiously followed:

Above all, Lourdes and her father continue to denounce the Communist threat to America. Every day they grow more convinced that the dearth of bad news about Cuba is a conspiracy by the leftist media to keep international support for El Líder strong. Why can't the Americans see Communists in their own backyards, in their universities, bending the malleable minds of the young? The Democrats are to blame, the Democrats and those lying, two-timing Kennedys. What America needs, Lourdes and her father agree, is another Joe McCarthy to set things right again. He would never have abandoned them at the Bay of Pigs. (Garcia, 1992, p.171)

As observed, Celia and Lourdes represent opposite sides of the spectrum in terms of their socioeconomic views. However, it is Lourdes's daughter, Pilar, who is caught in the middle and symbolizes the battleground for the ideological soul of the new generations of Hispanic Americans. Pilar left Cuba as a very young girl when her mother, Lourdes, and her father, Rufino, escape the island and migrate to the US. In contrast to her mother, Pilar views Cuba, and in particular the company of Grandmother Celia, as an idealized home and as a source of inspiration and hope:

I feel much more connected to Abuela Celia than to Mom, even though I haven't seen my grandmother in seventeen years. We don't speak at night anymore, but she's left me her legacy nonetheless—a love for the sea and the smoothness of pearls, an appreciation of music and words, sympathy for the underdog, and a disregard for boundaries. Even in silence, she gives me the confidence to do what I believe is right, to trust my own perceptions. (Garcia, 1992, p.176)

Although Pilar is not in direct or frequent contact with her grandmother Celia, we learn that Celia's views are highly influential in the intellectual development of Pilar, in her quest to maintain independence from

her mother, Lourdes, and in her pursuit to become an artist. Celia's sympathy for the underdog and commitment to social justice lead Pilar to question her mother's faith in the free market as the best allocator of wealth and the notion that greed and ambition should be at the core of individual aspirations. These doubts along with the desire to be reunited with her grandmother in Cuba prevents Pilar from sharing her mother's zeal for material gain and the traditional American Dream.

Nonetheless, Pilar does not fully adopt the socialist worldview of her grandmother either. Toward the end of the novel, Pilar finally has a chance to travel to Cuba with her mother when they learn about the unexpected death of Lourdes's sister (Pilar's aunt) Felicia. During her stay in Cuba, Pilar is very happy to be reunited with her grandmother but learns first-hand about the limited lifestyle of many Cubans under communism:

Abuela doesn't get any hot water at her house. The ocean water is warmer than what comes out of her pipes, but I am getting used to the cold showers ... I have to admit it's much tougher here than I expected, but at least everyone seems to have the bare necessities ... I wonder how different my life would have been if I'd stayed with my grandmother. (Garcia, 1992, pp.234–5)

In this quote, while Pilar does admit that everyone seems to have their basic needs met, she also acknowledges that life in Cuba is very limited economically just as Lourdes, her mother, had always described. Beyond the economic limitations, Pilar is also deeply disappointed when she learns that art expression is restricted in Castro's Cuba: "I ask Abuela if I can paint whatever I want in Cuba and she says yes, as long as I don't attack the state. Cuba is still developing, she tells me, and can't afford the luxury of dissent." (Garcia, 1992, p.235) Pilar's disagreement about the government's restriction on art content in Cuba is palpable as she replies: "I wonder what El Líder would think of my paintings. Art, I'd tell him, is the ultimate revolution." (Garcia, 1992, p.235)

Pilar searches for her own identity while in Cuba and quickly realizes that she must return to New York despite her fondness for the vibrant and inspirational life next to her grandmother, Celia:

I love Havana, its noise and decay and painted ladyness. I could happily sit on one of those wrought-iron balconies for days or keep my grandmother company on her porch ... But sooner or later I'd have to return to New York. I



know now it's where I belong—not instead of here, but more than here. (Garcia, 1992, p.236)

While Pilar appreciates the simplicity of life in Cuba and the fact that the very basic economic necessities are cared for under communism, she ultimately returns to the United States because of the economic opportunities and political freedoms for aspiring artists such as herself granted under American capitalism.

### **Interpreting the American Dream in *The House on Mango Street***

In *The House on Mango Street*, Sandra Cisneros explores themes of biculturalism, gender roles, socioeconomic status, and the coming of age bildungsroman. While these themes have often been discussed as they relate to issues of identity, the study of socioeconomic status as it relates to neoliberalism is an important area for analysis in the narrator's, Esperanza's, development of socioeconomic worldviews. Robin Ganz describes Sandra Cisneros' writing as

the sound of many voices speaking—over the kitchen table, out on the street, across the borderlands, and through the years ... she charts new literary territory, marking out a landscape that is familiar to many and unfamiliar to many more. And yet, resonating with genuineness, testifying to the ability of the human spirit to renew itself against all odds, Cisneros' voice carries across and beyond the barriers that often divide us. (Ganz, 1994, p.19, p.29)

Cisneros creates a literary space where identity, particularly identity experienced when assimilating into another culture, is both dissected and developed. There are generational differences in perceptions of the immigrant experience, of those who experience migrating to the US and the children who were born in the US. The promise of the American Dream and the reality of the American Dream factor into these multigenerational perceptions and how the neoliberal experience is negotiated.

Through the eyes of Esperanza, Cisneros captures not only the perceptions of neoliberalism as it is embedded in the American Dream, but the effects of those worldviews on each of the characters Esperanza encounters while living on Mango Street, including Esperanza herself. The American Dream is an inspirational cultural device that drives

many of the characters in their motivations and aspirations, but it is Esperanza who redefines her identity as she negotiates her own version of the American Dream. She does this as she watches the experiences of those around her and, rather than following their footsteps and repeating their actions, she develops a separate understanding of what it means to be self-reliant in an environment where she learns social norms expected of her as they relate to both her Hispanic heritage and “the American cultural landscape.” (Telgen, 1997, p.113)

In her depiction of Mango Street, Cisneros sheds light on the experiences of Hispanics who struggle with the reality of the American Dream when it falls short of its promises:

Esperanza’s community serves as a microcosm of Latinos in America, and her own identity is interwoven with the identity of the neighborhood. People in the barrio relate to one another because of a shared past and current experience. In “Those Who Don’t,” Esperanza considers the stereotypes and fears that whites have of Latinos and vice versa. (Telgen, 1997, pp.118–19)

In the chapter Diane Telgen describes here, Esperanza realizes how perceptions of others impact the ways in which those within her community, and without, deal with conceptions of “the other.” Esperanza observes,

Those who don’t know any better come into our neighbourhood scared. They think we’re dangerous. ... All brown all around, we are safe. But watch us drive into a neighbourhood of another colour and our knees go shakity-shake and our car windows get rolled up tight and our eyes look straight. Yeah. That is how it goes and goes. (Cisneros, 2009, p.28)

In this moment Esperanza sees the stereotypes through which Latinos are perceived by those outside their community, but also the way Latinos within the community perceive those “others” outside their community: through fear of the unknown, fear of those who might take away the dream of a better life, and envy for those who have it. This fear is significant as it relates to a neoliberal narrative that emphasizes self-reliance and personal responsibility because

the formation of social character is an inherently psychosocial process, in which the “push” of material conditions and the “pull” of political ideas and ideologies are mediated by the fears, anxieties, and needs which condition and determine the affective charge of political and social beliefs. (Foster, 2017, p.3)

The fears and anxieties Esperanza describes are indicative of how those fears can impact the actions of individuals within her community, and perceptions of those outside her community, as they create political and social barriers that inhibit upward mobility. These fears lead to stereotypes that cast individuals, like those on Mango Street (as Esperanza witnesses), into socially defined molds that are difficult to escape.

