

The Companion to **LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES**



EDITED BY
PHILIP SWANSON



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Map of Latin America

Introduction

Philip Swanson

Every schoolboy or girl knows that a European mariner, Christopher Columbus, discovered America, the New World, in 1492. Yet behind this apparently simple ‘fact’, there lies a weight of problematic cultural assumption. Columbus did not really ‘discover’ anything: he simply stumbled across something that was already there. Indeed he did not really know what it was he had found, since he thought he had reached the Indian subcontinent via a western route (hence the region was originally referred to as the Indies and the natives as Indians). Moreover the ‘New World’ was not ‘new’ at all. The indigenous inhabitants of the area had been there since about 7000 BC, fairly developed societies flourished in the first thousand years or so AD, and large empires with much of the organizational apparatus of a state (the Toltecs, the Chimú, the Mayas and, most famously, the Aztecs and the Incas) had begun to appear from about AD 900 onwards – all long before the arrival of Columbus. The very term ‘Latin America’ refers to the transformed space that grew out of European (essentially Spanish and Portuguese, i.e. ‘Latin’) conquest and colonization, with the name America coming from that of the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Florentine explorer Amerigo Vespucci who is sometimes credited with first formulating the notion of a ‘new world’.

In other words, from the moment of its inception as a concept, Latin American history has been perceived through an alien,

basically European, mindset. The argument is that the development of Latin American identity subsequently involved an internalization of a fundamentally foreign sense of self that in many ways persists to the present day. Even political independence was the result of the drive of a Latin American-born elite who nonetheless prided themselves on the purity of their inherited European blood which was untainted by the indigenous. Paradoxically, post-independence ‘progress’ was also fuelled by European or, increasingly, North American values and practices, leading to, for example, the overwhelming economic influence of Britain in the nineteenth century and the USA in the twentieth century. The ideas which have dominated Latin American development up to the twenty-first century (independence, civilization, progress, democracy, capitalism, neo-liberalism and so forth) are all basically imported concepts. In many ways, it was not until 1992 that there was large-scale public debate and

revisionism of this slanted perspective on Latin America, as – amidst something of an outcry – the quincentenary celebrations of ‘discovery’ were hastily transformed into a celebration of ‘encounter’ between two cultures. And, of course, Latin American intellectuals have long been vexed by the question of national and continental identity, while outside commentators have come to focus more and more on the redressing of the imbalance in our understanding of ‘Latin America’. The thrust, then, of much of Latin American studies, and the thrust of much of this volume, is to question and problematize the very idea of Latin America and to present it as a complex and varied phenomenon that has to be understood on its own terms as well as on European or North American ones, even if the nature of those terms is itself highly mobile and irreducible.

This book is edited by a specialist in Latin American literature. In a sense, it is thinking about the ways in which Latin American literature has been traditionally presented via Eurocentric models that has prompted the production of this book. The term ‘Eurocentric’ alludes to the ways in which Latin American and other cultures have tended to be examined by means of paradigms that were inherited from European criticism and that are now seen to underpin much thinking not only in Europe but also in North America and what has come to be known at various times as the First World, the West or the North. To be sure, the precipitous rejection of so-called European models is itself a problem: the European inheritance is very much part of Latin American cultural identity and Latin America today is part of and a contributor to an increasingly global consciousness. So, when talking of, say, Latin American literature, the book will use the conventional periodizations of accepted models of literary history as applied to Latin America, while exploring alternative ways of approaching that literature. It will also extend the notion of ‘culture’ so as to separate it from its traditional association with literary high culture in order to explore other cultural manifestations such as film, painting, muralism, photography, music and even forms of ‘popular’ culture such as dance, soap opera, football and religion.

A basic underlying principle of the book is the idea that literature and culture do not exist in a vacuum, but very much grow and operate in a specific socio-political environment. Hence, the book will also explore Latin American politics and society, as well as issues such as race, gender and sexuality. In a way, the book is aimed at students who might have traditionally approached Latin America via literature, and the hope is that students will be helped to contextualize that

literature in a more informed sense of a Latin American context while simultaneously garnering a wider and fuller sense of Latin American culture and society. At the same time, it is anticipated that the book will be of interest and value to those whose interests are not primarily literary or cultural, and it will hopefully demonstrate how literary and other cultural artefacts and practices are just as essential to an understanding of Latin American society as, say, the study of geography, history, sociology or politics

– indeed the hope is that the book will establish intimate connections between these fields and cultural activity, and show that the two are not separate.

The book opens and closes with chapters that deal with the fundamental questions of ‘What is Latin America?’ and ‘Where is it situated?’. Even a concept as seemingly obvious as ‘place’ will be questioned, and a consideration of Latin American geographies will point up just how constructed and mobile our sense of place in relation to Latin America is. The chapter on politics and society will give a broad overview of Latin America, sketching its history and how its contemporary institutions and characteristics have been shaped. A detailed history of the subcontinent is not the main concern here, nor is a consideration of the indigenous pre-Colombian civilizations. *Latin America* is the starting point, and hence another early chapter will concentrate on the culture of the colonial period when the region was still ruled by the Spanish and Portuguese crowns. The Independence movement and the process of emancipation will not be considered in historical detail as such, but these nevertheless form the background to the chapter on ‘civilization and barbarism’, a key notion and tension to emerge in the post-independence period of consolidation and

nation-building that would not only mark cultural production in the nineteenth century but affect it throughout the twentieth century too.

Having considered this cultural framework, the book will then offer an authoritative survey of Latin American literature itself, while following that up with a consideration of the various debates about how best to approach that literature in the light of new awareness about the potential limitations of Eurocentric and related perceptions. Moreover, it is acknowledged that Latin American culture has spread far beyond its physical geographical boundaries and is now a highly important feature of the cultural life of the USA: a lengthy chapter on Latino US literature will cover this relatively under-studied area. Notions of culture will then be expanded with a consideration of visual cultures (including film and art) and so-called popular culture (ranging from unofficial religions to soccer, from tango to rock music, from salsa to soap opera).

