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Where is Latin America?: Imaginary Geographies and Cultures of Production and Consumption

In many ways, 'Latin America' has long since departed from the parameters of its physical, geographical boundaries and become part of the global (especially Western or Northern) imagination. Manifestations of the phenomenon include: the popularity of a perceived 'new' Latin American cinema (*Amores perros* [2000], *Y tu mamá también* [2001]), *Cidade de Deus* [2002]) and the transitioning of its directors to US film industry success; the transnational stardom of actors and singers like Gael García Bernal, Ricky Martin and Spain's Enrique Iglesias; the impact of 'border' movies from, for example, *Traffic* (2000) to *Sicario* (2015), and the popularity of drug war TV shows like *Narcos*; the rise of *regaeton* and the ubiquity in 2017 of a song like *Despacito*; the North American recreation of hit telenovelas in the shape of *Ugly Betty* or *Jane the Virgin*: the growth in exotic coffee culture by day and the unmissable presence by night of so-called '*salsa*' (often accompanied by glamorous-looking rum cocktails); the Caribbean and Latin American tourism boom with its socially-oriented yet voyeuristic Rio *favela* tours and its fetishisation of supposed Havana decadence (a byproduct being the projection abroad of The Buena Vista Social Club). ''Twas ever thus', of course: one has but to think of gold and silver, much of the implicit content or subtext of *The Tempest* or *Don Quijote*, the cocoa, sugar or tobacco trade, Alexander von Humboldt's packed nineteenth-century lecture theatres or Good Neighbour Era Hollywood to realise just how long this exportation of the colonial exotic has been going on.

The rise of social media has accelerated this process to a feverish degree, but globalisation was already catalysing it in the later twentieth and early twenty-first century (the main focus here). One instance of Latin-inflected globalisation is the UK restaurant and bar chain Las Iguanas. The chain, which started out in 1991, aimed to bring what the company called 'our own brand of Latin magic' to presumably hitherto culturally deprived Britons, describing itself as Restaurant and Cachaçaria, and advertising salsa music and tapas, providing 'that all essential Latino atmosphere any time of day or night'. Though the chain's general manager was once quoted as claiming that 'our restaurants ooze … authenticity', the mixture of elements on offer just cited seems to mix notions of Spanish America, Brazil, the Hispanic USA and European Spain in an undifferentiated jumble of Latin otherness. The notion of Latin America (or, better, all-purpose Latinity) that is projected is, of course, positive, but based on the clichés of cultural assumption. For example, their website used to promise an experience involving 'passionate people', 'intoxicating Latin rhythms', a 'soundtrack of sultry salsa' and even 'the rich colour palette of the southern hemisphere'. Behind the upbeat projection, then, there seemed to lie a peddling of inconsistent stereotypes in which the Latin other could be conceived as liminal, dark, libidinous and unbridled. However, there does appear to be a self-consciously politically correct element thrown in too to appeal to the relative cultural awareness of the liberal-minded British eating and drinking public. A degree of association with the popular classes was created by the description of their one-time 'signature dish', *xinxim*, as 'Pelé's favourite'. Plus, in an image which conjures up the notion of fair trade, one is reassured that the cachaça one consumes is produced by our friend 'João Luiz' (who nonetheless appears generic enough not to require an identifying surname), a master cachaça maker from a town near Rio, who 'looks after our field of

Las Iguanas sugar cane, harvests it, distils and bottles it before shipping it to us in the UK'. The drinker's conscience is further soothed by the eco-friendly reassurance that, amongst the many 'Latin American things' that can be seen in Las Iguanas restaurants, are 'our mosaic tabletops … made for us in Brazil from sustainable woods'. So, while indulging oneself, one can at least feel that one is doing something to save the rainforest. However, one might feel slightly more uneasy about the anthropologising gaze which can risk appearing to reduce the people of Latin America to exotica not much different to the subcontinent's exhuberant flora and fauna. An early version of the website teases the customer with the following prospect: 'you might also find a few life-sized Latinos if you know where to look'. In its July 2004 news release entitled 'Las Iguanas say HOLA! To Nottingham', the chain quotes one reviewer's characterization of the restauarant as 'as loud and proud as Joaquin Cortez's [*sic*] Cuban heels, as intense as Antonio Banderas' gaze and as brazenly sumptuous as J-Lo's curves'. Of course, Cortés may wear Cuban heels but he is from Andalucía not Cuba, Banderas is Spanish and based in Hollywood, and J-Lo is a North American from the Bronx.[1]