Sandra Cisneros captures one such stereotypical perception, the migrant worker, in the chapter titled, “Geraldo No Last Name.” In this chapter Esperanza describes a man her cousin, Marin, met at a dance, who becomes a nameless, faceless victim of a hit-and-run car accident. The man Marin met has no known address and no known last name, and no way to discern these things because he does not carry any form of legal identification. Esperanza observes:

Only Marin can't explain why it mattered, the hours and hours, for somebody she didn't even know. The hospital emergency room. Nobody but an intern working all alone. And maybe if the surgeon would have come, maybe if he hadn't lost so much blood, if the surgeon had only come, they would know who to notify and where. But what difference does it make? ... Just another *brazier* who didn't speak English. Just another wetback. You know the kind. The ones who always look ashamed. ... What does it matter? They never saw the kitchenettes. They never knew about the two-room flats and sleeping rooms he rented, the weekly money orders sent home, the currency exchange. How could they? His name was Geraldo. And his home is in another country. The ones he left behind are far away, will wonder, shrug, remember. Geraldo—he went north ... we never heard from him again. (Cisneros, 2009, p.66)

This man represents the ugly side of capitalism, the faceless, nameless migrant worker whose cheap labor we are happy to have, yet do not care enough to save when he needs medical attention. Cisneros gives

a voice to this man, to this experience, and brings the reality of the neoliberal narrative about the free mobility of labor and capital to light. The neoliberal narrative provides an opening to migrate to the US and the American Dream promises economic opportunity and upward mobility. However, as Cisneros demonstrates in the experience of Geraldo, the reality of that dream through the neoliberal narrative is quite different.

In addition to bringing to the foreground the experiences of migrant workers, aspiration for economic independence and freedom is a theme that pervades the novel in the experiences of other characters, such as Alicia and Esperanza's mother, as well as Esperanza herself. In the chapter "Alicia Who Sees Mice," Alicia struggles with the responsibilities of her home where

a woman's place is sleeping so she can wake up early with the tortilla star ... Alicia, who inherited her mama's rolling pin and sleepiness, is young and smart and studies for the first time at the university. Two trains and a bus, because she doesn't want to spend her whole life in a factory or behind a rolling pin. Is a good girl, my friend, studies all night and sees the mice, the ones her father says do not exist. Is afraid of nothing except four-legged fur. And fathers. (Cisneros, 2009, pp.31–2)

The expectations placed on Alicia by her father, who represents the patriarchal dominance that saturates her culture, clash with the opportunities attending an American university offer. Esperanza calls Alicia a "good girl" and "my friend" and admires Alicia's strength as she perseveres in her struggle to change her economic conditions. Alicia's fears, her determination, and her perseverance all contribute to shaping her social character. Esperanza acknowledges Alicia's fears of being trapped in a room, "behind a rolling pin," a traditional task for women in her culture, but in the American cultural landscape, this tradition becomes deficient. Alicia fearfully defies the cultural norms placed on her by her father and embraces the neoliberal edicts for self-reliance as she strives to place herself into a position where she has the independence to choose her economic condition through hard work. This example illustrates the optimism inherent in those seeking to fulfill the promises within the American Dream, and through Alicia, Esperanza is able to see both the potential to fulfill such desires for higher socioeconomic status and the struggle to do so when attempting to adopt a new cultural narrative in the US.

Esperanza's mother expresses similar views in the chapter, "A Smart Cookie":

I could've been somebody, you know? ... Shame is a bad thing, you know. It keeps you down. You want to know why I quit school? Because I didn't have nice clothes. No clothes, but I had brains. Yup, she says disgusted, stirring again. I was a smart cookie then. (Cisneros, 2009, p.91)

Esperanza's mother describes how her insecurities, her fears of how she would be perceived by others according to her economic status, prevented her from pursuing educational opportunities. The connection between prejudice and socioeconomic status is not uncommon in these populations:

Historically, Mexican American men and women have suffered negative stereotyping and prejudices that prevented them from securing desirable jobs and being upwardly mobile within the society. Therefore, many remain concentrated in low-income neighborhoods like the one portrayed in *The House on Mango Street*. Poverty is a reality faced by many Mexican American populations living in the United States. (Telgen, 1997, p.122)

The insecurities Esperanza's mother relates in this chapter are an example of the very real circumstances of poverty that exist in neighborhoods like Mango Street, as well as the negative stereotyping that makes educational and economic opportunities seem impossible. The experiences of Alicia and Esperanza's mother illustrate the ways in which Hispanic immigrants have had to adapt their worldviews toward socioeconomic independence to meet the demands of reality in low-income neighborhoods.

The choice Cisneros makes to tell this story through the eyes of a young girl still developing her own identity is significant because she creates a voice that encompasses the many voices of those around her. Esperanza observes the experiences of the women in her neighborhood, of her parents, friends, and neighbors, and creates her own interpretation of self-reliance and freedom. Janet Sarbanes recognizes the significance of Esperanza's character as narrator:

By making the narrator of her novel a preadolescent girl, Cisneros represents Mango Street from the point of view of

someone who is not yet placed, not yet put into position. Esperanza's is a voice that can question, a voice of hope (Esperanza), a voice of transition. She is not inside the house looking out, like many of the other girls and women, nor is she outside the community looking in with strange eyes, like the nuns. Often she is out in the street, looking in at the other women—observing, analysing, evaluating their situation. (Sarbanes, 1997, p.125)

Cisneros creates this narrator, a young girl, who can witness the experiences others have faced as they struggle with the realities of poverty, stereotypes, and lost identity in an environment that promised to provide economic success, the US. Esperanza watches as those around her adapt that narrative and their perceptions of the American Dream, and she develops her own worldview as she finds her voice. She wants more than the poverty-stricken reality she has seen her parents face.

