

## BOOK REVIEW ESSAYS

# Interrogating Culture in Latin America

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This essay reviews the following works:

**Silencios y disputas en la historia de Hispanoamérica.** By Antonio Annino. Bogotá: Universidad Externado de Colombia, 2014. Pp. xi + 455. \$45.00 paperback. ISBN: 9789587587456.

**Nineteenth-Century Spanish America: A Cultural History.** By Christopher Conway. Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2015. Pp. x + 270. \$29.95 paperback. ISBN: 9780826520609.

**Vernacular Latin Americanisms: War, the Market, and the Making of a Discipline.** By Fernando Degiovanni. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2018. Pp. viii + 238. \$29.95 hardcover. ISBN: 9780822965541.

**Days of National Festivity in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 1823–1889.** By Hendrik Kraay. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013. Pp. xi + 562. \$70.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9780804785266.

**Intimations of Modernity: Civil Culture in Nineteenth-Century Cuba.** By Louis A. Pérez Jr. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017. Pp. xi + 256. \$39.95 hardcover. ISBN: 9781469631301.

**Historia global de América Latina del siglo XXI a la Independencia.** By Héctor Pérez Brignoli. Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2018. Pp. 629. €15.5 paperback. ISBN: 9788491811022.

**Latin America: The Allure and Power of an Idea.** By Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017. Pp. ix + 240. \$40.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9780226443065.

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This collection of books interrogates the concept of culture by taking a variety of perspectives. Some authors, such as Fernando Degiovanni and Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, investigate how Latin America became an object of study. Others, such as Antonio Annino and Héctor Pérez Brignoli, take a particular area and explore cultural trends in political thought and how it was put in action. The other three authors are more drawn into how culture was actually practiced in the nineteenth century: Christopher Conway is interested in the wider region, whereas Hendrik Kraay and Louis Pérez Jr. focus on cultural expressions in Brazil and Cuba, respectively. In the latter two books the examination remains centered around how people understood culture, while the other five books are concerned with ideas and how to conceive of the space they investigate—whether called Hispanic America (Annino), Spanish America (Conway), or the even more contentious “Latin America” used by Pérez Brignoli and analyzed by Tenorio-Trillo, who argues that this term tends to lead to generalizations and should be abolished. In contrast, Degiovanni embraces the idea of Latin America as he traces how the literature produced in this region became an object of study throughout the hemisphere, in large part because the men who created the discipline believed that it described a tangible reality.

In this review I explore how these books connect to one another through their different understandings of culture, and how they set these understandings within spaces of varying size. The first section focuses on whether “Latin America” is a useful concept for thinking about culture, and to what extent the term itself is a cultural artifact. Here I review the books by Tenorio-Trillo, Degiovanni, and Pérez Brignoli, who provide

a variety of answers to the question of whether it is useful to conceptualize “Latin America” as an area of study. In a sense these books are cultural studies inasmuch as they situate Latin America/América Latina at the center of their discussion. Tenorio-Trillo does this in a very deliberate way, whereas Pérez Brignoli simply assumes the explicative power of the term. Degiovanni, on the other hand, does not delve into this debate and instead traces the process through which differing Latin Americanisms emerged. The second section reviews the works by Annino and Conway, who are both interested in the areas colonized by Spain, even though the terms they use are not the same because of the languages they write in. Although they do not explicitly say it, they clearly both believe that speaking Spanish and having a common experience of colonization creates a cogent unit for study. The third section reviews the books by Pérez and Kraay, which analyze cultural practices in Cuba and Brazil, respectively. I consider what is gained from using this national perspective as opposed to wider regional studies. A final section provides some reflections on how these books interrogate the concept of culture in Latin America.