A trip to Las Iguanas, then, where you can have epicurean or libationary adventures, enjoy exotic new experiences and maybe – if you are lucky - even spot a life-sized Latino or two, sounds rather like going on a safari. And the safari cliché is rife in Northern/Western consumer culture in everything from tourism to shopping. One example is the US clothing company Banana Republic. Founded in 1978 and purchased by GAP in 1983, its name obviously plays on the cliché of political instability in Latin America (and elsewhere in what used to be called the 'Third World'). Moreover, its full original name, Banana Republic Travel and Safari

[1] Las Iguanas has repeatedly modified and updated its website over the years. The most recent manifestation at the time of writing is: https://www.iguanas.co.uk/.

Clothing Company, suggests that shopping there becomes a species of adventure or safari in which the Latin American other is projected as sexy but risky, as exciting but as frisson-inducing as an exploration in the jungle or hunting for jaguars. Paul Smith has quoted the founders of the company as saying they had the whimsy of imagining their business as a kind of republic of their own, the merchandise being a reflection of the surplus uniforms of supplanted military dictators (Smith, 1989, 130). More bizarre still was the 2004 campaign of British clothing company FatFace. FatFace described itself then as an Active Lifestyle Clothing Brand, selling fashion gear, to quote from their company philosophy, to those who like to 'ski, surf, sail, climb, fly, mountain bike, play tennis or just love getting amongst it'. The 2004 campaign, trading presumably on the long-standing idea of the New World as place of space, excess, grandiose landscape, discovery, adventure, and exploration, ran under the mystifying slogan '100% Ecuador' – together with the pun 'Es Todo sobre la Altitud' (It's all about altitude). What these versions of Latin America show is that imaginary geography is much more powerful than real geography and that, in the globalised system, true knowledge of Latin America has often been substituted by an imaginative Latin world existing in the minds of Northern and Western consumers.

Jon Beasley-Murray (2003) has drawn attention to the example of Bacardi, the consumption of which reveals a pattern of de-territorialization of Latin America and the fabrication of imaginary versions of it abroad. He notes that, though the Bacardi label carries the legend 'Established Cuba, 1862', it was founded by a Catalán, had its assets confiscated by Castro, and saw the Bacardi family relocate to the USA and enter a drawn-out lawsuit over the rights to the name. The Headquarters of Bacardi re-located to the Bahamas, but with distilleries in Brazil and Mexico, its ingredients coming from those companies and Puerto Rico. Moreover, this quintessentially Cuban

product underwent a campaign of de-latinization by the company in the Cold-War fevered USA of the 1960s and 70s, with a new emphasis on the product as a mixer. The idea was to reduce the colonial, Latin and Cuban associations of Bacardi as rum, and re-present it as an American mixer drink in a big joint advertising campaign with Coca Cola. Bacardi is Cuban, then, but also from nowhere. In a sense it is an image of the vacuousness globalisation. It is literally just a name and ironically, this, the name, the company's most precious asset, has been held, as Peter Foster observed in 1990, in a lawyer's office in Liechenstein (Foster, 1990, 247; quoted by Beasley Murray, 2003, 230). However, the growing fashion of Latin food, music, films and holidays in the 1990s led to a vigorous but equally displaced and amorphous re-latinization campaign and Beasley-Murray noted in particular the promotion in the late nineties of the Bacardi Breezer. He examined examples of the UK TV advertisements for the product. One is built around an imaginary opposition between staid Britishness and Latin sensuality, the formality of a British job interview set against the freedom and fun of a Latin carnival setting. But there is an important shift here too. The difference between the two cultures is no longer one of simple binary opposition. Rather, the one now exists within the other. 'There's a bit of Latin spirit in every/one', the tag line says. The pun suggests that inside every bottle of Bacardi Breezer there is an explosive Latin experience just waiting to burst out ('there's a bit of Latin spirit in every *one*'). It also suggests, though, that that Latin spirit exists potentially in all of us and that Bacardi Breezers are a kind of psycho-social lubricant that will allow us to set that spirit free ('there's a bit of Latin spirit in *everyone*'). In other words, - and this is Beasley-Murray's important point when he talks about 'viral *latinidad*' – Latinity has become the cultural unconscious of the West and the North. It is interesting that one of the other adverts in the series depicts a young woman who is lying on a