They always told us that one day we would move into a house, a real house that would be ours for always so we wouldn't have to move each year. And our house would have running water and pipes that worked. And inside it would have real stairs, not hallway stairs, but stairs inside like the houses on T.V. (Cisneros, 2009, p.4)

Esperanza associates her home with economic success and yearns for a space that will not fill her with shame because it does not meet the expectations that American television shows promote. Her parents use the lottery as another source of hope for achieving that economic prosperity:

I want a house on a hill like the ones with the gardens where Papa works. ... I don't tell them I am ashamed—all of us staring out the window like the hungry. I am tired of looking at what we can't have. When we win the lottery ... Mama begins, and then I stop listening. (Cisneros, 2009, p.86)

For Esperanza, all the dreaming about things they do not have, the hope held out for the slim chance of winning a future and home that fits the image promised by the American Dream, is unrealistic. She only sees the house they have and the place that never adheres to that

dream. So, she imagines a house of her own where she can help those in need, those “without”:

People who live on hills sleep so close to the stars they forget those of us who live too much on earth. They don't look down at all except to be content to live on hills. They have nothing to do with last week's garbage or fear of rats. Night comes. Nothing wakes them but the wind. One day I'll own my own house, but I won't forget who I am or where I came from. Passing bums will ask, Can I come in? I'll offer them the attic, ask them to stay, because I know how it is to be without a house. (Cisneros, 2009, p.86)

Esperanza refuses to accept the American Dream as it exists in the minds of her parents. Her own dream incorporates the realities she has experienced in the barrio on Mango Street, and, like Cisneros, she seeks to provide a safe space to those who suffer the same reality.

The independence Esperanza grows into makes her feel disconnected from her home and ashamed of it, but it allows her to assert a power that offers her a greater sense of freedom. She says:

In the movies there is always one with red red lips who is beautiful and cruel. She is the one who drives the men crazy and laughs them all away. Her power is her own. She will not give it away. I have begun my own quiet war. Simple. Sure. I am one who leaves the table like a man, without putting back the chair or picking up the plate. (Cisneros, 2009, p.89)

Esperanza's quiet war is a fight against poverty. It is a fight against antiquated social norms that no longer endure in an environment where capitalism means banging against walls of cultural stereotypes ridden with boundaries that restrict movement between cultures and above the poverty line.

When Esperanza meets the three sisters, reminiscent to “the Fates of Greek mythology, three old crones who know the fate of all human beings” (Sarbanes, 1997, p.126), she resists their prediction of her future at first because she still feels ashamed for wanting her own space, a home of her own, where she can fashion her own dreams. She feels guilty for wanting this, as if wanting such independence would mean she had to give up Mango Street and thus give up her cultural connections to her family and heritage, which she often associates with shame because of

their socioeconomic status. This conflict reveals a struggle between associating poor economic conditions with the Latino community and economic prosperity with American capitalism. In Esperanza's mind, to be able to attain any kind of prosperity must mean severing ties with her Latino community. However, the sisters tell her:

When you leave you must remember always to come back ... When you leave you must remember to come back for the others. A circle, understand? You will always be Esperanza. You will always be Mango Street. You can't erase what you know. You can't forget who you are. ... You must remember to come back. For the ones who cannot leave as easily as you. You will remember? She asked as if she was telling me. Yes, yes, I said a little confused. (Cisneros, 2009, p.105)

Esperanza listens but does not quite understand why leaving must also mean coming back, why to be Esperanza also means to be Mango Street, or how this place has become as much a part of her as her own dreams of being free of it. Yet, the sisters also make the point to say she must come back for the others, for those “who cannot leave as easily” as she will, for those who cannot escape the weight of poverty or the negative stereotypes that prevent them from getting the education or the desirable job. This is a feeling we have seen Esperanza already express as she did with the bums in the attic and her feelings about her first job. It is not until the last chapter, “Mango Says Goodbye Sometimes,” that Esperanza realizes what the three sisters meant. For while Esperanza

may not accept the house on Mango Street as her home—that is to say, while she may refuse to accept the self that is handed to her—she does ultimately accept Mango Street as a part of herself. She comes to identify with the street itself, that border space which is within the community (within Chicano culture). (Sarbanes, 1997, p.126)

Even as Esperanza comes to a new understanding of Mango Street, as the space tied to her cultural roots, she also has gained an understanding of what it means to have the freedom to leave that space and build an identity beyond her roots. Esperanza reveals that this house she has come to accept is still:



the house I belong but do not belong to. I put it down on paper and then the ghost does not ache so much. I write it down and Mango says goodbye sometimes. She does not hold me with both arms. She sets me free. One day I will pack my bags of books and paper. One day I will say goodbye to Mango. I am too strong for her to keep me here forever. One day I will go away. Friends and neighbours will say, What happened to that Esperanza? Where did she go with all those books and paper? Why did she march so far away? They will not know I have gone away to come back. For the ones I left behind. For the ones who cannot out. (Cisneros, 2009, p.110)

Esperanza comes to understand that she can leave that street and embrace the part of the American Dream that offers the freedom to forge an identity of her own, and she realizes that through writing she can give a voice to those who have none. She recognizes that “storytelling, or writing, is one way to create this relationship between self and community, to carve out her own place in the world ... Like Cisneros, Esperanza will free them with her stories” (Sarbanes, 1997, p.126). This is how she will return for those she leaves behind. Esperanza becomes conscious of her own strength, and because of this she can leave; because of this she can create change rather than accept a fate of marginalization, poverty, and negative stereotypes. She can break the cultural barrier and pursue economic upward mobility to better her own life, as well as the lives of those on Mango Street. Her ability to do this comes from her art, her writing, as it is within storytelling where she finds that the greatest freedom exists. She can free herself and others and this interpretation of freedom is her adaptation of the neoliberal narrative and the American Dream.

### **Negotiating the American Dream**

In both novels, the leading characters, Esperanza and Pilar, embark on life journeys in which they not only develop their self-identities but also their socioeconomic views and life aspirations. As part of this process, both novels are communicating directly to the younger Latino/a generation and provide models for them to come to terms with their ethnicity and socioeconomic realities. In the case of Esperanza:

[her] journey is deeply rooted in her observations about her barrio. They aid her in coming to terms with her identity.

Esperanza's search for her identity and her coming-of-age is universal; most readers will be able to identify with the feelings that trouble Esperanza—feelings of not belonging, of being other, of “the shame of being poor, of being female, of being not-quite-good-enough,” as Cisneros states in the introduction to the tenth-anniversary edition (1993). The answer to these feelings, according to Cisneros, is to recover, celebrate, and always remember one's roots. (Kevane, 2003, pp.55–6)

Early in the novel, we see that Esperanza clearly aspires to move out of the neighborhood to live in a nice suburban house and to surpass her parents' low socioeconomic level. However, this changes as she internalizes the experiences of others in her barrio and she realizes that her economic goals do not force her to leave her roots and the plight of others with whom she grew up. In this sense, the novel presents Esperanza's negotiated American Dream in which becoming a successful Latina writer does not demand forgetting about her cultural upbringing and the social issues which inform her writing, such as poverty cycles, immigration, and the persistence of gendered disadvantages.

In the case of Pilar, her journey differs somewhat from Esperanza in that she is the daughter of Cuban exiles who have been able to achieve a middle-class standard of living. Her mother, Lourdes, has fervently adopted the traditional American Dream narrative. She believes in the value of hard work and risk-taking to climb the socioeconomic ladder. Hanson and White describe this belief among many Latinos who migrate to the US:

Like other race/ethnic groups that immigrated to the United States, there is considerable evidence that Latino/as believe in the American Dream and its promise of upward social mobility ... Like earlier immigrant groups, they place high value on education, working hard, and success in careers. (Hanson and White, 2016, p.11)

In fact, Lourdes has worked hard to set up her bakery shop that she plans on franchising across the country and dreams about being a titan in the American pastry industry. In contrast to Esperanza's experience, Pilar's negotiation with the American Dream involves resistance to what she perceives to be the shallowness of her mother's greed and materialism. Instead, during much of the novel, Pilar romanticizes

the involvement and support which her grandmother lends to the communist regime in Cuba.