### Is “Latin America” a Useful Term for Thinking?

Echoing Alan Knight, who in 2005 asked if “political culture” was “good to think,” in *Latin America: The Allure and Power of an Idea*, Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo wonders whether the term is in any way useful or if it would not be better to abandon it because it “has never designated a geographically or historical tangible reality” (1).<sup>1</sup> Tenorio-Trillo traces its origins to the 1850s, when French imperialists created it to confront US expansionism, only to be transformed in the Spanish language to encompass an area that is neither Europe nor the US. According to this author it has later been used to describe a region that faced difficulties with industrialization or democracy or Marxist modernizing revolution or indeed post-Marxist, anti-modernizing revolution. He argues that by attempting to include so much the term becomes meaningless and does not contribute to understanding the reality of extremely different countries. Tenorio-Trillo locates the current rejection of the label “Latin America” in Spanish and Portuguese in both literature and the arts, noting that contemporary writers and artists do not feel bound by it or by traditional ideas of identity. In English there has not been much criticism of it, while in Brazil it has been ignored or rejected, and it has been repurposed to create a Latino/a identity in the United States. But is it a cultural category? A racial one?, Tenorio-Trillo wonders, as those from south of the border, once they arrive in the United States, go from being Hispanic to Latinos. Is it linked to language? And if so, just to Spanish, and where does that leave the speakers of Portuguese or indigenous languages? The questions remain open whether it is a cultural or ethnic category and what that really means when the populations of the region are so diverse. This is despite acknowledging that “Latino” is used nearly exclusively in the United States as a category that groups together many others, who thereby gain a collective identity they never realized they had.

In a sense the book is a reaction to the importance given to the term “Latin America” in the United States. One of the only chapters devoted to how it is used elsewhere concentrates on the “dustier corners of the author’s memory in search of a vernacular singing of said tune: ‘Latinoamérica’” (102). Here Tenorio-Trillo looks at poetry, philology, and popular song in an attempt to search for the term’s usage. He finds that after a brief moment of popularity in 1970s protest songs, it now tends to be used mostly by artists living in the United States who sing in Spanish, those who have assumed the existence of a common identity. The author devotes attention to the importance the term has north of the Rio Grande, and claims that if this were not the case “Latinoamérica” would have “gone or would be a very marginal idea” (119), but that it is needed to denote that everything “south of Nogales Arizona is Nogales Sonora” without acknowledging the great differences between the countries’ regions and subregions. The other reason has been the endurance of the “exotic” (148), the allure of otherness present in the term. But in spite of all these caveats, after presenting a long list of reasons why Latin America as such does not exist and is problematic, Tenorio-Trillo acknowledges there is a need for it as a concept, if only because no better one exists, but that it can only be useful when the diversity of the region is understood, and if there is a real engagement with what intellectuals from the region create in Spanish, Portuguese, and indigenous languages, as well as the scholarship on Latin America produced in languages other than English.

In spite of his protestations that Latin America is a problematic invention with no real connection to the region, and that the people south of the Rio Grande have eschewed it, many eminent historians such as Tulio Halperín Donghi have embraced it as an object of study. Halperín Donghi’s contemporary history of Latin America, first published in 1967, remains so popular it has been reprinted dozens of times and is still widely

<sup>1</sup> Alan Knight, “Is Political Culture Good to Think?,” in *Political Culture in the Andes, 1750–1950*, ed. Nils Jacobsen and Cristóbal Aljovín de Losada (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 25–56.

read in Spanish. In the prologue, Halperín Donghi wonders whether it is possible to bring together so many different nations. He concludes that given the diversity within them, and that just as much commonality can be found within nations as in the wider region, the approach is in fact advantageous.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, Fernando Degiovanni, in his exploration of how Latin Americanism became a discipline, presents a very compelling narrative of how it emerged mediated “by the specter of war, and that one of its primary objectives was the theorization of the continent as a hemispheric market” (1). In contrast to Tenorio-Trillo’s assertions, Degiovanni contends that the discipline surfaced not from the tradition of essay writing about continental identity but from the efforts by critics and institutional actors who sought to highlight the region’s financial and commercial possibilities against the backdrop of the Spanish-American War, the First and Second World Wars, and the Cold War. Degiovanni concentrates on three sets of actors: the Anglo-Americans who created the field in the early twentieth century, the Spanish Civil War exiles in North America who consolidated the notion that there was a reason to study the region, and the Latin American university reform movement veterans who developed their own brand of Latin Americanism. The book closes with an analysis of the effort to create a regional cultural market by the editorial houses of Mexico and Buenos Aires at midcentury, where work such as Halperín Donghi’s was published.