psychiatrist's couch. When asked by the stiff bearded and bespectacled English doctor to tell her the first thing that comes to her head, the girl's mind appears to cut to a memory or fantasy of raunchy excess with a muscly dark-skinned man partly on the bonnet of what looks like a 1950s Cuban vintage automobile photographed against an obviously sweaty Latin backdrop. The Latin is the unconscious other then – dark, dangerous and desirable, but a useful escape valve for the hard-working 'First-World' yuppie. Moreover, Latin America has burst its boundaries it seems and is, in many ways, now as much over here as it is over there, a fully fledged part of the mental landscape of modern Britishness.

Latin America, then, increasingly exists – as it always has done really - for the benefit of the gaze of the outside world, either as source of ogling wonderment or as source of exploitative possibility. With the rise of the movie industry in early twentieth-century California, the Latin look, as it was called, became extremely popular in the USA and Latin American actors became very popular (especially in the early silent movies where they enjoyed the advantage of not having to speak and thus mark their otherness). However, these actors quickly tended to become separated from their ethnicities. The original 'Latin lover', Rudolf Valentino, was, of course, actually Italian, while later stars of the 1930s like Ramon Novarro and Dolores del Rio had the accents dropped from their names and were presented in publicity material as 'Latin' or 'Spanish', thus avoiding the sordid low-class connotations for North Americans of the term 'Mexican'. Also such actors often played not Mexicans, but other kinds of foreigner. This de-latinization of stars soon became something of a norm. The most famous example is that Margarita Carmen Cansino, the daughter of a Spanish male dancer and immigrant to New York. She started off playing Mexican señoritas in American B movies, but her big break came in 1941 when – in a

tremendous stroke of de-ethinicization – she was re-named as Rita Hayworth and cast in the title role of *The Strawberry Blond*. This trend towards ethnic invisibility continued through to the 1960s and 70s with the re-packaging of Latin actors like Anthony Quinn and Raquel Welch. It perhaps continued into the twenty-first century with actresses like Cameron Diaz, who, despite the surname, does not conspicuously embody Latinity. Moreover, pan-Latin othering continued to be rife as Brazilian or Mexican characters around the turn of the millennium were regularly portrayed by Spaniards such as Penélope Cruz or Antonio Banderas – though this as an improvement on the browned-up portrayals of Mexicans by, say, Marlon Brando in *Viva Zapata* (1952) or Charlton Heston in *Touch of Evil* (1958).

These observations on Latinos in Hollywood are all in Clara Rodríguez's authoritative account (2004). Here she also opines that, in the 1960s, 70s and early 80s, more notoriously negative images of Latin Americans or US Hispanics became the norm, particularly with the rise of the Spaghetti Western and the urban crime drama focussing on gangsterism and drugs. The growth and integration of the Latino population in the USA did eventually bring more positive role models in the 1980s and 90s in the form of producers, actors and directors like, say, Salma Hayek, Robert Rodriguez and Andy Garcia (and the situation has noticeably improved much further by the mid twenty-first century). For some an iconic – if not very good – picture which sums up this trend is the 2003 Jennifer Lopez vehicle *Maid in Manhattan*. The title may be taken as a pun indicating both the humble status of the Latina chamber maid and the possibility that Latinos can do well for themselves in the Big Apple of the twenty-first century: here, J Lo's character 'makes it', but without having to relinquish her identity as a Latina (see Rodríguez, 2004, 228). All of which brings us on to the vexed question of Jennifer Lopez's bottom, which has received huge press

