Latin American Culture and the Challenge of Globalization

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Abstract. *This article deals with the cultural impact of globalization on Latin American culture. We describe the globalization processes which are bringing about profound changes in the cultural experience of Latin Americans, even in the most traditional communities. We warn that it must not be concluded too hastily that Americanized standards now tend to prevail everywhere or that local cultural patterns are disappearing or are bound to do so in the short or long term. Even though globalization increases interdependence and interconnectedness across national boundaries, we argue that these processes may give rise to a growing hybridization and heterogeneity within national and regional cultures.*

Introduction

In any discussion about major economic or political processes occurring on the world stage, Latin America tends to be seen as a region perpetually placed at the receiving end. Latin American societies would seem to simply follow, or submit to, or suffer the effects of tendencies originating elsewhere, particularly in the North Atlantic core. Undoubtedly, since the Colonial period, and throughout their history as sovereign political entities, the Latin American countries have occupied a peripheral zone in the international system (let's remember that even the name "Latin America" has been imposed by outsiders, in this case French imperialists during the late 19th century). The same can be said about today's transformations: the current process of globalization, initiated by the advanced capitalist economies, affects Latin America profoundly, to such an extent that we can now speak of a "globalizing Latin America": a region that is becoming maximally integrated into the "new world order", though still in a highly dependent

manner. This paper deals with one specific aspect of the "impact" of globalization on Latin America: the cultural dimension. The question we wish to raise here is: should we regard Latin America as a mere passive player, left with the sole alternative of "resisting or surrendering" to cultural globalization, or can we depict a more complex situation, where globalization does not inevitably mean global homogenization of cultures? In brief, are there any other options than that of lamenting the loss of national cultural identities, or trying to reinstate them by closing up to external influences? In any event, no simple answer can be put forward, as the process itself is extremely difficult to grasp:

To whatever extent globalization (however defined) actually is occurring (and to whom), its alleged positive benefits or negative costs are difficult to assess. The deeper questions are: 'cui bono?' and 'who is being globalized (or de-globalized), to what extent and by whom?' (Ferguson, 1992: 69).

But, what is "globalization"? Let's begin by saying that this notion can refer either to an historic process or to "the conceptual change in which it is reflected" (Arnason, 1990: 220). Robertson and Khondker (1998: 29) actually combine both these usages: "In its most basic sense globalization involves the compression of the entire world, on the one hand, and a rapid increase in the consciousness of the whole world, on the other". It is clear that, no matter how one defines culture, it includes states of awareness and experience. And the compression of space engendered by globalization processes has been accompanied not only by growing economic, political and

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social interdependence, but also by the expansion of states of awareness and experience beyond cultural boundaries even in isolated and traditional cultures. Giddens (1991) points out that social activities can increasingly be coordinated without reference to place and that though everyone's lives are rooted in the local, our phenomenal worlds are becoming more global. Culture, as Kearney (1995: 557) observes, "is becoming increasingly deterritorialized" and it can no longer be taken for granted that "old national hierarchies that sought to bind time and space through literature, history, heritage, ceremony and myth" will continue to do so successfully in the future (Stevenson, 1997: 41). The specter is raised of increasing cultural complexity, growing heterogeneity and the emergence of cultural forces which can be at once homogenizing and hybridizing (Hannerz, 1992). However, let's underscore the fact that "the growing hybridization and heterogeneity of cultures, have been a characteristic of Latin America since the beginning of its history as a colonial appendage of Europe in the sixteenth century" (Schelling, 1998: 146).

Globalization, in the sense of "the compression of the world as a whole, in long historical perspective" (Robertson, 1998: 26) has been vividly experienced by Latin America for a number of centuries. But, to argue that "present transformations are not novel except for their scale, scope, and complexity" (Arrighi, 1998: 61) might be misplaced: quantitative change can become qualitative change. For example, Altvater and Mahnkopf (1997: 449) argue that the "all-encompassing reach and enormous tempo of market transactions" and the "totality of exchange relations" are historically new. Lechner (1991: 543) maintains with regard to Latin America that as social structure, specifically social differentiation, extends beyond national boundaries and laps over into economic and cultural lifestyles in the global domain, social distances not only increase but are qualitatively changed. Moreover, Friedman (1998: 245) posits a connection between global transformation and the emergence of new cosmopolitan elites who share a "relatively coherent identity" linked to hybridity, border-crossing and multiculturalism rather than ownership of production.