Degiovanni focuses very specifically in the rise of the academic discipline that studied Latin American literature. In this way he is less concerned with what Latin America actually is or might be, and much more interested in how and for what purposes this literature was seen as a coherent object of study. North American professors Jeremiah Ford and Alfred Coester forged the field by embracing Pan-Americanism and gaining institutional support from the US government. Emerging from the study of modern languages, they successfully argued that knowledge of Latin American literature and the Spanish language were key to opening markets. In contrast, Spaniards Federico de Onís and Américo Castro sought to show that the true Spanish essence was so deeply rooted that it remained embedded in all the places colonized by Spain, justifying in this way the teaching of peninsular topics (74) alongside language. Exiled from Spain, they recalibrated their ideas to better suit Pan-Americanism. Latin American student reformists such as Luis Alberto Sánchez, Pedro Henríquez Ureña, and Enrique Anderson Imbert shared experiences of exile and understood their position as part of a continental Latin American movement; even as they all began at odds with Pan-American ideals, they were eventually co-opted. Degiovanni therefore argues that an idea of Latin America as a space for study embedded in culture and literature, even within the region itself, emerged in the twentieth century.

In contrast, Héctor Pérez Brignoli does not analyze the origins or contradictions of the term “América Latina” but instead aims to write a global history of the region moving backward from the “twenty-first century to independence. Following Halperín Donghi’s approach, his book provides a robust riposte to Tenorio-Trillo, as it tackles the whole continent from a perspective very distant from the United States. Pérez Brignoli begins his tour de force with a description of Diego Rivera’s mural of the Sunday afternoon dream in the Alameda, setting the tone for his book on cultural issues. His ambitious essay on the process of independence travels from the Andes in the 1780s to the North American and French revolutions through to Haiti and Brazil, then on to the creation of juntas and eventually the wars that led to the making of new nations. Pérez Brignoli moves from the local to the regional with great nimbleness, presenting the story of the whole continent in a detailed and nuanced way that does not reduce the experience to the other or the exotic, as Tenorio-Trillo feared the term could do. In his second essay Pérez Brignoli focuses on the concept of utopia in Latin America, and here he moves more directly on to the realm of cultural history by exploring different texts on the utopias of progress, digressing into the one of race, moving on to the reformist utopia and to national populist, communist, authoritarian-conservative, and neoliberal ones. Looking at them in this way he is able to cut across borders and compare diverse experiences from Mexico to Argentina, going through the Andes, Central America, and Brazil and showing how these different utopias appeared and disappeared in all these places through the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries.

Much of the rest of the book focuses on the issue of modernity and the short circuit that occurred when it was applied to Latin America. The first instance was during conquest; the second with the Bourbon and Pombaline Reforms, as well as with independence; the third one was liberalism, when an interlude of imperial competition took place with Britain, Spain, and France flexing their muscles, but all of them eclipsed by the United States during the First World War. According to the author a fourth and final short circuit of modernity came after 1930 with the attempt at industrialization during the Cold War. Once again, these broad conceptual brushstrokes allow Pérez Brignoli to construct a deeply detailed and wide-ranging

<sup>2</sup> Tulio Halperín Donghi, *Historia contemporánea de América Latina* (Madrid: Alianza, 2005), 10.

history of the region that is especially attuned to the differences between extremely diverse countries over a very long span of time. The essays that follow, on Brazilian musician Heitor Villa-Lobos and the painting of Argentine Antonio Berni, are much more focused on specific experiences but still help provide a wider argument on the importance of culture in the period of modernity in the twentieth century. The author aims to provide a rich tapestry of experience that inserts Latin America into a global perspective. The diversity of the region does not concern him, as he is very careful to acknowledge it in the subsections on each area, and in this book, there is never any doubt that there is a good reason to study the whole region under one banner, just as Halperín Donghi did. The author acknowledges that deep differences exist within the region but that this is no reason not to consider it a congruent unit. The United States appears in the narrative, but it is not its driving force; Latin America exists culturally in its own terms and with its own history, albeit one that, as his two final chapters show, has had to confront postcolonial encroachments from both Europe and the United States.