Fleshing out the social and political context will be the concern of the next two chapters, which deal in depth with issues of race, gender and sexuality in the subcontinent. Finally, and returning to the idea of unstable and imaginative geographies, the book will close with a chapter that looks outwards to Latin America's position in and in relation to not only the global system but also global consciousness: rather than simply being 'elsewhere', Latin America will be seen to inhabit all of us in certain ways.

Obviously, a book like this, which covers a considerable amount of terrain and diverse disciplines, is a tricky undertaking. Inevitably, there will be omissions, overlaps and differences of opinion, but also continuities and consistencies.

The enthusiasm and commitment of all the contributors are warmly acknowledged. In particular, I would like to thank Luis Fernando

Restrepo, who, like me, put together a chapter at a late stage due to unforeseen circumstances. The advice and technical suggestions of a range of friends and colleagues are also much appreciated, amongst them Daniel Balderston, Jon Beasley-Murray, Silvia Bermúdez, Julia Biggane, Alvaro Félix Bolaños, Sara Castro-Klarén, Sylvia Chant, Paul Garner, Tony Higgins, Kaarina Hollo, John King, Cathy Shrank and Gustavo Verdesio. Any limitations of the book are, of course, entirely my own responsibility. Finally, I would like to thank Elena Seymenliyska, who first encouraged me to do the book, and Eva Martínez at Arnold for all her support.

1

Latin American geographies

Gareth A. Jones

The principal question posed in this chapter is ‘where is Latin America?’. At one level this is a simple geographical question that should not vex anybody who has ever opened an atlas. Indeed, compared to the frenzy of cartographic updates necessary for Africa in the wake of decolonization or for Eastern Europe after the Cold War, the maps of Latin America appear to be fairly stable. A closer inspection would reveal some contested borders, between Ecuador and Peru for example, and some contested sovereignty, such as Las Malvinas/the Falklands. At a different level, however, the cartographic stability of Latin America is misleading. As Harley has observed:

all maps, like all other historically constructed images, do not provide a transparent window on the world. Rather they are signs that present ‘a deceptive appearance of naturalness and transparency concealing an opaque, distorting, arbitrary mechanism of representation, a process of ideological mystification’. (Harley 1992: 523, citing Mitchell 1986)

Maps, then, are imagined representations of space just as subjective as other ‘texts’ such as travel accounts, films, paintings, surveys and exhibitions (Driver 1992). So, while in the process of becoming objects these texts appear to convert imagined geographies of Latin America into ‘real’

geographies, in this chapter I want to consider how all such texts must still be understood as subjective. In order to do so I want to suggest that Latin America needs to be understood as geographically displaced through complex connections of commodities, people and images (Tomlinson 1996). Latin America is not contained in a collection of nation-states ‘over there’ but is, increasingly, also ‘over here’. Latin America might be a distinct place on a map, but its geography is everywhere. Latin America has become de-territorialized.

IMAGINATIVE GEOGRAPHIES

Appadurai (1990) has usefully categorized these connections of global cultural flows as ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, finanscapes and ideoescapes. Ethnoscapes describe the persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, refugees, guestworkers and students (1990: 297). In my classes at the London School of Economics I have students from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Puerto Rico. I am implicated in an intellectual globalization in which I am either ‘adding value’, for an elite that can afford it, or encouraging a vicious ‘brain drain’ of young talent from the region. On my journey home across London, however, I encounter a different ethnoscapes. On the bus, generally on the upper floor, is a transnational community of mostly Ecuadorians and Colombians. This is also a brain drain, quite well educated and entrepreneurial people now working as cleaners, porters and shop assistants in central London. And at the weekend, the ethnoscapes is represented by a Latin American football league in a nearby park and by salsa classes in a community hall.

A displaced Latin America is also encountered through a technoscape of technology and information moving around the world. This is baffling to my father, who emails to tell me that his new up-and-over garage door is made in Hermosillo, Mexico, although he seems unaware that his car was probably made in Toluca and his computer in Tijuana. The technoscape, however, is also delivering news about Latin America's engagement with the ideoescapes of world-views such as democracy and rights. My email account in mid-2002 has recently been full of messages about the economic collapse of Argentina, the attempted coup in Venezuela, and environmental activist concerns about the Mexican government's decision to allow multinationals to grow genetically modified grain.

Latin America is part of the finanscape in which a small part of my mortgage depends upon the performance of 'emerging' stock markets. In this respect the technoscape of how those branch plants on the US-Mexico border produce circuit boards for my father's computer and whether Venezuela's ambiguity towards democracy is affecting the price of oil takes on a direct importance. To get away from it all, I encounter Latin America in the mediascape, the image-based narratives of what Appadurai calls 'strips of reality'. For a moment, I indulge myself with the Sunday newspapers offering insights into snow boarding in the Andes and coral reef diving off Belize, an interview with a 'black' Peruvian singer about to tour Britain, a review of Argentine wines and the latest Mario Vargas Llosa novel. Meanwhile, my newsagent conveys to me his fears about the Latin Americanization of crime as a local 'drugs war' to distribute cocaine is fought by Jamaican Yardies and 'Colombians'.

These are some of my connections to Latin America and they instil in me a ‘map’ of what Latin America ‘must be’ like which is not objectively arrived at

but reflects my cultural and political situatedness (Appadurai 1990: 296). My set of imaginative geographies, my multiple ways of building a relationship to Latin America, are different from those of a multinational corporation or an environmental non-governmental organization (NGO), and differ according to whether I am a cinema-goer, a drug-taker, a football fan or a coffee-drinker. All imaginative geographies, however, are constructed upon the reception, interpretation and retention of discourses and images that represent Latin America as real.

To illustrate, I take two media that construct imaginative geographies of Latin America. The first is the flow of images and ideas about Latin America contained in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century travel accounts, and which have become established forms of knowledge through reproduction in books, exhibitions, contemporary travel writing, as well as a part of the ‘British’ cultural landscape, for example at the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew in London. A great deal about what we think we know about Latin America today derives from travel writers who nevertheless gave preference to certain places and overlaid meanings onto landscapes according to the ideological and philosophical conventions of the day.