attention and a fair bit of academic attention too. Frances Negrón-Muntaner (2003) offers an informative perspective. The furore probably began with or was most marked by the Puerto Rican American's being cast in the tile role of Gregory Nava's 1997 tragic Mexican-American pop-star bio-pic *Selena*. With the movie expected to become a landmark of popular Hispanic American cinema, the casting was controversial because it was thought by some to collapse cultural specificities by positing a Caribbean identity as equivalent to a Mexican one, while others celebrated the casting as a masterstroke gesture towards the Hispanic USA's reclamation of a common Latina/o experience. One thing which was seen as marking out Lopez's Caribbean ethnicity was the sizeable shapeliness of her rear end, a feature often considered in mainstream popular culture as constitutive of chicana identity. Jennifer herself made quite a big deal out of her derriere and gave a large-number of bottom-related interviews for the media. Talking of the curvaceous Selena, J Lo, commented that, unlike stars of an earlier generation, 'Selena could be who she was and, as for me, for once, I could be proud of my big bottom' (Vincent, 1997, E8; quoted by Negrón-Muntaner, 2003, 294). Of course, in terms of conventional clichés of male heterosexual proclivities and conventional female responses to them, the 'big butt' has often been presumed to be fashionable or attractive in Latin American culture, while another cultural cliché emphasises the North American (or European) fascination with big breasts. In this unfortunately conceived 'tits and ass' debate, Jennifer Lopez has been credited with initiating a seismic cultural shift of emphasis in North America from breast to butt, corresponding to a healthy latinization of North American culture. Is J Lo's bottom an example then of the de-othering of Latinity in the so-called 'First World'? Perhaps, or perhaps not. The relentless focus on her bottom may be little more than the othering of the foreign and darker female body. Rodriguez claims that,

as Jennifer entered the cultural mainstream and became an A-list American star, she actually chose to work on her bottom to reduce its size – either by surgery or exercise (Rodríguez, 2003, 227). So, the more 'American' she became, the more she was de-latinized à la Hayworth or Welch. Maybe not much was changing after all in the noughties, and Latinity remained disguised or had its specificity erased in 'First-World' popular culture, remaining a generic other that encapsulated the desires and fantasies of a non-Latin public.

Surely, one might think however that in the modern era, especially after the PC explosion of the late 1980s, there would be many liberal portrayals of Latin American experience which sought to deliver a more authentic or sympathetic viewpoint. And, of course, if one thinks of 1980s American movies like *Missing* (1982), *Under Fire* (1983), *Salvador* (1986) or *The Milagro Beanfield War* (1988), one can see that this is, in fact, the case. The problem is, though, that, despite, the liberal gesture, even apparently revisionist treatments from the more developed world inadvertently repeat the stereotypes and use Latin America as a backdrop for the exploration of Northern/Western concerns. Roland Joffé's 1986 picture, *The Mission*, appears to defend indigenous culture and attack European colonialism. It is set in a frontier area around the borders of Paraguay and Brazil in 1750 and deals with Jesuit priests' attempts to protect the innocent Guaraní Indians from the threat of the Brazilian slave trade, by keeping them in their missions at the time of a transfer of sovereignty from Spanish to Portuguese control. *The Mission* opens with a quotation that seems to present the film as a historically accurate account, yet is riddled with historical inaccuracies. Jean Franco (1993) and James Schofield Saeger (1997) have documented these problems. The spectacular opening scene is of a crucified Jesuit crashing over the top of a gigantic waterfall. There is, apparently, no historical record

of Jesuits being martyred as in this scene – but it certainly looks good. Later, one mission appears to be led by a Guaraní priest, but the indigenous population was excluded from the Jesuit order (what is worse, he is played by a Cambodian actor). In a sense, such inaccuracy is to be expected, because this film remains an essentially European or North American *version* of Latin America. The arresting martyrdom of the opening puts the Jesuits, the white-skinned Europeans, at the heart of this drama, not the 'Indians', and the real heroes are, of course, the Jesuit priests played by Robert de Niro and Jeremy Irons. Moreover, even in its sympathetic portrayal of the indigenous peoples, it simply reinforces another myth – that of the noble savage living in harmony with nature. The Indians, constantly photographed naked in connection with waterfalls and lush vegetation, are indistinguishable from 'nature' and denied human specificity or even agency as they play the role of naïve innocents, too simple to understand their situation and dependent on the priests for protection. The utopian context of the missions freezes time and stifles the possibility of change, turning the Indians into some kind of abstract emblem of timeless beauty and peace. Franco (1993) takes this view and has taken the argument a stage further, suggesting that, though set in the past, the film is really about the present. Like the historical Jesuits, the film seeks to preserve the Indians in a kind of New Age limbo of harmony and love, reflecting the modern fascination with multiculturalism and the ideal of the colourful rainbow community of peoples living together side by side. And given the abundance of rainforest imagery in the film, despite the fact that it is not set in the rainforest, is this story of the corruption of Eden or Utopia little more than a manifestation of 1980s Western anxiety over ecology and the rainforest, a distorted reflection of the ideal world 'civilization' is losing and must preserve? Ultimately, the