These three books share a wider vision and privilege a bird's-eye view, both in terms of the area they study and the way they consider culture. Tenorio-Trillo and Pérez Brignoli take entirely opposing positions on how useful the term "Latin America" is, with the former considering it an anglicized perspective while the latter, who does not write in English or belong to the American academy, fully embraces it. Degiovanni, on the other hand, is less concerned with Latin America as an all-encompassing unit and more interested in looking at the cultural manifestations that made it possible for a discipline of study to emerge. The place where these books were written influences their views. Tenorio-Trillo, writing in English from the US academy, is very much critiquing the way in which Latin America is often reduced in that context to a generic term that loses its capacity to explain the great diversity of the region. In contrast, Pérez Brignoli writes from within Latin America with the advantage of personal knowledge of both the Southern Cone, where he is from, and Central America, where he works as an academic; the term allows him to present a detailed granular analysis without ever losing sight of the nuances and differences within Latin America. This leads to the conclusion that in fact it is not whether the term is useful or not but more about how it is used, and that for it to be helpful it has to be employed with much care. Degiovanni, who also writes from the North American academy, does not dwell on the current power dynamics when discussing Latin Americanisms but clearly shows that the United States and the commercial possibilities opened by Pan-Americanism influenced the development of the field of study.

### Hispanoamérica or Spanish America?

Antonio Annino moves away from the term "Latin America" and very squarely defines his area of interest as Hispanoamérica. To a large degree this is because he concentrates on the countries that used to be part of the Hispanic monarchy. The term, however, is not without history or controversy, as Franco and his followers reclaimed the term *hispanismo*, put forward by Miguel de Unamuno, as central to Spanish identity in a bid to reimagine their links with former colonies as united by language, culture, and religion. But by the 1990s the term had been fully recovered by historians who, like Halperín Donghi, were tasked with reassessing the legacy of the five hundred years of colonization.<sup>3</sup> Annino is one of the most important exponents of this tradition, as *Silencios y disputas en la historia de Hispanoamérica* brings together essays published between 1992, five hundred years after the arrival of Columbus in America, and 2012, the bicentennial of independence. Annino claims that in those twenty years a substantial change occurred in the understanding of independence, thanks to a large degree to the impact of work by François-Xavier Guerra, a French historian of Spanish descent.<sup>4</sup> The general assumption—that long-oppressed nations fought against a colonizing power for liberation—was challenged and in the years leading to the bicentennial it had been completely reversed. Independence is now seen as the result of the monarchical crisis set in motion by the Napoleonic invasion and the abdications. Although this book is mostly concerned with politics—how states were created and functioned, whether or not through elections, or how politics became more rural in the aftermath of independence as local areas were able to take control of their politics—the essays are extremely interested in the cultural underpinnings that made these processes possible.

Annino examines concepts such as liberalism, democracy, and sovereignty and unpacks their meaning in the context of Mexico, his region of study, but with much awareness that these ideas originate and develop in a much wider milieu. This allows him to bring together Max Weber and Norberto Bobbio and insert them into the debate of how representation functioned in Hispanoamérica. The vision remains, however, firmly

<sup>3</sup> Tulio Halperín Donghi, "Hispanoamérica en la encrucijada del Quinto Centenario," *Revista de Occidente*, no. 131 (1992): 7–36.

<sup>4</sup> François-Xavier Guerra, *Modernidad e independencias: Ensayos sobre las revoluciones hispánicas* (Mexico City: MAPFRE, 1992).

on the nation and the radical change brought by seeing it as causing the Hispanic monarchy's fall, instead of considering it as a consequence. Annino posits that this has resulted in a deep, Copernican historiographical transformation that questions many of the twentieth century's nationalist myths. For Annino change is only halfway, as plenty of questions remain. One of his main contributions is in the study of the connection of the local with the regional and the imperial. He attempts to examine notions of sovereignty and the tensions over who controlled it during the wars of independence and as new nations were created. The final section, on Mexico, illustrates many of the previously discussed general points. This bird's-eye view approach, however, fails to capture the detail of how politics actually functioned and changed throughout the period studied, and not just how it was thought of.