The second medium is the process of consumption, specifically of bananas and coffee, the two principal commodities from ‘tropical’ Latin America (Llambi 1994). The inscription of imaginative geographies onto commodities is by no means new. Sugar, spices, chocolate, even Fray Bentos tinned beef have all been associated with

representations of Latin America and the Caribbean, and have become domestic cultural icons at home (Naylor 2000; Roseberry 1996). The construction of contemporary imaginative geographies of Latin America through consumption builds an image of Britain as cosmopolitan and multicultural. But, while globalization is bringing Latin America in one sense ever nearer, the imaginative geographies represent Latin America in a series of stereotypical ways so as to create distance and mark the difference between the places of origin and the place of consumption (Cook and Crang 1996; Smart 1994). Good taste and chic may depend, briefly, on the consumption of an image of Latin America as exotic, although to somebody else the 'gourmet' coffee will be agribusiness.

TRAVEL WRITING AND IMAGINATIVE GEOGRAPHIES

The shelves of any large bookshop reveal the importance of the travel writing genre to the geographical imagination. Today's collection, however, pales compared to the outpouring of travel accounts and works of natural history during the nineteenth century that constituted perhaps as much as 10 per cent of titles in libraries in England, Germany and the USA (Cicerchia 1998). This enormous output was written by 'imperial citizens' who were often directly implicated in the scientific and political projects of empire. The clearest examples are the accounts emanating from official expeditions, such as Charles Darwin's *The Voyage of the Beagle*, Robert Schomburgk's survey of the Orinoco river and

Guyana borders, and La Condamine's attempt to map the Amazon (Burnett 2000; Dunbar 1988; Stepan 2001).¹ Travel accounts also emerged from involvement in surveying the routes for rail companies, land colonization schemes and diplomatic missions (Dickenson 1997; Naylor and Jones 1997; Pratt 1992; Walker 1992).

Many of these travel accounts are the precursors and occasionally the more conscious guides to contemporary travel writers.² A good example is Toby Green's *Saddled with Darwin*, which recounts his attempt to follow the routes taken by Darwin across South America to reveal how the landscapes that were important to the study of evolution had changed by the late 1990s. In places, Green's attempts to mimic Darwin's journey on horseback prove impossible, cut across by freeways or industrial zones, provoking Green to wonder whether, had Darwin been travelling today, he would have been able to make the kind of observations to generate a theory of evolution. Darwin's ghost serves as an accomplice for Green's critique of modern science, relating contemporary landscapes to ideas of global warming and genetic theory.

Contemporary travel writing borrows from earlier accounts in more subtle ways. Here I am interested in the appropriation of representations established in the nineteenth-century writers' narrative as a system of 'truths' (Cicerchia 1998).³ These representations derive their (lasting) power from the construction of objectivity by writers, who mostly lacked a formal academic position, but whose class, race and gender gave them the mandate to imagine themselves as ethnographers, to pursue knowledge as a right and a symbol of their status (Salvatore 1996).⁴ This kind of privilege provided travellers with a detachment from the landscape that

allowed them to represent their subjective observations as objective accounts.⁵ The opening to Reginald Koettlitz's paper in the *Scottish Geographical Magazine* is fairly typical:

Having a wish to see this famous stream [the Amazon!] ... I took an opportunity offered me last April ... Though the opportunities for studying the people, especially the Indians, as well as the natural history of northeastern Brazil and the lower Amazon were very few, I propose to give a short account of facts observed, together with information gathered during the South American portion of this voyage, in the hope that some of the matter may be of interest to the members of the Scottish Geographical Society, and some possibly even new. (Koettlitz 1901: 12)

Koettlitz does not mention the purpose of his trip to Brazil or his legitimacy for disseminating his geographical understanding, but he is sure that the 'facts' will be useful.

Koettlitz and others add to their credibility by giving the impression of being 'alone'. This device positions the travel writer in a wilderness or against a frontier of the unknown, and is particularly vital in Latin America where there was little *terra incognita* and many preferred to follow established routes linking a European presence (Dickenson 1997). Seeming 'alone', however, enhances the power of the traveller to 'see' Latin America from a particular vantage point. Koettlitz, for example, gazes upon the shore from a boat, but for more drama travellers would look 'down' upon the landscape, dominating the scene as the 'master' or 'monarch' of all they survey (Burnett 2000; Pratt 1992).⁶ Today, Latin America is viewed from trains or light aircraft,

or even from space using satellite imagery to ‘show’ global warming.

Representations of Latin America

Detachment from and dominance over the landscape set up the most important representation of Latin America, namely the enormity of nature. According to Cicerchia, ever since Humboldt’s thirty-volume travel accounts appeared in the early nineteenth century, ‘part of the European imagery of the “new continent” has been framed by nature’ (1998: 4). In his *Personal Narrative of Travels to the Equinoctial Regions of the Americas* (1814–25), von Humboldt fused aesthetic appreciation with his tentative scientific understanding of nature, raving about the ‘abundant fertility’ and ‘organic richness’ (Arnold 2000). Writing to his brother, von Humboldt commented in 1799:

What a fabulous and extravagant country we’re in! Fantastic plants, electric eels, armadillos, monkeys, parrots, and many, many, real half-savage Indians.

And Henry Bates wrote:

To the westward we could see a long line of forest rising apparently out of the water; a densely packed mass of tall trees, broken into groups, and finally into single trees, as it dwindles away in the distance. This was the frontier, in this direction, of the great primeval forest characteristic of this region, which contains so many wonders in its recesses, and clothes the whole surface of the country for two thousand miles from this point to the foot of the Andes. (Dickenson 1997: 112)

Unlike the pastoral or increasingly industrialized landscapes of Europe, Latin American nature was physically over-powering and abundantly fertile, a possible paradise or Eden, adding a sexualized desire to the representation (Stepan 2001).