While their experiences contrast in many important ways, at the end of both novels both Pilar and Esperanza make conscious decisions to accept the freedom of opportunities provided by the American Dream in their role as creative artists. While both are aware that the American Dream has left many people behind, the freedom of artistic expression which is granted to them under American capitalism outweighs the harsh reality of social inequality. In the case of Pilar, she realizes that, despite the coverage of basic needs for the entire population under communist Cuba, her art would have to submit to the advancement of the revolution. As a result, she decides to return to the US and pursue opportunities as a painter who is free to make her own artistic choices, which could include criticism of ongoing and cyclical poverty traps embedded in the American neoliberal experience. In the case of Esperanza, her aspiration to become a professional writer becomes a tool to overcome the oppression of poverty and the historical gender role of domesticity:

As [Esperanza] develops both a critical and creative awareness, she comes to accept her past and, at the same time, transform her present. By developing this strength of character, Esperanza finds herself able to move beyond assigned, contained, and disempowered mental and physical ghettos, and live a meaningful and fulfilling life. (Sloboda, 2010, p.95)

While both Esperanza and Pilar are aware that American neoliberalism has left the American Dream as unattainable for many in the Latino American community, they also realize their own potential to achieve it through their artistic talents. This contradiction is ultimately resolved in the case of both characters through their deliberate choice to participate in American capitalism as artists who are socially engaged in the cultural and economic advancement of their own communities.

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# Bare Life in Contemporary Mexico: Everyday Violence and Folk Saints

*Jungwon Park*

## **Necropolitics and *homo sacer***

The postcolonial critic Achille Mbembe offers “necropolitics” as a corrective complement to Michel Foucault’s broadly known idea of “biopolitics.” Foucault underlines that modern liberal governments have moved away from controlling the population through the imminent threat of death to use subtler disciplinary techniques to achieve the (un)conscious subjugation of the subject and its body. The validity of the influence of bio-power rests with the constant reproduction of living subjects. However, Mbembe points out that biopolitics is not sufficient for explaining how the work of death continues to prevail as a technique of governance in the contemporary politics and everyday life.<sup>1</sup> His arguments lie in that the sovereign, whose role is to defend society from potential threats, is still given the power to determine who may live and who must die. Thus, the relationship between politics and death is essential to understanding “how the state has emerged through its reproduction of death and to examine consequent transformations in the meaning and representation of death in everyday life for its citizens” (Mbembe, 2003, p.16).

To demonstrate the presence of necro-power, Mbembe, unlike Foucault’s reliance on Western European cases, draws examples from the more politically volatile state of peripheral regions and countries.

For instance, in many African states, the political economy of statehood has changed drastically over the past few decades. Governments have failed to maintain the economic underpinning for political authority and order, and in turn have been forced to forfeit their monopoly on violence and control over death. Therefore, “other armed forces such as urban military, armies of regional lords and private armies all claim the right to exercise violence to kill” (Mbembe, 2003, p.26). These armed powers share a complicated relationship with the state, at times usurping control and undermining state power and at others allying with it to eliminate competing armed groups. Rather than writing this situation off as a simple “failure of the state,” Mbembe claims that this is a form of *war* in which survival of the fittest governs any and all human action, leading to an incessant chain of violence and terror.

According to political philosopher Giorgio Agamben, in such chaotic situations, the sovereign power is summoned again to intervene and resolve the crisis. The government transforms itself into a war machine by proclaiming a “state of exception,” in which constitutional laws are superseded to restore the status quo, and military power is mobilized and all violence pardoned. Agamben states that *homo sacer* is reborn in this paradoxical circumstance. In ancient Roman law, *homo sacer* is an “accused man” expelled from his own community and deprived of all rights and functions, and hence can be killed without the killer being punished as a murderer; yet he is still a “sacred man,” in that his life maintains sanctity that prevents him from being sacrificed in a ritual ceremony (Agamben, 1998, p.27). In this fashion, *homo sacer* becomes a modern-day symbol of subjects who are unprotected in the everyday, such as criminals, outlaws, and illegal immigrants, yet are exposed to all types of violence in war-like circumstances. The life of *homo sacer* is disposable and replaceable for the sake of society, and their existence is tantamount to the “living dead,” whose value as a human being is denied and is ultimately destined to die under precarious conditions.

Necropolitics extends itself to other parts of the globe, to contemporary Mexico. Melissa W. Wright contemplates the relevance of necro-power at the turn of the 21st century by examining the infamous femicide that took place in Ciudad Juárez, one of the largest border cities of Northern Mexico. The corpses of more than 300 women who were sexually abused, brutally murdered, then dumped across the city not only shows that the local police and federal government were unable or unwilling to find the perpetrators, but also serves as a visual reminder of imminent danger, justifying unlawful government actions taken under the pretense of protecting the lives of citizens and residents (Wright, 2011, p.709). However, the violence

did not end here. Followed by this tragic chain of female deaths on the US–Mexico border, Mexico became the hotspot for unprecedented drug violence that made a larger part of its territory a bloody and chaotic battleground, and for this very reason, put the entire population into a state of panic and fear of death.

### **Mexican war on drugs**

It is well known that the neoliberal economic reforms launched in the late 1980s and driven by the administration of Carlos Salinas brought dramatic changes in Mexican society. Both positive and negative impacts of the reforms are manifested in the aftermath of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA, 1994), a symbol of globalization and an embracing of the open market. While it brought industrialization and relative economic prosperity in the country's northern border region adjacent to the US, NAFTA caused a critical impact on the national economy, desecrating rural areas and those of lower socioeconomic classes. Consequently, those impacted sought to escape their economic predicament in two ways: on the one hand, there was a large-scale exodus from rural areas to the northern border cities to find work, with many seeking jobs in *Maquiladora* factories. Others went even further by crossing the border and trying to start a new life for themselves in the US.

Alongside the massive migration to the north, on the other hand, the rapidly growing informal economy has been one of the striking results from the neoliberal transformation, in which state intervention in the market was reduced to prioritize the national security and safety of citizens. Anthropologist Keith Hart coins the term “informal economy” while studying emerging urban labor markets in Africa. He distinguishes self-employment and small-scale entrepreneurial activities including small traders, peddlers, hawkers, street vendors and others with no fixed location from waged employment in large firms or government agencies. The former activities are referred to as the “informal economy” as opposed to the “formal economy” because these activities are unregistered and unregulated, and hence operate without paying taxes. Robert Neuwirth (2011, p.18) notes that, according to the OECD's 2000 report, half of the workers in the world—close to 1.8 billion people—work in the informal sector. In many developing countries, the informal economy is growing faster than any other part of the economy and is a rising force in world trade. During the most recent financial crisis and neoliberal transformation, desperate workers



in Latin American countries turned to the informal sector in the hopes of escaping their destitute conditions.