In contrast, Christopher Conway's *Nineteenth-Century Spanish America: A Cultural History* provides an in-depth analysis of how culture was practiced. Like Annino, Conway does not find it necessary to explain the reasons why he chooses to exclude Brazil from his discussions, and he remains close to the concept of Spanish America, the term Halperín Donghi uses for Hispanoamérica in the English version of his 1992 essay.<sup>5</sup> The decision is nevertheless important. Is it because of the shared language? Or because cultural traditions were influenced by the experience of being colonized by Spain, or by the establishing of republics instead of monarchies after independence? These questions remain unaddressed as Conway discusses how culture was "forged through the opposition and intertwining of tradition and modernity" (3). This is the book that engages most directly by far with the concept of culture and the role it played in the nineteenth century, not only among the elite but also in the popular sectors. One of the central ideas it develops is that of the recurring importance of the debate between civilization and barbarism, not just in Argentina, where it was developed by Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, but in the whole of Spanish America. Conway sets it within a wider discussion of dichotomies that were important in that time and place, such as conservative versus liberal, or urban versus rural, and that spoke to the overarching topic of modernity. He considers, however, "not that there is one Spanish America, but that nineteenth-century conversations about culture and its definition established an identifiable pattern across the hemisphere" (130).

With chapters on cities, print, theatricality, image, and musicality, the book explores a kaleidoscope of experiences from a wide variety of places, weaving a rich tapestry that brings culture to life, showing how it was embodied and lived in nineteenth-century Spanish America. The ambition is not to cover every single place and time but instead to illuminate each of the topics with detailed examples of what culture meant to those living in the region at the time. Without ever referring to it explicitly, Conway builds on the strong tradition of cultural history that made a powerful return following the cultural turn, and he is interested in documenting the way in which culture was experienced by a wide variety of actors.<sup>6</sup> His book works as an extremely inviting text that allows the reader to understand how culture was developed from printing presses to dance halls, to bull rings and circuses, providing more than a glimpse of the way people of all kinds lived their lives. In contrast to the other books reviewed so far, this one is more interested in how culture was practiced, lived, and understood rather than in the way thinkers thought about it. Tenorio-Trillo, Degiovanni, Pérez Brignoli, and Annino think about culture in terms of ideas and the history of ideas, whereas Conway concentrates on how that culture was created, disseminated, and experienced. His book is therefore an excellent introduction to the nineteenth century and contributes to wider debates on what culture is.

It is noteworthy that both of the authors reviewed in this section choose to identify their area of study in terms of the space colonized by Spain. In a sense this seems very logical in the case of Annino, as much of what he is discussing is linked to the collapse of the Spanish Empire. The differences and similarities with the Brazilian case, however, are so many that a comparison or even a mention of it would have been very useful. This is even more so in Conway's case, as many of the things he describes for Spanish America can also be found in Brazil. This brings us back to the previous three books and the advantages and pitfalls of terminology. Annino and Conway do not choose to write about Latin America, and that choice is in itself a comment on the term. They do it in large part because they do not cover Brazil, but neither do they discuss the reasons that lead them to limit their frame of analysis to just the Spanish American experience. It remains an open question whether they believe Latin America is not a useful concept or if they choose not to employ it simply because they do not think it is the right one to frame their studies. But the choice is not innocent; just as the concept Latin America has a long history, so does Hispanoamérica, although much less

<sup>5</sup> Tulio Halperín Donghi, "Backward Looks and Forward Glimpses from a Quincentennial Vantage Point," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 24 (1992): 219–234.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Burke, *What Is Cultural History?* (London: John Wiley, 1988).

so in its English translation as Spanish America. But do we study Anglo-America or Luso-America or indeed Franco-America? Is this category of study linked to language or to an experience of coloniality? It certainly is more commonly used in books that survey the colonial period or the nineteenth century rather than in studies of the twentieth century.

### Culture in Nineteenth-Century Cuba and Brazil

The final two books move away from these wider regional perspectives and concentrate firmly in particular cases. The choices are interesting because they differ from the experiences of the rest of the region as both remained monarchical much longer. As Cuba was still a colony of Spain and Brazil an independent empire, some would even question whether they can actually be conceived as part of Latin America. Like Conway's book, these books are more interested in a wider understanding of culture, in practices rather than the history of ideas. Both approach the experiences of culture in the nineteenth century in innovative ways that focus on the material and the symbolic. In *Intimations of Modernity: Civil Culture in Nineteenth-Century Cuba*, Louis A. Pérez Jr. explores life on the island without concerning himself with several of the topics that have dominated the more recent literature on Cuba. The book does not focus on slavery, race relations, sugar, or the fight for independence from Spain. Instead, it presents an in-depth study of everyday life, mainly in Havana but also in other important cities, with an aim of showing how change happened, imperceptibly yet in important ways, in a variety of situations from the use of public spaces and the development of a cosmopolitan café culture to changes in consumption, and especially in the use of fans.