To the nineteenth-century traveller size did matter. It added to the sublime, the awe that served to make the visualization of the scene important, and captured an audience back home (Martins 2000).⁷ Latin America was a region of giants – usefully so in the case of Robert Schomburgk, whose expedition to Guyana was saved by the discovery of a huge water lily that he named after Queen Victoria, and which became a centrepiece of the Great Exhibition of 1851 (Burnett 2000). More or less everyone makes some reference to the

apparently endless sky-lines or the open landscape (Naylor 2001). Lady Florence Dixie was able to gallop and:

penetrate into vast wilds, virgin as yet to the foot of man. Scenes of infinite beauty and grandeur might be lying hidden in the silent solitude of the mountains which bound the barren plains of the Pampas, into whose mysterious recesses no one as yet had ever ventured. And I was to be the first to behold them! (*Across Patagonia*, 1880, cited in Robinson 1995)

Alone against the power of nature is a geographical imagination that resonates with a contemporary distress at environmental destruction (note Toby Green) and the discourse of ‘eco-warriors’.

The representation of Latin America as a landscape dominated by nature is frequently contrasted with

observations of poverty and disease to legitimate calls to order nature. Dr David Christison, for example, writing of his journey to the River Plate in 1866, describes how the immense open grasslands gave Uruguay the potential to be 'a second Australia'. The point is illustrated by a drawing of an unusual cloud formation rather like the trail of a jet plane going from horizon to horizon underneath which the 'wild and picturesque' *gauchos* drive cattle. The paper concludes with a lament about the cornucopia going to waste such that mutton that should be brought to 'our use in these overcrowded and pauper-stricken islands' is just rotting (Christison 1909: 481). As Pratt (1992) has argued, such representations of Latin America as 'nature' were far from innocent. In accounts that indicated the possibilities or practice for improvement through rail or the introduction of new crops, nature was converted into a resource – a representation often supported by paintings and, later, photographs showing rural and forest scenes cut into by railways, roads, bridges (Matless 1992; Stepan 2001).

Travellers and scientists did not represent all forms of nature as suitable to man-power. In the 'tropics' the dominance of nature over man was portrayed as beyond the capacity of science to tame (Arnold 2000). Albert Hale, for example, is careful to point out that the region of the River Plate is 'by no means a tropical country', noting how Buenos Aires and Montevideo are on similar parallels and share the same climate as Los Angeles and Cape Town, but he then notes that 'only the extreme northern tip of the whole area is actually between the Tropic of Capricorn and the Equator, and therefore nearly every mile is susceptible of just such productive activities as we, in the United States, understand and have within broad limits put into practice' (1909: 428–9).

By implication the area within the tropics was likely to be less productive and unsuitable for improvement.

More broadly, however, the term tropical became a synonym to denote a conceptual space where nature was magnificent, Eden-like, dominant, but man was indolent and, in the absence of science and civilization, vulnerable to flood, hurricane, disease, and even rebellion. According to Arnold:

Although describing the tropics as ‘nature’s garden’ might seem to suggest unqualified approval, in an age obsessed with improvement and progress, with racial origins and competitive evolution, there were definite disadvantages to being the denizens of an earthly paradise. (2000: 10)

Travellers such as Henry Bates clearly preferred nature to the population of Belém, whom he described in 1848 as idle soldiers, slovenly dressed women, naked children and:

people of all shade of colour of skin, European, Negro, and Indian, but chiefly of an uncertain mixture of the three ... So striking, in the view, was the mixture of natural riches and human poverty ... but amidst all, and compensating every defect, rose the overpowering beauty of the vegetation. (Naylor and Jones 1997: 103)

Over a half century later, Koettlitz describes travelling from Para to Manaus on a steamboat dirty from the ‘filthy habits of the people’, and he devotes more column inches to insects and flora than to people, whom he rarely mentions other than in relation to their race, conditions of disease/mortality and laziness. Noting the uncared-for cocoa plantations, Koettlitz writes that ‘the ordinary Brazilian loves laziness, and is so indolent that he will rarely do a stroke more work than he is

compelled' (1901: 23). And thirty years later again, Huxley describes the villages of southern Mexico as stagnant places:

The spectacle, I confess, always made my blood run pretty cold. Not so cold as the spectacle of an industrial town in Lancashire, say, or the Ruhr (*that* has power to chill the heart of man to its absolute zero); but cold, heaven knows, enough. The industrial town is intensely and positively, whereas these Mexican places are only negatively, appalling. They are appalling not so much because of what is there as because of what isn't there. A Black Country town is a fearful sin of commission; Miahuatlan and its kind are sins of omission. Omission of the mental and the spiritual, of all that is not day-to-day animal living. 'Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds'; the Black Country is more horrible than Miahuatlan because it embodies the corruption of a higher good than has ever been aimed at, at any rate since the fall of the indigenous empires, by the Indians. (1934: 146–7)

These representations of people in the tropics as backward, lazy, as well as temperamental and prone to sexual ill-discipline, found an echo in 'science' which mapped them onto race/climate (Livingstone 1999). This same literature, however, also showed how climate and disease served against the ability of a 'white' population to work in the tropics. Better, therefore, to manage the locals or, as was observed during the construction of the Panama Canal, encourage labour migration from Spain (but also Italy, Ireland and Eastern Europe), as these workers were more productive than either the North Americans doing lighter work or the 'Negroes' (Matless 1992). The paradox

serves to the present day. Left to its own devices tropical Latin America is incapable of development, necessitating external assistance, while those from outside consider themselves unsuited to work under the same conditions.

Representations of ‘man-power’ in the tropics stand in counterpoint to the depictions of indigenous peoples. First, as already illustrated by Lady Florence Dixie’s gallop across Patagonia, indigenous peoples were often absented entirely. Second, they served as additions to a picturesque landscape by encroaching onto riverbanks or a village nestled against foothills. Third, indigenous peoples were represented within a framework of human improvement. Had indigenous societies degenerated from a more advanced civilization? Had they ‘become’ savages and primitives? It is a representation contemplated by Huxley:

Indian men are often handsome; but I hardly ever saw a woman or young girl who was not extremely ugly. Endemic goitre does not improve their native homeliness; and without exaggeration, I should guess that at least a third of the women of Chichicastenango [Guatemala] have bulging necks. One would expect to find cretins in a population so much afflicted with goitre. But I never saw a single one. Doubtless they are born, but fail, in the unmerciful environment of an Indian *rancho*, to survive. (1934: 103)

Fourth, indigenous people were seen as the objects of science. While some travellers, such as Henry Bates, Alfred Wallace and Richard Spruce, sought to map the diversity of language and indigenous uses of nature to pose a dynamic understanding of their existence, the dominant representation

was established by von Humboldt, who often treated vegetation and indigenous artefacts in the same taxonomical framework (Barreto and Machado 2001). This framework placed indigenous people and objects in the same form as natural specimens, showing similar objects next to one another even when originating from different ethnic groups thousands of miles apart. This Linnaean model, as it is technically called, is still used in museum display but it is being challenged by exhibitions such as the *Unknown Amazon* at the British Museum, which shows the complexity of indigenous societies and how they use the environment productively (see www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk).