The observation that "the coexistence of modern and pre-modern forms of life, has made hybridity and heterogeneity constitutive of Latin America's very sense of identity" (Schelling, 1998: 146) raises, of course, the issue of the link between modernity and globalization processes. Giddens (1991: 4) views globalization as part and parcel of "high modernity" which undercuts traditional habits and customs and frees up social relationships from the constraints of place. This suggests that coping with globalization processes is an inherent part of modernization and development. As Lechner (1991: 542) puts it: "the modernization process becomes an imperative. No society [...] can renounce modernization without condemning itself to underdevelopment". Further, this author contends that "the only way to improve the people's standard of living is for the region to become competitive on the world market" (Lechner, 1991: 551).

I. What is Latin America?

The focus of our paper is Latin America. But in order to tackle the problem of assessing the "impact" of globalization on Latin America, we ought to address a two-fold question: What is specific about the Latin American identity or, in other terms, what makes Latin America a distinct and coherent region when compared to other parts of the world? And then, is Latin American culture *necessarily* and *fundamentally* at odds with the process of "Westernization" that globalization seems to imply? These questions have no easy or unequivocal answers. For each author who characterizes Latin America as a unified region –where many countries share a "common language, common colonial past, common religion, and similar aesthetic traditions", as well as a "comparable mestizo ethnic makeup and experienced similar political and economic histories" (Waisbord, 1998: 389)–, we will find another one who decries the "stereotypical" image of a homogenous continent (Quijano, 1998). There is also the perpetual ambivalence that the Latin American intellectual elites tend to show towards the Western paradigm which often clouds the debate on the linkages between this region and the "Modernity" stemming from the North Atlantic liberal societies.

We will argue that, in spite of the significant and highly relevant political, economic, and social discontinuities that we can find among the different Latin America countries, it is still possible to speak of certain *c o m m o n cultural foundations*. Moreover, we will contend that, rather than defining Latin America in negative terms (as non-Western, backward, or pre-capitalistic), we must consider it as being historically, symbolically, and materially embedded in the Western project, though with a dependent and peripheral status (Guerra, 1995; Smith, 1992). For the most part of the 20th century, nationalists in Latin America have deplored the region's submission to the metropolitan countries by underscoring its non-Western character. This critique challenges the Eurocentric

conceptions that have consistently been applied with an imperialistic attitude to the Latin American nations. Yet, questioning Eurocentrism need not mean breaking with the major ideals of social organization originating in the European Enlightenment and embodied in the English, French, and American political revolutions, such as individual freedom and sovereignty of the people. If the process of political democratization and economic liberalization that most societies of this region have carried out during the last ten or fifteen years is not to be just seen as yet another chapter of Western imperialism, we have to take into consideration the complex and hybrid nature of Latin American culture. We will then be able to look at Latin America as something more than a region that simply "imports", "imitates", or passively "suffers" what happens elsewhere.

What is then Latin America? The term Latin America covers at least twenty societies in the American continent which because of their historical origins, reflect in their institutions and social organization a worldview with roots in the Southern European tradition –that of absolutist Counter-Reformation Spain and Portugal (Eisenstadt, 1998). But this worldview has not merely been "transplanted": the colonial experience has involved an extraordinary process of ethnic mixing, cultural amalgamation, and ideological construction. The Native populations have contributed decisively to this process of identity formation, though from a clearly subordinate position. The "imagined community", the mythic origins of the nationality, and the legitimacy of the State in each Latin American country are based on a narrative that celebrates the "mixture of races" and the fusion of cultures; but the core theme has always been the "promise of the New World"–which is, of course, "new" in terms of the European colonization. Ironically, it is there that we can find perhaps the most obvious common trait of all Latin American countries: the failure to achieve their full potential. Not surprisingly, the proverbial Latin American nation is thought to be a place where most of the people are underemployed, underpaid, undereducated, and undernourished, and where radicalization and authoritarianism are the dominant patterns of public life. Latin American appears as a place of "unfinished aspirations" (Adelman, 1998), especially when compared to the success story of the United States. The evident question to raise is, why the difference? And the answer would seem to be quite straightforward: because of the contrast between the Anglo-Saxon and the "Latin" –Southern European, Mediterranean– cultural patterns that were brought to the Americas during the process of its "discovery", conquest, and settlement.