The informal economy encompasses another business world that exists in the criminal underground. The clandestine cartels that traffic human organs, drugs, and armed weaponry also operate outside the law. They are commonly referred to as the black market or shadow economy because these illegal activities are well known to legal authorities and chased down by law enforcement. Moreover, this informal sector is the target of moral stigma and condemnation. Historically, drug trafficking has been one of the largest informal sectors in the Latin American economy. Colombia established itself as the hub of the international drug industry in the 1980s, supplying narcotic commodities to the world, particularly the US—in 1982, 79% of marijuana and 75% of cocaine consumed in the US originated from or was processed in Colombia (Villar and Cottle, 2011, p.45). Colombia became the target for Washington, with the CIA partnering with anti-drug organizations to halt the flow of cocaine into the US. For over a decade, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) was centrally involved in the drug wars in Colombia and after the death of Pablo Escobar, legendary drug lord, there was a gradual decline in Colombian drug production and a decrease in the number of active cartels.

When drug cultivation and manufacturing is pushed out of one country it inevitably pops up in another. This so-called “balloon effect” shows that as long as there is a market for illicit drugs, production will shift to another country or region to meet demand. Colombia began to hand over its central position to Mexico, which as one of the main entry points to the US, also has had a long history of drug trafficking. Local and small-scaled production that formed around the Pacific region in the early 20th century transformed into a transnationally industrialized business due to US demand for medical marijuana during World War II, and since then drug trafficking cartels and organizations have expanded to all over the country.

The geopolitical transition of power in the continental drug industry alongside the social implications of the free market economy implemented by NAFTA reshaped and expanded the narcoeconomy. Drug cartels bought bankrupted farms at cheap prices and increased the cultivation of poppy and marijuana on lands that used to grow corn, bean, and other staple crops. The unemployed found dangerous but “well-paying, steady jobs in the recession-proof drug trade as farmers, drug couriers, truck drivers, chemists, street sellers, informants, *sicarios* (hired killers), and armed security guards” (Grillo, 2011, p.56). The election of Vicente Fox in 2000, which broke the

Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI)'s 71-year hold on power, led to the transition of political power and a reorganization of federal and state police and political institutions. This effectively ended the PRI's domination and control of the drug trade by dismantling the *plaza* system.<sup>2</sup> The failure to impose a structure and order to the drug trade by the new administration created a power vacuum that was quickly filled by cartels who wanted to act more independently. They attempted to negotiate or even intimidate local authorities into ensuring the safe transportation of their drug products. The fight for control of the international drug market and various transit routes led to bloody competition among cartels and an outbreak of violence in Mexican society at large. In the meantime, an estimated 77% of cocaine in the US traveled through Mexico in the mid-2000s. US officials expressed concerns that a "narco state" was emerging in Mexico, as both a parallel to the official state and as the de facto force behind the official government (*Economist*, 2009).<sup>3</sup>

Violence in Mexico only intensified during the presidency of Felipe Calderón, Fox's successor, whose legitimacy was disputed from the beginning due to suspicion of election fraud. To avoid people's attention and to firmly establish the legitimacy of his role as commander-in-chief, one of Calderón's first endeavors in office was declaring a war on drugs. In 2007, the government deployed hundreds of thousands of troops to the major sites of drug-related crime such as Tijuana, Ciudad Juárez, Michoacán, and Acapulco, which were rumored to be occupied by drug-related organizations. However, this militant strategy only fueled further violence: on the one hand, the government faced heavy opposition from the cartels that did not want to lose their clout over the illicit market to local or federal authorities, who in fact were as complicit in the illegal drug trade as the cartels. While still fighting each other, the drug cartels fought back against local police and the federal army to thwart government intervention. Moreover, the Mexican military, which has an extensive record of human rights violations, rampantly attacked civilians suspected of being accomplices to cartel activity. Far from reducing violence and cleansing society of crime, Mexico's war on drugs resulted in a dramatic surge of murder, torture, and other appalling abuses, which only exacerbated the climate of lawlessness in Mexico (García, 2016). This "war" has not been contained to a battle between and among the government and criminal organizations but has spread to terrorize civil society with unending violence and ever-growing casualties.

Accordingly, the tragic consequence of narcoviolence was the construction of the "fear system." Social activists, intellectuals, and

journalists expressed their concerns and anxieties as they sought to uncover the truth behind official discourses. Mexico became one of the most dangerous places in the world for media workers and activists were under the constant threat of death and mysterious disappearances (Grillo, 2011, p.287). What was at stake was the freedom of speech. The widespread censorship of crime and corruption-related stories contributed to the difficulty of estimating the exact numbers killed and those who have murdered and maimed with impunity. Mexican society was trained to be silent and to turn a blind eye as fear of violence and terror grew. Yet, an increasing subset of people continued to confront government action and tried to make their voices heard. Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity was one of these efforts. The Movement began in 2011, when the poet Javier Sicilla, whose 24-year-old son was murdered by alleged drug traffickers, called for social action from all citizens of Mexico to push for a stop to the mafia bloodshed and for new anticrime strategies and reforms. He organized a march from his hometown, Cuernavaca, to Mexico City. The ranks of the rallies quickly grew from hundreds to hundreds of thousands, culminating in a caravan march through a dozen cities, where family members held up pictures of victims of the drug war, asking for open dialogue and investigation among all the members of Mexican society.

### **Folk saints tradition in Mexico**

While trying to break the silence in the public sphere, Mexican society also looked to religion to cope with this overwhelming situation. In fact, despite appearing anachronistic, religious practices have always remained a part of even secularized modern life. With the sweep of globalization bringing unprecedented vulnerability and uncertainty to societies, it is not surprising to see the return of religion as a powerful transnational phenomenon. From the colonial period to the present, the Roman Catholic Church has had a strong presence in Mexico, serving as the *de facto* official religious institution by intervening in the political system and dictating social values. At the same time, the Church offered a unique space of consolation and protection for those who were persecuted and those whose problems seemed impossible to solve in a failing system. Many, if not most, Mexicans pray for compassion and forgiveness to the Virgin Guadalupe, who historically acts as a symbol for Mexican Catholicism, simultaneously embodying national Mexican identity and acting as a defender of the Catholic faith.

Alongside its unique devotion to the Virgin Guadalupe, Mexican Catholicism has a long and rich history of revering folk saints. Paul J.

Vanderwood explains the appearance of laic saints such as Teresa Urrea, Niño Fidencia, and San Judas Tadeo and their popularity in terms of intimacy and identification. Folk saints offer an affective connection to their devotees—God is glorious and eternal but alien, while folk saints are mortals in contact with life and death just like human beings. They are worshiped not for being divine but more for being equals to *us*—they are compassionate and mysterious, yet at times flawed and imperfect, and unpredictable (Vanderwood, 2004, p.208). The degree of affinity that people feel toward these folk saints can also be attributed to the perceived lack of care and attention from the government and the official church. The cult of folk saints is mainly created and spread among those who are excluded by mainstream society. Hence, laic saints are far from a sign of stunted development or backwardness. They function rather as an inherent and unique part of modern religiosity that often reveal the poor's dissatisfaction with the dogma of Catholicism and institutionalized religion (Graziano, 2006, p.11).