While nature was represented as a sublime populated by 'innocents', most cities in Latin America were represented rather differently. Marianne North's paintings of Rio de Janeiro show the Corcovado mountain as a scenic backdrop but one could be forgiven for thinking that a city was not remotely near. Charles Fox-Banbury described settlements in Brazil as monotonous, except for the occasional church, and inhabited by 'ugly and scantily clad negresses' and 'an abundance of layabouts' (Dickenson 1997). When cities had to be entered, Salvatore (1996) argues that travellers sought out the marks of civilization, checking the quality of the museums, libraries, hospitals and prisons. In this vein Koettlitz describes parts of Para as having some 'handsome and imposing edifices' built with stone from Europe and 'several small public gardens and fine plazas', although George Fracker deplored 1820s' Buenos Aires, commenting that 'the theatre is a low and miserable building ... and the performances are in keeping with it' (Cicerchia 1998: 15). According to Salvatore (1996), some writers gave impressionistic accounts of the

social landscape of cities, describing the bustle of the streets and shortcomings in local manners. The main features of the urban landscape therefore were often described in relation to the standards of Europe, while the slums or more mundane parts of the city were ignored.

Comparison is a powerful form of representation. Through evoking landscapes, institutions and peoples back home, writers could make the diverse and strange intelligible to their audience (Naylor and Jones 1997; Salvatore 1996), while also making little attempt to hide their preference. Thus, Saussure compared tropical nature in Mexico unfavourably to that of his native Switzerland (Dunbar 1988), Charles Fox-Banbury compared the better parts of Minas Gerais to Caernarvonshire, and Marianne North compared the Rio de Velhas to the River Tweed except that the former was 'a bit more tropical' (Dickenson 1997). The urban landscape too was compared to home. Luther Schaeffer compared the Emperor's chapel in Rio de Janeiro to the Boston Exchange, and Nathaniel Bishop compared the Buenos Aires jail to reformatories in the USA (Salvatore 1996: 105). More abstractly, Aldous Huxley compared the church at San Felipe in Guatemala to Keble chapel, Oxford, and the Preparatoria in Mexico City as 'most refreshingly' unlike Rugby or Roedean public schools. Sometimes comparison represented a joint distaste. Huxley again:

We lunched at Quezaltenango in a most forbidding German hotel. Pretentious, dirt, expense – one was painfully reminded of inedible lunches in South Shields, of a weekend in Middlesbrough, with a dark tide-mark of grit and the pubic hairs of commercial travellers running round the bath. (1934: 116)

Comparison also extended to ideologies, folklore and political condition. Travellers from the USA compared the life of blacks in South America to those in the American South (Salvatore 1996). Others, more esoterically, compared the religious idolatry of the Maya to that of the Romans, political populism to Stalin, Hitler and Mussolini, and social and philosophical contexts to the civilizations of Egypt, India, Greece and Babylonia (Huxley 1934; Naylor and Jones 1997).

Travel writing on Latin America created a series of stereotypes that represented both the human and the physical landscape as different from those of Europe or North America. While Latin America was not seen as the antithesis of Europe – compared to Africa for example, the people could not be easily grouped as ‘natives’ or ‘barbarians’ – it was imagined to be less productive, less civilized or more natural, more dangerous. This imagined geography of other places was useful to the constitution of economic, political and cultural imaginations about how Europeans and North Americans saw themselves. The ‘others’ were regarded as inferior and therefore in need of authority and science.

Representations of Latin America as ‘British’ culture

I suspect that few people have read Darwin’s *The Voyage of the Beagle*, Burton’s *Explorations of the Highlands of Brazil*, Wallace’s *A Narrative of Travels on the Amazon and Rio Negro*, or any of the hundreds more narratives like them. Yet, we may be familiar with the imagined geographies of Latin America, in part because representations of ‘other places’ are a staple part of the Western cultural landscape. In Britain, for

example, London is littered with sites that display Latin America, from the Victoria and Albert Museum, to the Natural History and British Museums, London Zoo, even Harrods. Outside, some of the ‘great’ country houses that serve as settings for novels-to-film and are managed by English Heritage were built with proceeds from the slave trade or sugar plantations (Seymour *et al.* 1998).

Through re-representation these sites celebrate and confirm a particular geographical imagination of Latin America. They operate as a form of ‘information technology’ by organizing, deleting and interpreting scattered objects brought back from travel and (scientific) exploration (Richards 1993). Today’s exhibitions might not include ‘real’ Indians in this exercise (Anthropology Day at the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition displayed ‘Patagonians’ to demonstrate the virtues of health and exercise on the body of ‘primitives’), but most exhibitions remain based on Euro/US-centric ideas of ‘universal values’ in which the curators decide what is worth collecting, thereby dividing the world into the ‘curating cultures’ and the ‘curated cultures’ (Mosquera 1994: 135).

We can appreciate this power of re-representation of Latin America by thinking about the botanical gardens. As Martins (2000) observes, the botanical garden was already an established part of the landscape of Europe by the early nineteenth century and many travellers’ first experience of ‘tropical nature’, including Charles Darwin’s, was an encounter in these tamed surroundings. Botanical gardens are marvels of order in which plants that exist in nature in seemingly chaotic display – the ‘abundant fertility’ of von Humboldt – are placed inside hothouses, set out in taxonomical clusters in which orchids from Brazil could sit

among palms from Sri Lanka, and are given Latin names and scientific explanation (Stepan 2001).