Evidently, it would be futile to try and dress a list of Latin American "core cultural values". We all know that culture is perpetually in motion, and that it is by definition ungraspable. Specific cultures are heterogeneous, conflictive, even self-contradictory. Does this mean that we should abandon all hope of reaching an agreement of what constitute the main cultural patterns of public life in Latin America? Although not a task without risks, we think that it is possible to make certain generalizations. We will argue that, since colonial times, the tendency in Iberian America has been towards more centralized and hierarchically structured nation-states, a stronger ethnocultural, sometimes "organicist" understanding of nationality, and a worldview that tends to separate the moral world into public and private domains, with one code valid within the family circle with relatives, intimate friends and close associates, and another code regulating life outside (Dealy, 1996). Public life in Latin America has to be understood in terms of its own logic, wherein predominate, for example, the cult of manliness, the values of fraternity, loyalty, pride, and grandeur (rather than the values encouraged by Protestantism: tolerance, humility, and frugality), as well as the aspiration –consistently unfulfilled– for "an administrative system possessing a clear hierarchy of command and rationalized formal structures minimizing conflict" (Graham, 1992). These cultural traits can be easily construed as irrational or premodern. But the contrast can also be seen in a light that favors Latin America over North America: some authors have underlined what they see as an opposition between the ultra-individualistic and materialistic Anglo-Saxon societies and the gregarious and spiritual Latin American societies. But even so, Latin American public culture manifests deeply entrenched patterns that are certainly problematic in an "open society". Let's mention, for instance, the propensity to view politics as a zero-sum game that excludes opposites (leading to a "war logic"), and the general mistrust in the government as an economic regulator (leading to widespread "black market" practices) (Albala-Bertrand, 1992).

However, we should not jump to the conclusion that Latin American public ethos is intrinsically or uniformly authoritarian, collectivist, and traditionalist. This perspective would entail over-simplifying the long and rich history of political and social endeavors that has characterized both the big and small countries throughout the region. First of all, let's remember that nation-building processes in Latin America predate the successful anti-colonial movements in other Third World countries by more than a hundred years. This precocious adoption of the national model has involved a very early politicization of cultural issues, including the

question of defining the national identity (Guerra, 1995). The paradoxical nature of Latin American collective identities stems from the fact that, in spite – or because – of the previous existence of a very strong and encompassing sense of belonging to the Spanish-American world, the newly-formed independent states had to strongly and proactively unify and differentiate themselves as territorial entities (which usually coincided rather loosely with preexisting colonial administrative units). This inaugural thrust has persisted in its effects all over the twentieth century. What sometimes may appear as a chauvinistic obsession to delimit *la mexicanidad, la argentinidad,* or *la chilenidad,* actually reflects what Lechner calls a "desire for community". Though it certainly can lead to nationalist excesses (and it has in many cases), this "need of sociableness, protection against insecurity, and the certainty of shared feelings" (Lechner, 1991: 548) is at the heart of what this author describes as the "quest for citizenship". When democratic advancement is exclusively measured in terms of the standards found in the advanced liberal societies, it is easy to miss the fact that societies that are internally unequal (in terms of wealth, power and prestige allocation) and externally dependent (in terms of economic and military leverage at the international level) have sometimes to deal first with the challenge of integrating the people into the political system. And, of course, any attempt at actualizing the "sovereignty of the people" must raise the question of "who are the people?", and more difficult yet, the question of "what is the purpose of our being together?". These questions cannot be answered without referring to the cultural realm.