As drug violence worsened and fear grew, we see the emergence of new folk saints and an upsurge in their following. Jesús Malverde and Santa Muerte (Saint Death or Holy Death in English) stand out among others as the emblematic figures who bear witness to the transformation of Mexican society and underscore the unique condition of their followers. They are not accepted by the Catholic Church and even rejected within religious communities. Their names function as a type of taboo and their devotees are morally condemned due to their supposed association with *narcomundo* (the drug world) and crime. Despite being labeled as the non-approved patron saints of drug traffickers or prisoners, their cult followings seem to revel in this uncomfortable and conflicting image by drawing further public attention and provoking controversy in civil society. Could we consider these figures as contemporary, alternative versions of the folk saint tradition that draws attention to the unjustness and exclusivity of the official system? Do they effectively represent the intimate desires of those whose lives were made destitute through the lawlessness that pervades Mexican society? Or are they yet another example of deviant occult practices of Western esotericism that have developed as a pathological symptom of the ever precarious 21st century?

### **Jesús Malverde**

The spiritual universe of Malverde has crossed various borders, elevating his status to that of a transnational legend associated with both narcotrafficking and migration to the US. The mythical saga

of Malverde goes back to the turn of the 20th century.<sup>4</sup> According to the stories in *True Tales of Another Mexico* (Quinones, 2001), *Folk Saints of the Borderlands: Victims, Bandits, and Healers* (Griffith, 2003) and *Jesús Malverde: El Santo Popular de Sinaloa* (Esquivel, 2009), Jesús Malverde was born in the state of Sinaloa around 1870. He lost both parents to starvation as a child and took odd jobs in construction and the railroads before eventually becoming an outlaw, hiding in the mountains. He is remembered as the Mexican Robin Hood, who stole from the rich and divided the booty among the needy. Despite his fame, he was betrayed by one of his comrades and finally arrested and executed by the governor of Sinaloa. It is said that the governor ordered that his head be hung from a tree as a warning to his followers and forbade the burial of his body. After his death, he became a figure of worship among the working class in conflict with state power, with his followers conferring the name “Jesús” in the Christian tradition to celebrate his martyrdom.

The social injustices that took place before the Mexican Revolution allowed Malverde to find his niche within folk religiosity for those who looked to the bandit-saint for unclaimed justice. José Genis explains this connection with the concept of *compadrazgo* (godparenthood). In addition to *compadrazgo* being associated with the Catholic tradition of having patron saints, *compadrazgo* also serves as a basis to structure “myths about apocryphal saints of folk religion, saints that are not accepted by the Church but that popularly receive a special cult” (Genis, 2003, p.81). The idea of Malverde as being *like us* brings him down to an earthly plane, facilitating social relations among those who identify with him. In this sense, devotees who are not favored by the official system and may even engage in criminal acts can share in Malverde’s mythical condition and feel a sense of affinity. Thus, a social bandit is reborn as a religious figure.

The figure of Malverde as a folk saint has evolved further since the 1980s, taking on the title of “narco-saint,” who offers special protection to those who are involved in the drug business. As the informal sector gained power, his name has become more popular and influential throughout the northern part of Mexico, spreading to the other side of the border to encompass the territory impacted by the transnational drug trade. Nowadays, we can find shrines of Malverde not only in Sinaloa and Tijuana, but in Los Angeles, California and Cali, Colombia (Sada, 2000, p.7). His current international character distances Malverde from saints like the Virgin Guadalupe who have already been institutionalized within the Mexican religious tradition,

causing controversy and criticism as the leaders of cartels try to identify with Malverde to assume the image of generous bandit and local hero.

However, Sam Quinones points out that the media has overemphasized Malverde's character as narco's patron saint. Although it is undeniable that he is venerated by drug-traffickers, not all his devotees are linked to the drug industry. The cult of Malverde has been uprooted and rewritten to reflect the upheaval of the local population of Sinaloa (Quinones, 2001, p.230).<sup>5</sup> The continental drug trade has led to the transformation of this peripheral region into one of the central hubs for illicit business. Sinaloa was the cradle of opium cultivation in the early 20th century, but demand from the US for its medical use during World War II transformed Sinaloa into a strategic point for the production and transport of drugs. Consequently, the regional economy was reorganized around this illegal business, and local farmers gradually adapted to this transnational current and established a powerful cartel that administrated the drug market in northwestern Mexico.

Ironically, the development of the drug business clearly stems from a stealthy transnational economic project implemented by the official order, despite prohibitionist anti-drug policies. Hence the drug business in Sinaloa is destined to have a complex and conflicting relationship with legality (Astorga, 1996, p.20). For Sinaloa and its residents, this condition is perceived as "original sin" that has cast this region under the shadows and made it difficult for residents to live within the legal system and appeal to it when necessary. Despite corrupt authorities including federal government and local police being furtively complicit in drug trafficking, association with the drug industry is still heavily stigmatized. Those involved benefit economically but at the same time are trapped in the wave of violence that accompanies the transnational drug industry, which has constructed a landscape of bloody competition among the cartels as well as increasing tension with the law. No man emerges from this battleground unscathed, from low-level *gomeros* (growers) and minor traffickers to powerful kingpins. In fact, no resident of Sinaloa, regardless of their involvement in the drug related business, is immune to the threat of assault, kidnapping, and assassination that has overshadowed the region.

Life in Sinaloa does not follow any "natural" logic but is driven by the logic of the "war on drugs." The savage battles for control and dominance over the illicit market, unpredictable but ubiquitous, have entangled the region in a web of chaos, terror, and casualties. This situation, unlike a real war, is particularly tragic due to the indiscriminate violence that constantly interrupts the daily life of citizens. Sinaloa is the privileged place of narcotrafficking within the national and global

context and this everyday war consolidates a culture of death (Gómez Michel and Park, 2014, p.209). As a local symbol, Malverde represents the prevailing precariousness of the region. He is appropriated as the religious icon in the process of reconciling this region's "original sin." People of Sinaloa share with him the fate of living outside the law and staying in the margins of Mexican society. They plead for salvation that can only come from a supernatural and divine force and, to receive a saint's grace, healing, and protection, they strategically grant Malverde patron-sainthood, the role of mediator between the heaven and earth. Their devotion to Malverde is connected to a communal strategy that attempts to evade imminent and premature death.

It is worth clarifying that even though devotional veneration to Malverde is a part of "narcoculture," Malverde is not a saint exclusively to drug traffickers. Since the protective function of Malverde lies at the heart of his cult following, his cultural influence is extended to the regions and communities across the continent entrenched in the booming informal economy and drug-related violence. In this way, this local saint acquires transnational resonance and draws a new spiritual map of folk religiosity. Malverde performs the dual function of maintaining ties to the Christian tradition while also embracing a range of elements that lie outside of Catholic dogma (Creechan and Herrán-García, 2005, p.8). This strange interweavement of criminality and religiosity in his portrayal embodies the people's desire to call for care of and attention to the marginalized. The cult of Malverde thus attempts to compensate for the ignorance and neglect of official institutions. Among his devotees, Malverde has become an integral complementary figure to the Catholic Church, reshaping the religious landscape of Mexico and beyond.