The botanical garden, therefore, domesticates other places by putting their plants into our framework of reference. At the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew, Latin America becomes part of Western, or more specifically British, culture, and not only because of the tropical plants within the famous glasshouses. If one walks along the eastern edge of the gardens one passes a Victorian villa complete with wrought iron balcony and a slightly incongruous

pediment. This is the Marianne North Gallery, opened in 1882 to house the 500 or so paintings of flora and fauna from over a dozen countries including Jamaica, Brazil and Chile. The gallery is a marvel of travel, science and imperial power. Inside, overhead in gold letters, are the names of the countries or regions that are the subject of the paintings beneath. The gallery is testament to how a single middle-aged Victorian woman could travel across the world, aided by private wealth and the support of company agents, virtually without hindrance in the scientific endeavour of painting and botany (then, usually no more than a lady's hobby) (Losano 1997).⁸

The gallery and the paintings exhibit some of the representations of Latin America that dominate the contemporary geographical imagination. Within the gallery hardly an inch of wall is blank, giving the feeling of nature's power. Furthermore, in the paintings themselves North positioned the plants as the foreground, again reinforcing the dominance of nature and accentuating what Stepan (2001) notes is the flowers' exotic presence. While the subject is presented as the foreground, it is also displaced. Through the order of the gallery and the incredible attention to detail

(some paintings show little more than the fine points of a single plant stem), North gives the impression that these ‘exact’ representations are already in a European botanical garden. Certainly, they are not touched by the dirty hands of imperialism, a representation reinforced by North’s minimal use of background, sometimes no more than a misty mountain or lake, that conveys almost no human presence whatsoever. Throughout, human scale is dwarfed by nature, the ‘enormous vivid flowers, itty bitty grey people’ (Losano 1997: 433). Indeed, in her memoirs North provides thick descriptions of nature but the few people get short shrift, including herself – against the solitude of nature, North is working alone (Losano 1997; North 1993). Just like the gardens outside, the scene at the gallery is quintessentially British, the landscape style European, their content Latin America, Africa or India.⁹

CONSUMPTION AND IMAGINATIVE GEOGRAPHIES

My second illustration of imaginative geographies of Latin America seems far removed from travel writing and paintings at Kew Gardens. However, just as books, paintings and botanical specimens brought images of Latin America into many homes during the nineteenth century, so the globalization of agro-food is drawing Latin America into our daily world. A tour of my local supermarket revealed asparagus, avocados and strawberries from Mexico, mangoes from Peru, honey from Guatemala, melons from Panama, paw paw from Costa Rica, flowers from Colombia, grapes from Chile, plus processed products such as tortillas and sauces, wines from Argentina and Chile, and beers from Mexico.

We can understand the presence of these commodities on our shelves in a number of ways. One argument is that they form part of a new international food space economy supported by global institutions and enabled by dramatic changes to the division of labour and technology (Andreatta 1998; Friedland 1994; Gwynne 1999; Murray 1998; but see Goodman and Watts 1994). Consumers in the North are presented with an increasingly wide selection of commodities regardless of season and presented as 'fresh' despite long transport distances from their place of origin (Friedland 1994; Gwynne 1999). Behind these scenes this economy has adopted industrial techniques of 'just in time' production and aggressive social policies such as anti-unionization, and encouraged the feminization of labour at both the point of production (fruit packing in Chile) and consumption (supermarket shelf filling in Britain) (Barrientos and Perrons 1999; Murray 1998; Raynolds 1998).

A second argument understands the international food space economy through the representation of commodities rather than purely economic relations between producers and consumers. As Cook (1994) argues, supermarket trading managers have been active in constructing meanings for particular new fruits and especially 'exotics' (what they used to call 'queer gear') through advertising campaigns and placement on cookery programmes that associate them with particular social classes, 'healthy' lifestyles, and sexuality. To some extent these representations are a response to economic and political change. In 2000, the Banana Protocol that gave preferential treatment to bananas imported into the European Union from former colonies in the Caribbean collapsed after a challenge at the World Trade Organization by Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico. Their argument was that

the Protocol contravened the principles of free trade and was obliging European consumers to pay an additional \$US 2 billion per annum (only \$US 150 million of which reached the farmer, most being retained by shippers and distributors) (*The Economist*, 10 April 1999). Yet, bananas from the Caribbean are still available in my supermarket and they still cost more than the larger varieties from Ecuador. But they are now explicitly labelled as from the Windward Islands, and are advertised as smaller, sweeter and more environmentally friendly. Managers are now representing these as specifically 'Caribbean' bananas.

Am I making better-informed consumption decisions when I purchase my 'Caribbean' as opposed to 'Latin American' bananas or am I buying into an imaginative geography? This imaginative geography presents me with a fairly remunerated smallholder in the Caribbean compared to large plantations in South and Central America using temporary, possibly child, labour and stuck in an unfair contract with a multinational company (Human Rights Watch 2002). Of course, really, I have no idea how much of the extra price paid for 'Caribbean' bananas makes its way back to the smallholder, and whether it is paying for better labour standards or a mismanagement of local eco-systems that make larger-scale production difficult (Andreatta 1998). To what extent am I being duped by an imaginative geography into thinking that I am exerting my agency as a consumer?

Representations of Latin America in a coffee cup

The conventional understanding of consumer-product relations has stressed what Marx called commodity fetishism.

This illustrated how consumers are kept ignorant of the exploitation or violations of human rights that take place in the process of getting an item to the store (Harvey 1990). Commodity fetishism allows consumers to think of their purchases as moral actions. Yet, commodity fetishism is constantly being exposed. Aldous Huxley, visiting a coffee estate in highland Guatemala during the 1930s, noted how “the cups that cheer but not inebriate” require the use of children to raise the productivity of the only paid worker and that to pay such “sweated coloured” labour European wages would raise costs to the consumer by eight or ten times’ (1934: 140).