Like Conway, Pérez aims to trace the advent of modernity in Cuba and how this was manifested in cultural practices. The role of women and how, during the nineteenth century, their participation began to change in this patriarchal society is central to the argument presented, especially how female voices began "to reach an ever-wider audience through the genres of poetry, fiction and drama, as well as criticism and the literary essay, as magazine feature writers, and newspaper columnists, reviewing theater productions, and books, authoring opinion pieces" (104). Other aspects studied in detail are consumption and dancing, the latter which provided an "opportunity for potentially dangerous forms of social interaction, where the hierarchies of social class, race and gender blurred in settings of casual interaction, often in circumstances of dangerous physical intimacy and eroticized performance" (175). But one of the cultural aspects that interests this author most is how the fan was used and how changes in its use show the way in which society changed. This is reminiscent of Arnold Bauer's excellent work on the importance of goods and the power they exert given the symbolic power they are imbued with.<sup>7</sup> The fan became a source of power for women, who employed it as a weapon making men submit to their desires. One question that recurs, however, is whether this was a particularly Cuban phenomenon, not just the use of the fan, but consumption in general and the changing role of women. All over Spanish America, and indeed in Brazil, there were similar experiences, which raises the question of how unique Cuba's experience was. Modernity was part of the way in which culture was experienced in the nineteenth century, and it is not clear how much of that was particular to Cuba.

In *Days of National Festivity in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 1823–1889*, Hendrik Kraay presents a case that has no comparison in the region, as it is concerned with the way in which the monarchy was publicly commemorated during the Empire. The Braganza dynasty's move to Rio during the Napoleonic invasion of the peninsula set in motion a very different trajectory for Brazil, making possible an independent constitutional monarchy in which liberals and conservatives vied for power through Parliament. To some degree this validates the claim that Brazil's experience was so different from Spanish America's as to warrant its separation from a wider Latin America. What emerges from a reading of Kraay's volume—about how "the celebrations of days of national festivity served as the occasion for Brazilians to debate the meaning and nature of the political institutions of the constitutional monarchy established in 1822–24" (2)—is how particular this was and how it set Brazil apart from the rest of the countries in the region. Although Brazil declared its independence at the same time as Mexico and Peru, the political institutions that ruled it were entirely different. Both of the former large Spanish viceroalties had flirted with the possibility of becoming monarchies, Mexico more than Peru, where there were actual attempts to make this happen, though not even there was this possible. Having said that, and considering the particularities of the Brazilian Empire, to what extent did the fact that the ceremonies studied were monarchical ceremonies make them so different? Or did they in fact share some similarities with those put together by their republican neighbors to celebrate new nations? The

<sup>7</sup> Arnold J. Bauer, *Goods, Power, History: Latin America's Material Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

politics around the unveiling of the equestrian statue of Pedro I, covered in one of the chapters, were not that dissimilar to the debates around public sculpture in Peru to celebrate the centennial of independence.<sup>8</sup>

The Brazilian Empire seemed to be quite stable, at least on the surface, even in the face of the political turmoil that led Pedro I, the first emperor, to abdicate in 1831, leaving his five-year-old son as his successor. The book captures in intricate detail the way in which the people of Brazil lived the celebrations of empire and how their relationship with it changed throughout the more or less sixty years of its existence. The first section deals with the creation of the empire and the process through which the festivities surrounding it led to consolidation but also opened spaces for contention between those who thought it should be done differently. The conflict between the radicals, liberals, and conservatives was played out mostly on the discursive arena, and the uprisings tended to be regional and unsuccessful enough not to really threaten the monarchy. Like the other books reviewed in this essay, this one is very much about culture and how it was experienced in this period, particularly regarding public festivities. Each of the chapters examines a topic and a period, using the celebration as a theme through which to delve deeper into how culture was lived. In more than five hundred pages, chapters move through the construction of the monarchy, the challenge set by the radicals and then the monarchical reaction, the development of festivities, the unveiling of the equestrian statue of Pedro I in 1862, how the stage was used to commemorate, the impact of the War of the Triple Alliance and of abolitionism, to finally reflect on the innovations introduced during the republic. One of the key findings of the book is the extent to which these official celebrations resonated with the Brazilian people, in particular the popular classes. The book is exhaustive in terms of detail, but the reader not so familiar with Brazil can find it overwhelming.