### **La Santa Muerte**

While the transformation of Jesús Malverde as a folk saint tells the local history of the birth of the drug world and a cry for public attention throughout the 20th century, Santa Muerte is a relatively new unofficial saint. The very name Santa Muerte, which means "Holy Death" in Spanish, explains much about her identity.<sup>6</sup> Santa Muerte is depicted as a skeleton female figure clad in a long robe, holding a scythe and a globe like the grim reaper. The color of her clothes and the flowers, candles, and other accessories that adorn the icon vary widely from devotee to devotee and according to the region. Her origin can be traced to the 20th century, with Oscar Lewis' classic of Mexican anthropology, *The Children of Sánchez: Autobiography of a Mexican Family*,

being the first to mention her worshipers (1961, p.306). However, from the beginning of the 21st century, the clandestine status of La Santa Muerte has quickly evolved. Santa Muerte had her public debut when homemaker turned religious crusader Enriqueta Romero initiated a large shrine for her in the street of her Tepito neighborhood, known to be the informal market for illegal trade and drug trafficking (Villamil Uriarte and Cisneros, 2011, p.35). Santa Muerte became even more famous through a massive public street ceremony in Mexico City and has now reached an unprecedented popularity and following. Although condemned and sanctioned by mainstream churches, it is estimated that Santa Muerte currently has millions of worshipers in Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and the southwestern US.

Interestingly, this saint addresses in her celebrated name a direct connection with death. In *The Idea of Death in Mexico*, anthropologist Claudio Lomnitz explores Mexicans' changing perceptions of death and the afterlife from the Spanish Conquest to modern day. Interwoven with the religious cultures of Catholicism and indigenous worldviews,<sup>7</sup> the notion of death has been deliberately designed by those in power to effectively govern and subjugate the poor, who are trained to accept and even embrace their vulnerable condition that lies close to death (Lomnitz, 2005, p.83). *El día de los muertos* (The day of the dead) is one of the examples in which Mexicans intertwine life and death and intermingle with the dead in their everyday life. Lomnitz views death as a national totem in Mexico. From this perspective, he argues that the cult of Santa Muerte is a contemporary resurgence of this close relationship with death—however, unlike the past, it highlights the complete disappearance of the role of the state as the defender of the population. Instead what has emerged is the idea of the neoliberal penal state. Loic Wacquant (2009, p.8) argues the global trend of “zero tolerance” on crime—including smuggling, piracy, drug dealing and minor delinquency—emphasizes punishing the misconduct of the disposed concentrated in marginalized neighborhoods, while reducing assistance to the poor. He notes that Mexico City is no exception. Police officers routinely inspect passers-by; street vendors have been forced out through frequent raids on informal markets. Bars and nightclubs have sprung up rampantly in the more notorious areas around the historic center as well as in the outdoor markets. The result of massive crackdowns by the government to address the general public's perception of escalating crime rates has been an increase in the prison population.

It is therefore no coincidence that those in marginalized sectors seek care and protection that they cannot find in the official system. Santa



Muerte was reborn in the context of insecurity, anxiety, and state violence. She was first adopted by the prisoners as their patron saint, and her following expanded throughout prisons including prison officers and police. She serves as the bridge between prison-torn families by connecting prisoners with their family outside, who pray to her for their imprisoned family member's health and safety. For this reason, she is considered by the worshipers as a family member. It is not difficult to find the shrines to this skeleton saint in the streets of Mexico City's Tepito area. Her devotees also set private altars in their home adorned with candles and colorful flowers around her icon to foster an even more intimate relationship with her. Santa Muerte has a special association with prisoners and their families, yet this skeleton saint has taken on other important roles as she has gained more popularity among the urban poor. She acts as a supernatural healer, love doctor, money-maker, and angel of death. This flexibility of her powers reflects her detachment from the official circuits of the State and Catholic Church—she is only subject to individual needs (Oleszkiewicz-Peralba, 2015, p.106). Santa Muerte is an embodiment of the variety of dreams, hopes, and demands from those of low socioeconomic class spanning the urban poor, immigrants, blue-collar workers, and minority races.

Considering that most prisoners are males, it is also significant to note that the death saint appears as a female figure. Worshipers call her mother (*madrecita*) and godmother (*conmadre*), among others, but also baby girl (*nena*) and sister (*hermana* and *manita*), which is popularly used in Mexico to address one's youngest sister. As a result, Santa Muerte is not limited to a singular character and her familial position is not fixed. For some worshipers, she becomes a judicial policeman to hinder them from crime and foul behavior like drinking, smoking, and negligence. In other cases, this saint has a flair for expensive clothes and fine food to decorate around her statue and shrine. She is considered benevolent and merciful when hearing of her devotee's fears, anxieties, and sadness. Yet some devotees believe she is easily angered and may punish them severely if betrayed. Anthropologist Regnar Kristensen points out that Santa Muerte takes on a more capricious character than ordinary folk saints. Her multiple characters that may appear contradictory embody the diverse female roles in the family. Indeed, these characters somewhat reflect stereotypes of Mexican women. She is portrayed as a "typical temperamental female while also fulfilling the traditional trope of the self-sacrificing, silent woman promoted in the notion of *marianismo*." (Kristensen, 2015, p.558)<sup>8</sup>

Accordingly, her multiple characters lead to the reproduction of ambiguous roles within social relations. As a female member who is

humble, merciful, and benevolent, she contributes to the reunification of the family by paying attention to other members' difficulties, sharing their emotions and providing them with kinship and comfort. If betrayed and neglected, La Santa is transformed into the icon of vengeance who is thought to punish the wrong-doers severely without tolerance or forgiveness. Her conflicting characters as peaceful but violent, an affectionate protector of family but also a potential castigator, heroine but potential demon makes her a powerful friend for families. Her diabolic energy is taken advantage of by her devotees, who ask her for protection and at times plead for her favor to perform black spells and seek revenge on their neighbors, competitors, and enemies.

Andrew Chesnut's study shows that her worshipers use different colored candles depending on their request. For example, red candles indicate the skeleton saint's role as love doctor; golden candles refer to her role as job finder and angel of economic prosperity; black votive candles indicate a desire to harm others. This demonstrates the variegated nature of the cult of Santa Muerte. Yet, at the same time, Chesnut underscores the fact that the black candle of crime and punishment outshines the other colors (Chesnut, 2012, p.187). Worshipers not only pray to resolve concrete issues in the family, but to curse other people by repeating "death to my enemies," which can lead to an exacerbation of tension and conflict in real life. Since her role is not limited to protective work but includes punishment and vengeance, Holy Death may also bring negative social effects to communities.