Appadurai (1990), however, suggests that Marx’s commodity fetishism has been replaced by what he calls production fetishism and the fetishism of the consumer. According to Appadurai, production fetishism is the illusion that transnational production is not about placeless capital, global management and faraway workers, but a spectacle of idyllic local industries and of national sovereignty. Rather than hide links back to production, therefore, some retailers represent their ‘direct’ link to the grower in the field into a corporate boast, claiming that this way they can ensure the quality of the product, which is good news for the company, the grower and the consumer. Describing the image of Guatemalan plantations contained in a Starbucks’ brochure, Michael Smith (1996) notes how these are depicted as peaceful places of honest toil, operated as small family farms, in which the buyer and the grower are ‘friends’. It is a representation extended by Starbucks’ glossy *Corporate Responsibility Annual Report*, which gives details of support for NGOs to undertake social projects related to health and literacy in coffee-producing areas and of encouragement to producers to

adopt environmentally sustainable practices overseen by organizations such as Conservation International (Starbucks 2002).

Of course, a harder look at the international coffee market does not fully support this benevolent representation. According to Fitter and Kaplinsky (2001), only about 40 per cent of the pre-consumption price of coffee (i.e. the price before it reaches the coffee shop) accrues to the country of origin and, at best, only about 10 per cent is received by the farmer (also Renard 1999). Moreover, world coffee prices have declined from over \$US 3 per pound in the early 1970s to below 50 cents in 2001 due to both the substitution of supply from countries such as Vietnam where labour costs and environmental regulations are low and the collapse of the International Coffee Agreement in 1989 which had attempted to sustain price agreements among major producer nations (Llambi 1994; Roseberry 1996). Despite a modest increase in the size

of the global coffee market (which grew by between 1 and 2.6 per cent per annum during the 1990s), the small family-run farms have been badly hit.

How do these conditions tally with the explosion of coffee bars on the high street as well as the range of coffees that they sell? A recent article in the *Guardian Weekend* reported that in a ten-minute walk from Charing Cross station along The Strand in London, one would pass two Starbucks, three Coffee Republic, two Caffe Nero and two Costa coffee shops (14 August 2001). Given that, in 2002, Starbucks is opening six new shops per month in Britain, Costa is opening four and McDonald's is planning to follow up its control of Aroma with the introduction of a McCafé chain, these figures are

likely to be significantly out of date by the time this chapter goes to press. This rapid growth in places selling ‘gourmet’ coffee in Britain follows a trend in the USA where coffee consumption rose from \$US 13.5 billion in 1993, of which less than \$US 1 billion was in gourmet coffees, to \$US 18 billion in 1999, of which \$US 7.5 billion was in gourmet (Roseberry 1996; Starbucks 2002). Although Starbucks does pay over the global market rate for coffee, and especially for organic and shade-grown varieties, it has also benefited from the decline in prices generally, new technology and deregulation in producer companies. All of this suggests that my ‘tall’ cappuccino should become cheaper over time. One reason why the price seems resilient to the market is that only about 4 per cent of the price of a ‘gourmet’ coffee is actually coffee (Fitter and Kaplinsky 2001). So what am I paying for?

Part of the explanation might lie with Appadurai’s second concept, the fetishism of the consumer, in which an image is created for consumers to believe that they are agents in the flow of commodities rather than just ‘choosers’. Appadurai, however, is rather vague as to how images that pretend to empower the consumer are constructed. One insight into the relationship between consumers, commodities, and the construction of knowledge is through work on the notion of ‘taste’ (May 1996; Smart 1994). For consumers, and perhaps especially those from the ‘new cultural class’ of young professionals, it is increasingly important to invest symbolic meanings into commodities and the surroundings in which they are consumed in order to signify their social distinction from others. One particular symbolic meaning is ‘exotic’, which projects the consumer as cosmopolitan, travelled, multicultural, upwardly mobile. ‘Exotic’ draws the consumer

directly into an imaginative geography that consciously plays on a relationship with the Third World.

A good example is provided by Paul Smith (1989), who shows how the clothing chain Banana Republic Travel and Safari Clothing Company is comfortable appropriating images that play on the exotic. Indeed, the company consciously conveys cliché images of political instability in Central America (in which no one is killed), the racist language of colonialism and the re-representation of travel narratives in catalogues, likening shopping to a safari. Smith quotes the founders explaining the origin of the Banana Republic name:

because our merchandise came from countries where one regime had deposed another and declared all the old uniforms surplus. The new general could never be seen in the old general's uniform ... and [it was] part of a whimsy of creating an imaginary republic where I was Minister of Propaganda and Finance and Patricia was Minister of Culture. (Smith 1989: 130)

Rather than deny the relationship between the company and the Third World, Banana Republic is building imaginative geographies of what the place of origin for their goods might be like.

The extent to which consumers are implicated in the construction of the 'exotic' through particular geographical imaginations needs further understanding. According to Cook and Crang (1996), we can consider three ways in which geographical imaginations interact with consumption. First, the 'setting' or where one eats is important to the signals of status and taste. The 'setting' for the consumption of gourmet

coffee is modern stylized surroundings that offer a West Coast USA-meets-European coffee house environment, open-plan design with sofas and small tables to encourage social interaction, and floor-to-ceiling glass frontages and outward facing stools to see the street, and be seen from it (M. D. Smith 1996). These restaurants and bars are also associated with sites of gentrification. Indeed, Starbucks makes a virtue of this relationship, claiming that ‘a new Starbucks is evidence the area is ripe for redevelopment. It’s yet another step in the right direction’ (Starbucks 2002: 14).¹⁰

There is also, however, a less tangible notion of ‘setting’. At a Starbucks in Washington DC I picked up the ‘mission statement’ that claimed the ‘guiding principle’ of the company was to ‘contribute positively to our communities and our environment’. In practice this contribution seemed to mean ‘putting in many hours of volunteer time for our local neighborhoods and non-profit groups’, the donation of old pastries and past-date coffee, the formation of ‘Green Teams’ to organize litter pickups, and support for community projects. All of these are worthwhile acts, but they also create the belief that consumers are not buying coffee from a faceless multinational but from a locally in-touch retailer.

The second interaction of geographical imagination and consumption works by creating ‘biographies’ of how a commodity arrived in the store or dinner table. The biography may involve a play on distance, on how the materials were brought from afar for just this drink or meal. Again, I can illustrate with a leaflet picked up at a Starbucks in central London called *The Story of Good Coffee: Whole Bean Coffee*. This describes the process by which the bean is bought, roasted and served. In addition to the obvious attention to the

flavour and freshness, the leaflet tells a story involving only two principal actors: the buyer for Starbucks and the *baristas* who are ‘trained professionals dedicated to helping you find your perfect cup’. Working together, this team is willing to go to ‘extreme’ lengths. In the biography, however, nobody seems to grow the coffee bean which is purchased on the unlikely assertion of ‘taste alone, regardless of price’.