planet *is* Europe and North America, hence the implied setting for *The Mission* – the rainforest – becomes interesting only when it affects other parts of the world.

In 1990 Universal Pictures boldly released Sydney Pollack's film about the Cuban Revolution, *Havana*. A flop as it turned out, there was nonetheless tremendous advance interest in the film because of its cost and because it was to re-launch the career of that idol of liberal Hollywood Robert Redford. Much of the buzz in Hollywood in the late 80s was about who would play Redford's love interest Roberta. Roberta is the wife of a revolutionary leader but who comes under the spell of Redford's charming but irresponsible poker player, Jack Weil, enjoying the easy sex, booze and gambling available to American visitors in Batista-era Havana. With the film dwelling on sleaze and corruption supported by US business and government as the regime collapses, Weil does the right thing and sacrifices everything – including all his money and the biggest poker game of his life – to save Roberta's husband from certain execution, allowing the happy couple to stay and work for the Revolution while he returns to Florida. An unusually generous vision from a mainstream Hollywood film on Cuba, then. But the first surprise came with the casting of Roberta. The part did not go to a Cuban or even a Latina, but to Swedish actress Lena Olin. In fact, the only Cuban-born actor in the film was Tomas Milian, who played, of course, the villain, General Menocan. Add the blonde American hero, the glossy production values, and the romanticisation of both Batista-era nightlife and the Revolution, and any political charge is pretty much neutralised. Indeed, the revolutionaries are barely seen and their ideology never explained, and the hero is fundamentally apolitical. The movie's echoing of *Casablanca* is obvious (love triangle against conflict-ridden background, with seemingly venal American ex-pat losing out personally by doing what is best for the cause because of the woman he

loves but can never have), but what this shows is that Weil's character is linked not to reality but to fiction, romance, adventure. Hence, his motivation is love and general decency rather than politics. Roberta's husband tells Weil at one stage that 'politics is what your life is all about' and that if you want to get rid of Batista, 'you cannot do that nicely'. This seems to be a reference to that which the film and liberal Hollywood romance are forced to suppress, the centrality of hard politics and the extremely brutal reality of political revolution. The revolutionary ventures to Weil, whom he calls 'innocent', 'perhaps you believe in beautiful women', and Jack's friend, the Professor – old, wise and source of instruction – says: 'women are perfect, the rest is bullshit'. Weil does undergo a species of political education (illustrated filmically, by the intercutting of his soulless three-in-a-bed romp with a couple of young American tourists and the tracking down and arrest of innocent Cubans, including a pretty young girl). But that education is neutralised and de-politicised. When Bobby – as Roberta prefers to be called - finally explains her political ideals to Jack, she says: 'it isn't an idea – it's a feeling inside you'. Real politics is overridden by feely-touchy goo. So, Weil is reduced to a kind of modern chivalric hero and the movie ends with him back in the USA commenting, in a voice-over dated 1963, that 'we've got our own kind of revolution going'. Given the film's multiple allusions earlier to Vice President Nixon as an enemy of Latin America and justice, this seems to be an approving reference to JFK. But, of course, Kennedy was ferociously anti-Cuba and fiercely anti-Castro, sanctioning invasion and assassination attempts. The liberal revisionism cannot take on board the reality of revolution or the myth of Latin America as space for the exploration of European adventures and heroisms, and – despite its initial promise – the film ends up effectively denying history.