Returning to our opening questions (What is specific about the Latin American identity? And, is Latin American culture at odds with a Western-driven globalization?), we have to be careful not to give in to explanations based on Latin American "exceptionalism" (Adelman, 1998). Though many authors have either celebrated or condemned the "exceptional" character of the region – its "mentality", its "destiny", its "essence" –, it is important to see Latin America as a different type of outcome stemming from the same kind of forces, tensions and contradictions that have shaped other modern nations. Almost every country in the region has continually tried to find a functional balance between the universal notion of citizenship embedded in the very structure of the nation-state, and the idea that the country has a transcendent essence and a fixed destiny. As the events of this century have tought us, nationhood can be both a powerful tool of exclusion and a principle of integration. It is in this perspective that Latin America can be seen as the

"Other" within the Western stream or, as Octavio Paz (1983: 140) has put it, one of the "two different versions of Western civilization" implanted in the Americas. However, this should not led us to embrace the opposite view of "exceptionalism", that is, the idea that Latin America is just a "North America in waiting", a region that has been badly administered, but one that could become a "success story" if only a more progressive approach was adopted. This perspective has been put forward by the modernization theorists in the 1950's and 1960's, and has been strongly reactivated by the free-marketeers in the 1990's. The basic tenet is that, if the creative forces (i.e. private initiative, open competition, meritocracy) are unleashed (i.e. stripped of government regulations, traditional values, and corruption), Latin American countries will naturally and spontaneously "develop" (or "emerge", following the more current terminology). Such a view reduces Latin American cultural specificity to a "superstructure" that should not interfere with the economic rationality of globalization.

II. Changing Cultural Patterns

We have suggested in the previous section that the question of "what is the purpose of our being together?" is crucial to any definition of a given national identity. But the vast scope and abstract character of the question should not lead us to think that its answer only concerns intellectuals or ideologues. What can be viewed as the shared meaning and common goals of collective life in a specific national setting is relayed by countless cultural patterns which affect the life of each individual in a subjective way. The globalization of relations and exchanges has powerful effects on the cultural realm. But these effects have a complex configuration: they can sometimes counter-act specific patterns in a given culture, while at the same time reinforcing others. This is especially true in Latin America, where the tension between modernizing trends and "traditional" values (that is, values which can block or slow down capitalist development) has always been a major issue. An interesting way of assessing the impact of globalization on cultural identities is to examine what is happening in the workplace.

The economic processes of globalization, involving increased trade, communication flows, and movement of people have important cultural consequences. But it is useful to remember that though economic activity is becoming increasingly global in nature, regionalized

economic integration is not losing importance as is reflected by Mercosur and NAFTA. Nonetheless, the current phase of economic globalization is "qualitatively different [...] to the earlier expansion of international trade" (Cook and Kirkpatrick, 1997: 55). There have been fundamental changes in the very processes of production which may have considerable cultural impact on working life in Latin America. For example, though the procurement function of multinational corporations remains highly centralized, decision-making is becoming dispersed as production processes become more integrated across countries on a regional basis, and management and coordination is being increasingly devolved to regional headquarters. Advances in information technology have led to the increased tradeability of knowledge-based services which have become the most dynamic area in terms of foreign direct investment flows (Cook and Kirkpatrick, 1997). Are things likely to be any different in Latin America than in North America where "the gap will only widen between those who fit, who have been configured, in terms of their possessing the technical competence needed to access, manipulate and market information, and those who do not fit into this reconfigured informationally driven reality" (Tuathail and McCormack, 1998: 358)? Given current realities in Latin America it is surely discomforting to learn that "35 per cent of all US companies monitor their workers by recording their telephone calls, voice and electronic mail, checking their computer files and videotaping them as they work" in what are sometimes "information-age sweatshops and digital dungeons" (Tuathail and McCormack, 1998: 357). It is clear that there is an impending threat stemming from the lack of privacy laws (of the failure to enforce them), as well as from the still strong role of Latin American governments in "policing" their citizens (through state agencies, often the police force itself, which gather information on individuals). It may be a safe assumption to say that the protection of privacy – and the promotion of the individualist values that sustain any claim to privacy rights – will become an important issue in the wake of political, economic, and cultural integration initiatives.

Are we predicting hemispheric "cultural convergence" for the next century? Obviously, there will be some cultural convergence, but from very different cultural heritages in Latin America and North America. Determining the direction and extent of cultural convergence is best left to solidly grounded, longitudinal research. Not much research of this kind has been done or is underway. Interestingly, Nevitte (1995), arguing from the position that cross-border

transactions lead to greater similarities in values in adjacent societies and noting that the volumes of such transactions increased between Mexico, the U. S., and Canada during the decade leading up to NAFTA, analyzed the 1981 and 1990 World Values Surveys to determine trends in value change in these "North American" societies. He argues that the "main values" in all three societies are becoming more similar and that this cannot be explained by the "Americanization" of Mexico and Canada. Nor do the data fit a "cultural lag" model – that is, that America leads and that Mexico and Canada "lag".