What emerges from reading these two case studies is that each country's experiences were very particular to their context, but both show the way in which culture serves as a conduit to understand how modernization took place in the nineteenth century. Pérez's detailed examination of practices such as using coaches, consuming fashion, and publishing illuminate how change took place. Similarly, Kraay, in his intricate descriptions of the public and private ways in which the days of national festivity were lived over a long period of time, also sheds light on how modernization reached many different sectors of society. As I have mentioned before, it is not the intention of either of these books to claim that any of their conclusions are relevant outside the area they concentrate on. But reading these alongside the other volumes reviewed, it becomes clear that even as there were particularities and specificities, these are examples of a wider culture. It is clear from what the authors describe that Cubans and Brazilians shared much with the rest of the region in terms of how culture was practiced. These books therefore have much to contribute to a wider discussion that interrogates culture in Latin America.

## Final Reflections

Is there a Latin American culture to be studied? Tenorio-Trillo clearly shows that the term is contested, but even as he objects to what he considers to be a category imposed from the United States he nevertheless embraces it, however reluctantly. Degiovanni, on the other hand, reminds us that Spaniards and Latin Americans were also involved in its creation, and that linkages of language and cultural production underpinned it. Some, like Pérez Brignoli, simply take it as a given, accepting that even though the region is diverse there is enough commonality for this approach to make sense. But whether the space for study should be further limited to Spanish America, as for Annino and Conway, hinges on the exclusion of Brazil. Is it because they understand culture as based on language? Or is it more linked to the colonial experience? These authors never explicitly address this, but their decision begs the question: Is Portuguese really so different, or did the contrasts emerge due to the type of imperial structures? These questions are pertinent when thinking about culture because the scale of the object of study matters, particularly in making comparisons. Is it possible to find enough commonality to study more than just nations? Or should the national unit be privileged? Kraay and Pérez, whose books do not extend their conclusions outside of Cuba and Brazil, leave the reader wondering if those comparisons might be possible or even useful. These books look at culture from different perspectives, from an issue to be debated among intellectuals to a way in which all members of society live and experience it. In doing so these authors interrogate what culture means and open a series of avenues to explore how it developed, making contributions to the understanding of political culture, material culture, and cultural production and consumption.

<sup>8</sup> Johanna Haman, *Leguía, el Centenario y sus esculturas* (Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, 2015).

## Author Information

Natalia Sobrevilla Perea's interests include state formation and political culture in the Andes from the end of the colonial period through the nineteenth century, as well as issues of identity, race and ethnicity, and military culture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in South America. She has published on a wide range of issues, from economic to social history, and has a special interest in intellectual history and constitutionalism. Her books include *The Caudillo of the Andes: Andres de Santa Cruz* (Cambridge University Press, 2011; Spanish edition, Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 2015), and the coedited collection *The Rise of Constitutional Government in the Iberian Atlantic World: The Impact of the Cádiz Constitution of 1812* (2015). Between 2015 and 2018 she led the international War and Nation Network, funded by a Leverhulme International Network Grant, which studied the links between war and the emergence of nations in South America. Between 2014 and 2015 she held a Leverhulme Fellowship, and between 2017 and 2018 a Humboldt Fellowship at the Free University of Berlin. Professor Sobrevilla Perea has contributed to the creation of the digital collection of the Museum of Memory in Lima, Peru (LUM), and the digitalization of newspapers with the support of the British Library Endangered Programme. She is a regular contributor on issues of history and archives in the press and publishes a bimonthly column in Peru's prestigious newspaper *El Comercio*.

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