Films like *Havana* and *The Mission* show just how porous are the borders of imaginary Latin America as it seeps into the broader Western liberal imagination. Such seepage also has to do with the rise of so-called Magical Realism on the back of the Boom of the Spanish American novel in the 1960s. This latter phenomenon (coupled the ambiguous allure of the Cuban Revolution) was what made Latin America interesting to the educated reading public of the world and was at the core of the development of Latin Americanism as an academic discipline within Hispanic Studies. One of the reasons the new critical establishment sometimes appears to be keen to write the phenomenon out of cultural history is precisely because the Latin American Boom did not, in a sense, really take place in Latin America, but in Europe. It is well known that most of the major figures of the Boom were based in Europe, that their novels were mainly promoted by Spanish publishing houses like Seix Barral and their high-profile conferences and literary prizes (especially the Biblioteca Breve Prize), that interest in the Latin American novel was whipped up mainly by magazines in France and the USA, and that it was translations that turned a number of the Boom authors into superstars. Critics nowadays routinely bemoan eurocentrism and the perceived reduction of modern Latin American literature to a game of formal catch-up with Europe, but it seems an undeniable fact of literary history that the sense of modernity in the New Novel is profoundly associated with the absorption of European and North American models and that the emergence of the New Novel is linked to forces of cosmopolitanism and the international market. A key factor in the success of the international marketing campaign was the sobriquet of Magical Realism, a term which became so loose in the 1980s that it came to be associated with a generalized sense of innovative or colourful fiction from Latin America implicitly of appeal to a foreign audience. And Magical Realism is a hugely contradictory business. The

standard line is that it is a way of privileging an essentially 'Third-World' and specifically Latin American version of reality in a world dominated by eurocentric perspectives. But Alejo Carpentier's original notion of *lo real maravilloso* or the marvellous real was based on French Surrealism and European ideas of the unconscious, and, in any case, while seeking to vindicate an inherently Latin American world view, seems actually to be based on an invitation to gawp at the wondrousness of Latin American reality as if an outsider. The global star of Magical Realism was, of course, Gabriel García Márquez and the famous opening of his masterpiece *Cien años de soledad* is *the* quintessential Magical Realist moment. The founding father of Macondo introduces his children to the most dazzling and beautiful diamond on earth – actually, the previously unknown substance ice. Now it is usually claimed that by presenting ice, films, false teeth and phonographs as bizarre and levitating priests, rains of butterflies and girls ascending into heaven as normal, that the novel is striking a blow for authenticity and Latin Americanness by inscribing events from the perspective of a remote rural community. But the reader *knows* that the beautiful diamond is only ice and must inevitably be engaged in a relationship of ironic complicity with the implied narrator. Thus implied reader and narrator are, if anything, posited as 'First-World'. Just as the character Gabriel (surname Márquez [hint hint]) leaves Macondo to go to Europe, so too does the Magical Realist experiment seem to be departing Latin America at the very moment of projecting its own Latin Americanness.

This leads to one final example. Around the turn of the millennium, some (by no means all, of course) Latin American novelists and their novels had indeed departed from Latin America. Two of the leaders of the Crack generation of Mexico, Jorge Volpi and Ignacio Padilla, produced two of the best Latin American novels of

the last decade of the preceding century, *En busca de Klingsor* (1999) and *Amphitryon* (2000) – yet both are set against the background of Nazi and post-Nazi Europe and have nothing to do with Latin America. Then there is the powerful example of another figure, with whom the Crack generation would certainly not like to be associated and who many critics would be quick to disown: Isabel Allende. Allende is by some measures the most successful Latin American writer of all time and yet (perhaps for the very reason of her success) she is routinely dismissed for naivety, a tendency towards stereotyping that runs counter to feminism and oppositional politics, an emotional idealism that shows little understanding of the reality of social problems, and, in general, the perpetuation of bourgeois norms. She is also perhaps implicitly criticized for leaving Latin America and settling and enjoying life in the United States. Snobbery aside, it seems self-evident that, if her novels are less rich as an aesthetic or literary experience than those of - say – García Márquez, they are actually very effective politically in that they communicate pretty directly and meaningfully to masses of ordinary people in a way that, for example, professional practitioners of subaltern criticism could never hope to. Moreover, they do not appear to seek to be primarily Latin American in a conventional or limited sense. Allende's novels are now published more or less simultaneously in Spanish and English, first in New York. Many novels are set partly or entirely in North America and celebrate the melting pot and opportunity culture as well as critiquing them. And, if we take the example of her trilogy of children's fiction, only one has a Latin American setting, the young protagonist is an American and the novels appeal implicitly to a 'First'- rather than 'Third-World' reader. The adventures that teenager Alexander Cold enjoys with the primitive Amazonian People of the Mist, for example, are clearly designed to produce lessons of liberal moral instruction on environmentalism and cultural relativism for