Ingelhart and Carballo (1997: 37) in their analysis of the 1990 World Values Survey affirm the cultural specificity of Latin America, including Mexico, working from a revised version of modernization theory:

Cross-cultural variation does not simply reflect the changes linked with the modernization and postmodernization processes: to a great extent, each society works out its history in its own unique fashion, influenced by the culture, leaders, institutions, climate, geography, situation-specific events, and other unique elements that make up its own distinctive heritage.

Based on responses to more than 100 questions dealing with a wide variety of aspects of life in 43 societies in the 1990 World Values Survey, Ingelhart and Carballo try to provide answers to the questions of whether coherent cultural patterns exist in Latin America and other regions and, if so, whether these patterns reflect economic development or socio-linguistic and religious heritage. They report "huge differences between the basic values of people in different cultural groups" and that, though the values of richer societies differ systematically from those of poorer ones, the "worldview of a given people reflects its entire historical heritage" (Ingelhart and Carballo, 1997: 35 & 44). The Latin American cluster (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Mexico) displayed similar values across a broad spectrum of topics but, as Inglehart and Carballo (1997: 42) report, "it would be easy to extend the boundaries of this cluster to include Spain and Portugal". Simply put, culture is heavily anchored in historical experience and "economic factors alone do not determine what people want and how they behave" (Inglehart and Carballo, 1997: 46).

What of Lechner's (1991: 551) contention that for living standards to rise, Latin America must become more competitive on the world market? He appears to be arguing from an economic "convergence" perspective which holds that closer integration into the world economy accelerates economic advance. The "divergence" perspective, in contrast, argues that globalization "leads to a widening of
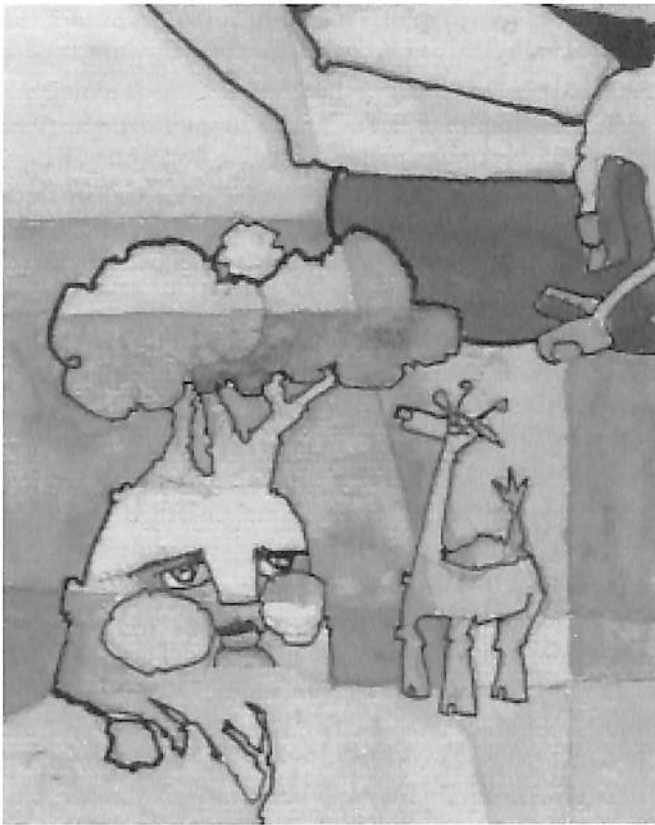
existing international disparities and a further marginalization" (Cook and Kirkpatrick, 1997: 64). For example, Kiely (1998: 103) notes that although the developing world as a whole has increased its global share of exports, "this is largely accounted for by the rise of the four first-tier East Asian NICs, who together produce around half of the total manufacturing exports originating from the 'Third World'"; Latin America's share of world exports actually declined from 12.4% in the 1950s to 3.9% in 1990. And, as Sussman (1997: 260) puts it, "absorption of Third World elites into the mainstream of transnational culture marginalizes the poor even further and leaves them few, often only the most extreme, alternatives, including war". Sussman points out that, although information technologies and media do not create poverty, "their introduction into the mix of already severe class segregations are likely to make life worse for the majority". Without attempting to resolve this debate, it is worth noting that fundamental transformations in the processes of production and management require increasing levels of knowledge-based inputs (and nearness to and understanding between firms, customers, and suppliers). If international competitiveness is to be achieved and maintained, this will involve significant cultural changes at the micro and macro level in Latin America. These changes are now underway.