In this sense, Santa Muerte carries a double-edged sword. She embodies the ambiguous modern Mexican family wherein the distinction between good and evil, friend and enemy, formal and informal, has become blurred since "people often find themselves forced to operate on both sides of the moral chasm in the everyday" (Kristensen, 2015, p.564). Their prayers seek an end to the logic of premature death from the war on drugs. Yet, at the same time, when people take advantage of Santa Muerte to apply the logic of death to other individuals, this religious practice leads to the reinforcement of an incessant chain of violence and fear. Therefore, the cult of Santa Muerte continues to raise ethical dilemmas and moral discussion on whether this following is merely an alternative practice of spirituality or a dangerous occult practice entangled with the world of crime.

## Living with death or postponing death?

The devotion of folk saints demonstrates that religiosity is inseparable from social change and cultural transformation. The current social climate driven by the logic of premature death is deeply present in people's everyday life, casting a constant threat of danger and sense of insecurity. The western concept of *Memento Mori* ("remember that you will die") was introduced in the Americas during colonial times and has since been interwoven with ancient indigenous cosmology and historically modified by the state, which has appropriated death to effectively govern its population. As a result, Mexicans live side-by-side with death, infusing death into everyday life and celebrating it as a harmonious state of existence. However, the extreme insecurity that Mexican society faces through its ever-growing drug violence has placed this cultural tradition in jeopardy and made its population create new religious practices. Unofficial saints are born when they take on the role of patron saint for those who were cast aside in the neoliberal transformation and excluded from the official system. And the rise of new folk saints has divided public opinion between stigmatization and celebration.

Malverde and Santa Muerte are considered representative folk saints in 21st century Mexico. Both share the role of performing miracles for their devotees who are forced to live with death yet desperately want to postpone it. However, apart from the fact that La Santa is physically more aggressive symbol than that of Malverde, there is a crucial difference in terms of their characters. Malverde's role focuses on the healing of damaged spirituality by lending an ear to the difficulties and hardships of worshipers. While Malverde solely provides mercy and forgiveness, Santa Muerte appears as an ambiguous and even contradictory figure. She is affectionate yet punishes and seeks revenge if betrayed. She also uses violent power to curse and perform black magic toward enemies. Her name has often become associated with the drug world as traffickers seek her power to fight against their rivals or the government officials. It is in this sense that although her character remains ambivalent, it is virtually impossible to avoid at least some condemnation of Santa Muerte. Her devotional practice is accused of intensifying violence and aggravating the existing volatile social landscape rather than spreading a message of peace and solace. The media demonizes folk saints and the Catholic Church forbids their worship. The Mexican government have demolished nearly 40 shrines devoted to Santa Muerte on the US–Mexico border since 2009.

Nonetheless, to forbid worship and criminalize followers may not be the solution. The cult of unofficial saints reminds us of the polarization within Mexican society and the problematic marginalization of the poor, who tend to be abandoned by the state and excluded from civil society. Malverde and Santa Muerte are witnesses to bare life in contemporary Mexico. It is critical to examine the cult of folk saints as a reaction to the crisis of the state and explore its significance as an alternative answer to the prevailing culture of death. The future of this new religious movement appears bleak because it is difficult to separate it completely from the world of violence. However, it offers important insights into tenacious ways the people of Mexico wrestle with necro-power, endure pervasive fear and terror, and fight against the dehumanized conditions of life, even in the darkest hours.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> One of the main contributions that Foucault brought into the realm of modern politics is to highlight the negative function of modern state and its institutions, which at first glance are operating under the consent of its population but are used by the dominant power to achieve control over it. The regulatory devices and disciplines in modern democracy are the essential technique of governing the subject, replacing dictatorship and autocracy. For him death threat is outdated and no more efficient, and thereby it is excluded from the possible strategies of contemporary politics.
- <sup>2</sup> *Plaza* system is crucial to understanding the contemporary Mexican drug war. Since 1970 narcotrafficking had formerly been integrated into the PRI corporatist state, an under-the-table equivalent of labor, peasant, and business organizations. Thus it was subject to a certain degree of regulatory control and to unofficial taxation in return for the de facto licensing of smuggling. However, the abandonment of this furtive structure with the introduction of the PAN government contributed to the independent growth and power of organized crime syndicates followed by their conflictive relation with the state and local police.
- <sup>3</sup> In covering an increasing drug business and violence, the mainstream media tends to underscore the failure of state that has lost control over the illegal organizations and cartels. Yet, this perspective often leads to an easy conclusion in which Mexican government should recover its power and sovereignty on the civil society.
- <sup>4</sup> Malverde in Spanish literally means “bad green.” In fact, *verde* can refer to the green of marijuana, as well as the green of dollar bills. He appears as a mustached middle-aged man in a white suit, showing he is an ordinary man like his devotees.
- <sup>5</sup> Literary representations of Malverde also focus on the locality of this folk saint. *The Horseman of the Divine Providence* (Oscar Liera, 1984), *Every Breath You Take* (Elmer Mendoza, 1991), *The Queen of the South* (Arturo Pérez-Reverte, 2002) and *The Curse of Malverde* (Leónidas Alfaro Bedolla, 2004), among others, draw Malverde’s origin and character in association with local history of the state of Sinaloa by highlighting that this patron saint is dedicated especially to this region.
- <sup>6</sup> Santa Muerte has various nicknames such as Skinny Lady (*la Flaquita*), Pretty Girl (*la Niña Bonita*), White Girl (*la Niña Blanca*), and Bony Lady (*la Huesuda*). Her

devotees sometimes refer to her as a “cabrona,” which is equivalent to “battle-ax” in English, to express their identification and intimate relation with this unofficial saint.

- <sup>7</sup> Perla Fragoso attempts to see the origin of Santa Muerte from the pre-Hispanic tradition and religious practices (2011, p.6). In Mesoamerica there had been a long history of the cult of death that unlike Judeo-Christian culture was not the end of earthly life, rather a part of the circle of constant renovation. In this sense the cult of Santa Muerte can be understood as an example of Latin American syncretism that inscribes indigenous cosmology and ideas in western Christianity.
- <sup>8</sup> Santa Muerte is secular and profane rather than sacred although her figure represents modern day sanctity. Therefore, unlike the Virgin Guadalupe who maintains a coherent image of generosity and mercy, the uncanny combination of contradictory female elements provides her with a special position in the Mexican religious landscape.

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**“A fascinating and wide-ranging exploration of neoliberal and post-neoliberal politics in Latin America. The collection offers a refreshing perspective on the ongoing crisis of neoliberalism in the region – and the many ways that it is being challenged.”**

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Ongoing conflicts between neoliberal and post-neoliberal politics have resulted in growing social instability in Latin America. This book explores the cultural dynamics of neoliberalism and anti-neoliberal resistance in Latin America as a complex set of interrelated cultural forms, examining the ways in which neoliberalism has transformed public discourses of self and social relationships, popular cultures and modes of everyday experience.

Contributors from an international range of different disciplinary perspectives look at how Latin Americans construct subjectivities, build communities and make meaning in their everyday lives in order to analyse the discourses and cultural practices through which a societal consensus for the pursuit of neoliberal politics may be established, defended and contested.



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