'First-World' teenagers more usually glued to reactionary video games. Indeed Alexander returns to the USA at the end of the first and final novel, ready to apply the lessons he has learned from his Amazonian, Himalayan and African outings, and emerges as a kind of ideal liberal 'First-World' teenage hero empathetic to the South and the values implicit in it.

One of Allende's post-millenium literary treatments is the perfect embodiment of the Latin in America, Zorro - in the 2005 novel entitled *Zorro*. The idea of the novel came to be the filling in of the background to Zorro, the character's life story from birth to the assumption of his role as masked freedom fighter in Spanish California. Diego – a *mestizo* in Allende's version – undergoes a double initiation ritual. The first is at the hands of the Native American Indians when, alone in a forest wilderness, he reaches a new plane of reality and comes face to face with what is revealed to be his totemic animal, *el zorro*, the fox. This primitive nature-orientated Native American initiation is complemented, however, by the more metropolitan European one in a secret lodge in big-city Barcelona. At its conclusion, Diego unhesitatingly assumes his new codename: Zorro, the Fox (Allende, 2005, 160). The point is, though, that despite the seeming differences, the Native American wisdom behind the first ritual is really not at all dissimilar to the intellectual currents of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Europe that motivate the second. If anything the vast part of Diego's education (and the novel's narrative) takes place in Europe and, when he returns to California to save the day, he does so fuelled by ideas of the European Enlightenment. Moreover, the correction of the myth of colonial 'civilization' is promoted via the idea of Independence. Diego learns to admire the United States for securing freedom from the English yoke and begins to dream of a similar future for the Spanish colonies. The implied audience, then, for this novel does

not seem to be some imagined anti-eurocentric Latin America, but rather the Hispanic USA and the wider global market. The Latin American writer and her fiction is now circulating freely in a transnational environment: she and it have become as much North American or European as Latin American. A new borderless Latin America, freed from geographical boundaries, is thus imagined.

Perhaps Zorro is a good place to end because it returns us to the mass cultural imaginary of porous borders evoked at the beginning. Zorro's first outing, in the 1919 North American serialized novel *The Curse of Capistrano* by Johnston McCulley, was the spark for a massive pop cultural industry, especially following the masked man's transition to the silver screen in films like *The Mark of Zorro*, with idols Douglas Fairbanks in the original 1920 movie and Tyrone Power in the 1940 talkie remake. Almost forty movies have been made, recently two featuring Antonio Banderas, while the television series –begun in the 1950s - was the biggest-budget western production of its time, and it spawned numerous imitations. Perhaps even more significantly for the development of a modern icon, the Disney series sparked a merchandizing craze which continues to this day. There have even been musicals (at least eight, with a West End London musical, based partly on Allende's novel and featuring music by the Gipsy Kings, running for nine months in 2008). The Gipsy Kings are a French band, often thought to be Spanish, and their music is regularly played in Latin American-themed restaurants. Indeed, returning to my starting point, the first time I visited the peculiar mix that is a Las Iguanas venue, the Gipsy Kings were playing as I entered. To mix it all up a bit more, I could have popped op over to Italy's CanevaWorld Movie Studios (now re-launched as Movieland as part of the CanevaWorld resort) where they boasted a fabulous Zorro restaurant and show set in 'a real Mexican Fazenda'. Real? Mexican? *Fazenda*? And on a Californian theme in

Italy …. Where is Latin America? It is not just up there or over there anymore. It is up here, over here and everywhere.

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