III. Globalization Processes and Local Cultures

It is probably in the most traditional of Latin American communities that the cultural effects of globalization processes are the most visible and striking. As we have seen, globalization processes involve the compression of space and produce a unity of time – in short, they give way to "an increasingly simultaneous, interconnected world" (Scribano, 1998: 494) or, as Castells (1998: 350) puts it, to a "network society" that is emerging "from the superseding of places and the annihilation of time by the space of flows and by the timeless time". It is clear that globalization processes are now enmeshed in Latin America with ongoing industrialization, urbanization, and modernization, and that these processes combined have brought about the virtual disappearance of traditional ways of life, as TV, cars, supermarkets, mass-produced clothing and fashion have permeated even indigenous communities (Schelling, 1998: 154). Arguably, these trends are changing the nature of ties between individuals and groups through the way in which they impact on individual consciousness and social relationships. Among the Yucatec Maya, for example, "as media penetration within the Yucatan region becomes more intensified [...] Maya are continually re-evaluating local life [...] with increasing awareness of external referents which are alien to local cultural practices" (Miller, 1998: 307). Television viewing in the Brazilian Amazon is reported to have resulted in "new conceptualizations of space and time, in the modification of work patterns; in a new wave of consumerism, in a general shift in expectations towards life and towards the community, and in the displacement of private and public activities" (Reis, 1998: 306).

One of the main effects of the introduction of TV into family homes in traditional communities throughout the world, has been to shift social activity from *outside* the home to *inside* the home. This is as true of the Yucatec Maya as it is of the Aymara in Bolivia and the Inuit in the Canadian Arctic. Time that used to be spent in interactions with friends and neighbors and in participation in the community at large declines as time spent viewing TV increases. It is this type of phenomenon that perhaps has given rise to the anecdote about the member of a tribe who complained that "before we had time, but we had no watches; now we have watches, but we have no time". Thus, the very notion of time can change from a more qualitative, flexible conception to a more quantitative one since TV, for example, "with its strict schedules [...] tends to set definite boundaries" (Reis, 1998: 303). Social relationships, therefore, may often be conducted according to time frames determined by TV viewing patterns.

The way in which TV viewing alters the way people use and experience time, is *homogenizing* in a cultural sense. The content of TV programming almost everywhere, regardless of whether it is homogenizing in some instances or hybridizing in others, is such as to expand awareness beyond traditional cultural boundaries and to provide external referents. It is this, perhaps, that contributes to the process among the Yucatec Maya of "younger community members [...] moving outside the existing structures of household authority and the achievement of status through the moral order of rural agriculture" (Miller, 1998: 314). While TV can provide alternative role models and social scripts to those currently available in traditional communities, the relationship between the viewer and the social content is, at best, vicarious. This relationship can, nonetheless, be powerful: "In a globally mass-mediated society [...] style and fashion are important sources of self-esteem" (Schelling, 1998: 154). However, as Waisbord (1998: 393) rightfully cautions, "if ideas and images do not resonate with existing beliefs, it is unlikely that they will be accepted and incorporated into the formation of cultural identities".

More complex is the way in which the forces of globalization and tradition interact among migrants from rural areas to the explosively growing metropolises and future megalopolises in Latin America. These immense and rapidly expanding centers of urbanization reflect the fact that cities have become the pivotal points not only at the local, national, and regional levels, but at global level as well. The world economy has become, much more than before, an economy in which global and regional metropolises and megalopolises are the dominant actors. The major cities of Latin America are taking on these characteristics, and will continue to do so in the future. These urban centers are likely to become even larger than those of North America and Europe. In the space of one generation, there has been a very profound change in the nature of the cultural influences to which migrants to the large metropolises throughout the region are exposed. These migrants acquire an enhanced awareness of the outside world, as well as a form of "cultural literacy" that enables them to develop, for example, a better understanding of micro-economic and even macro-economic issues, an awareness which is largely lacking in traditional rural areas. In this context, the informal dollarization of many Latin American economies should be seen as an indication of a dramatic turn in the way in which people, even those of the lower strata, perceive the value of goods and of work itself. Better and cheaper transportation and communications within and between the countries in the