The third interaction is the identification of ‘origins’. This geographical imagination has been fundamental to wine consumption for a long time, where consumers (are asked to) associate drinking with a particular valley in Chile. In the case of coffee, retailers have trained the consumer to appreciate origins by, for example, the use of ‘maps’. One map is on Starbucks’ website, which offers consumers the opportunity to ‘Taste the Sights’ through ‘World Coffee Tours’ by receiving every eight weeks a selection of ‘exotic’ coffees from around the world. A narrative style map is Starbucks’ leaflet *The World of Coffee: In Search of the Best Beans*, which guides the consumer to coffee-producing areas, noting how climate, altitude and soil affect the quality of the bean. This map works by conflating places into ‘coffee regions’ such as Arabia or Central America, while presenting others, such as Costa Rica, as outside these regions in order to accentuate the distinction of their coffees (M. D. Smith 1996: 515). Even greater imagination is at work when Yukon Blend, symbolized by a grizzly bear, is described as made from the ‘brisk qualities of Latin American coffees [and] the heaviness of a select Indonesian coffee’. Harmless fun? Or does the ‘exotic’ rely upon imaginative geographies of race (May 1996)? It is notable that coffee, place and people become interchangeable through terms such as ‘wild’, ‘mysterious’, ‘sun-blasted’, ‘chocolatey’, ‘spicy’, or sexualized as

‘inviting’, ‘satisfying’, and with ‘enough full-bodied muscle to stand up to cream’ (also M. D. Smith 1996).

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have tried to show through the concept of imaginative geographies how Latin America is both a real site and a sight, a representation of a place that is displaced beyond physical space through discourses and images. We can expect that with globalization Latin America will appear an ever greater part of everyone’s landscape and material culture. But in so doing the geographical imagination may also place Latin America as further away, as different, more ‘exotic’. In earlier travel writing this was achieved by representing Latin America as nature, pastoral productivity or a space of disease, laziness, immorality, violence, compared to which Europe was perceived as superior. Many of these representations are invoked today in the marketing of gourmet coffee and on our television screens. While writing this chapter news broke of an episode of *The Simpsons* that was set in Rio de Janeiro and depicted men as bisexuals, a samba school teaching a fictitious dance called the *penetrada*, Copacabana beach being roamed by vicious monkeys, and tourists being kidnapped by taxi drivers and mugged by street children (*The Guardian*, 9 April 2002).

Should we be concerned by these imaginative geographies? The simple answer is ‘yes’. The Brazil government is arguing that the episode will cost Rio millions of dollars in lost tourist revenue. Furthermore, imagining Latin America to be full of lazy, emotional, violent people is not going to help the employment prospects of those on my bus home from work.

But the answer is ‘yes’ for another reason. By imagining other peoples and places through stereotypical representations we are simultaneously imagining the ‘West’ in ways that are superior – we work harder, hold to ‘universal’ moral values and so forth – and builds false assumptions about our skill at decoding geographical imaginations. As Banck (1994) describes, the poorly educated *favela* (slum or shanty-town) youth of Rio de Janeiro consciously appropriate and manipulate ‘Western’ commodities as signs of distinction. I wonder whether the cultural class in Britain can deconstruct the meanings of their cappuccino with equal skill.

NOTES

The will to produce travel accounts was not always appreciated by expedition patrons. The Royal Geographical Society had to remind Robert Schomburgk on numerous occasions to keep his mind on the job and not become distracted by adventures (Burnett 2000: 84).

This is not new. The surveyor Robert Schomburgk followed the routes of Alexander von Humboldt and Walter Raleigh through Guyana. Moreover, imperial nostalgia becomes an ever more prominent part of the ‘unpackaged’ travel experience for ‘ego’ tourists to ‘follow Darwin’ on trips to the Galapagos and Alfred Wallace up the Amazon (Munt 1994).

Not all imaginative geographies were predetermined. Darwin records being constantly challenged by Latin America, and his reworking of that experience into formal science changed traditional ‘ways of seeing’ (Martins 2000).

Travellers claimed to be competent amateurs in the human and physical sciences, as well as occasionally proficient in landscape and technical drawing, as indicated by the copious use of illustration in texts (see Barreto and Machado 2001; Burnett 2000; Stepan 2001).

Objectivity through detachment was enhanced by the inability of many travellers to speak Spanish, Portuguese or indigenous languages. This did not hinder their confidence in their ability to understand beliefs in idolatry and moral standards. Of course, some travellers, such as Henry Bates, Carl von Martius and Robert Cunningham Graham, took a more interactive approach to local cultures (Barreto and Machado 2001; Walker 1992).

Scaling peaks was often undertaken to the consternation of locals, as Dunbar (1988) describes for von Humboldt and de Saussure in Mexico. There is also perhaps an implicit masculinity involved. Annie Peck, leading a party to scale Mount Huascarán in Peru, was ‘robbed’ by a male colleague of putting first footfall on the summit as she engaged in taking altitude readings (Robinson 1995: 433).

The enormity of nature implied danger, as is clear in Lady Richmond Brown’s account of travel through the Panamanian jungle of the 1920s, although she reduced that danger considerably by appearing to shoot every animal in sight.

Unlike many women travellers of the day, North’s travel writing displays little sense of escaping a repressive Victorian Britain (Naylor 2001; Robinson 1995).

Cultural representation can also be displaced. It has been announced that Kew has been nominated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in acknowledgement of Britain’s global

influence and contribution to the management of biodiversity (Department of Culture, Media and Sport press release, 18 January 2002).

\$0arbucks operates a joint venture with the Johnson Development Corporation to site stores in ‘underserved urban communities’, a euphemism for poor and (as the Johnson Corporation is run by the black basketball player ‘Magic’ Johnson and has an explicit mission of developing pro black American business) a synonym for race too.

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