region, and for the middle-classes and up, a strengthening of links with North America by means of cultural consumption and tourism, have modified, in a very short time span, the cultural dynamics of the continent. Interdependence and interconnectedness have increased across social class, ethnic, and national boundaries, even in the context of a growing gap between the "haves" and "have-nots" in both North and Latin America. The upper levels of Latin American society are increasingly "wired" –that is, they are becoming increasingly dependent on technologies such as the cellular phone and the internet, which mediate their relationships with others.

Waisbord (1998: 392) takes issue with "the idea of wired citizens who develop new cognitive maps and identities in placeless virtual communities"; he points to low penetration of cable and satellite TV and even of the old telephone networks in many Latin American countries. But even the introduction of phone lines and services, particularly private phone service, brings with it the possibility and actuality of social relationships mediated by technology and free of the constraints of place. Traditional cultural boundaries are rendered more permeable and, in addition, the ties and bonds of traditional culture can be weakened from within:

As physical distance as a barrier to communication with others disappears, psychological obstructions are created [...] We have witnessed the extraordinary rise of privacy as a coveted value and simultaneously documented the de-emphasis of public spaces as a prized part of daily life (Gumbert and Drucker, 1998: 429).

In short, it is now obvious that even in the most traditional communities in Latin America, globalization processes are rendering cultural boundaries more permeable, bringing about changes in the way in which time is conceptualized and experienced, and changing the nature and quality of communal ties. These trends are likely to become more rather than less pronounced as those technologies which facilitate increasing interconnectedness between Latin Americans and Latin Americans and the world at large pervade the social fabric of everyday life.

Though much is made of the fact that these technologies are used mainly by educated, urbanized, and upper and middle class Latin Americans who "have already participated in a cosmopolitan culture and global communication flows" (Waisbord, 1998: 392), the barriers to their greater penetration are mainly infrastructural and economic rather than related to predominantly cultural issues. Even levels of education and literacy are no longer insurmountable barriers to the diffusion of these technologies. As Miller (1998: 310)

points out, for the Yucatec Maya, "the expense represented by a television in the home exceeds the total median expenses on all basic needs for at least one month". This is the real meaning of high and exorbitant prices for access to information technologies for the population in most Latin American countries. But, again, there is a strong and pronounced trend towards a significant decline in these costs on a worldwide basis.

As technologies which "abridge distance and fuel a new consciousness" (Waisbord, 1998: 377) permeate Latin American societies in the decades ahead, ties to traditional cultures and groupings will be changed and loosened and individuals may be left with a more fragmentary grasp of cultural patterns of meaning. Will this result in an "increasing split between everyday life and large-scale systemic integration" (Calhoun, 1991: 96)? Perhaps. But it is through identity formation processes that "populations are mobilized and integrated into cultural communities" (Waisbord, 1998: 377). Nation-states will continue to play a powerful role in identity formation processes, even if their capacity in this regard is being eroded by the forces of globalization, acting from above, and those of pluralism, acting from below. They will continue to provide a sense of place, as space becomes increasingly compressed and cultural barriers of all kinds become more porous. National (and ethnic) identities may, however, become less all-encompassing as the processes of individual differentiation continue worldwide.

But there is another way in which spatial structures are being disrupted in the wake of globalization. We have to take into account the vast rearrangements that are taking place in terms of regional shifts, where core and peripheries are changing their relative position and even their overall status. A city that has held a consistent role as an industrial center for local markets can become very rapidly a backwater town if it is left out of a globalized axis of production for export markets. As Feagin and Smith (1998: 55) argue, Lima is a paradigmatic example of a "loser" in a global game that, at a continental scale, tends to converge in cities like Mexico D. F. and São Paulo. There is no doubt that this kind of shift can bring forth major changes in the political, social, and cultural arenas. In fact, this phenomenon – of which the long-term effects are still extremely difficult to assess – raises a number of questions regarding the integrity of national communities. It seems more likely that the global game will be played in terms of sub-national regions than in terms of countries. In other words, a few large industrial, financial, commercial and technologically-developed centers – usually the capital cities or main metropolises, along with their heartlands – will concentrate and benefit from the economic

take-off. Does this mean that the already acute "dualization" that exists in Latin America (in terms of social stratification) will be amplified by a form of regional fragmentation, with thriving globally-linked city-regions on the one hand and estranged, pauperized provinces on the other? This is a very disquieting possibility, but it is at least plausible that economic growth will eventually irradiate to other geographic areas. We have to remember that, despite the fact that these changes are brought about chiefly by economic factors, extremely strong political and cultural mechanisms are at work as well. As we have argued, though globalization is about markets, it is also about compression and expansion of space and time, about cultural awareness and self-awareness in an increasingly interconnected world.

Conclusion

In the first decades of this coming century, we are likely to witness in Latin America fundamental economic, political, and especially cultural changes on an unprecedented scale. The scope and depth of these changes may be quite profound and far-reaching, and take place in what in historical perspective may be a relatively short period of time. While cultural barriers of all kinds are becoming porous and national and ethnic identities are becoming less encompassing, a heightened individualism will dramatically alter the social fabric of Latin American countries. The continuing commodification of time will tend to reduce conviviality and sociability, and empty interpersonal relations of non-essential elements. This will affect not only relations in public, but family and intimate relations as well. These trends may very well become more pronounced in Mexico than in any other Latin American country. In this regard, we can expect that a crucial play-out will take place in Mexico and, perhaps, Central America. There is already some evidence that values and culture in Mexico may be taking a turn away from the rest of the region, without this necessarily meaning a loss in its *Hispanidad*. The extraordinary cultural pull exerted by the United States entails, indeed, an "Americanization" of Mexican culture and ways of life. But it is possible to contend that we have already begun to observe some signs of an emerging hemispheric cultural system, at least at the North American level, where Latin American culture adapts and transforms US cultural contents, and even affects US culture itself. There might also be the cultural push emanating from the three-way competitive and interactive economic, political, and social relations and exchanges between Mexico, Canada, and the United States within the framework of NAFTA. Acting within this framework may force adaptations and adjustments

on all partners that neither would have made alone.

Globalization processes are having an intense effect on social structures, which in turn have an impact on cultural patterns. Lechner (1991), for example, has pointed out that social structures now flow across national boundaries, and elites now intermingle more than ever before at the global level. Global economic activity has created new avenues of upward mobility, particularly for the middle classes and up, and especially for young professionals in the large urban centers. But this upward mobility for some must be contrasted with what amounts to downward mobility for others. Performance and achievement are now key values in the workplace, while the traditional "Latin" ethos based principally on personal trust and loyalty – as opposed to almost exclusive reliance on contractual relationships – is increasingly seen as an impediment to the efficient management of business. Consequently, those who previously had to rely on family or connections to attain or maintain high positions in the social structure must now demonstrate achievement or face downward mobility. Once again, we must not conclude too hastily that "Americanized" standards now tend to prevail everywhere, and that local cultural patterns are disappearing or are bound to do so in the short or long term. What we see is rather a tendency towards a more rational use of resources, which does not necessarily conflict with Latin American culture. Economic methods and management techniques are indeed being imported from

North America, particularly to Mexico; however, as corporate experts have realized long time ago, the workplace remains a domain where interpersonal relationships and cultural sensitivities play a very strong role. In this sense, in order to be successful, businesses have to operate within the cultural framework of employees, clients, and suppliers, as well as that of the larger community. But the cultural framework also includes political culture. Authoritarianism, nationalism, and populism have always been considered to be the fundamental traits of collective life in the region. After the democratization wave of the 1980s, economic liberalization and privatization proceeded apace, partly because this was compatible with economic globalization. The case of Mexico is again highly significant. Mexico has had no choice but to move towards economic liberalization and privatization, because of its involvement in NAFTA. Further, its economic partners, Canada and the United States, have put strong and sustained pressure on Mexico to democratize its institutions and civil society, at least in part so as to establish a common cultural framework for economic activity. While this might suggest that economic globalization is inexorably weakening political and cultural sovereignty, and though it does open the way for greater identification at the level of regions and continents, nation-states will continue to have the predominant role in collective identity formation processes. There are, in other words, limits to the transformations that globalization is likely to engender.

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