

## Originality and Resistance in Latin American Culture

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### English Abstract

This article examines the question of Latin American cultural identity from a philosophical perspective informed by the logic and semiotics of Charles Sanders Peirce. A Peircean perspective was first suggested in Fernando Zalamea's *Ariel y Arisbe* (2000) which argues that Latin America is a place of cultural synthesis at the margins of, but closed linked to, the West. Zalamea's view is examined here to argue that while Latin American culture is characterized by a process of synthesis of various sources one of which is European, the cultural aspects of resistance and originality need to be more fully considered. Latin American universalism or cosmopolitanism is not to be confused with the Occidentalism that some elites have advocated. Thus, Latin American culture may be understood as an evolving process of resistance and synthesis that is original, creative, and its own locus of freshness in relation to other cultures. Brief case studies from Latin American poetry and popular music are adduced to substantiate the argument.

### Resumen en español

Este artículo examina la cuestión de la identidad cultural latinoamericana desde una perspectiva filosófica basada en la lógica y la semiótica de Charles Sanders Peirce. Un enfoque peirceano ya fue sugerido por Fernando Zalamea en *Ariel y Arisbe* (2000), donde arguye que Latinoamérica es un lugar de síntesis cultural en los márgenes de Occidente, si bien íntimamente relacionado con éste. Aquí se examina el punto de vista de Zalamea y se argumenta que, aunque la cultura latinoamericana se caracteriza por un proceso de síntesis de varias fuentes, una de las cuales es europea, los aspectos culturales de resistencia y originalidad se deben considerar más cuidadosamente. El "universalismo" o "cosmopolitismo" latinoamericano no debe confundirse con el occidentalismo que algunas élites han defendido. De este modo, se puede entender la cultura latinoamericana como un proceso evolutivo de resistencia y síntesis que es original, creativo y cuya situación de frescura y novedad es única en relación con otras culturas. Se aducen breves estudios de caso de la poesía y la música popular latinoamericanas para corroborar el argumento.

### Resumo em português

Este artigo examina a questão da identidade cultural latino-americana de uma perspectiva filosófica informada pela lógica e pela semiótica de Charles Sanders Peirce. Uma perspectiva peirciana já foi sugerida por Fernando Zalamea em seu *Ariel y Arisbe* (2000), que defende ser a América Latina um lugar de síntese cultural às margens do Ocidente, embora a ele intimamente relacionado. A concepção de Zalamea é examinada aqui para se defender que, embora a cultura latino-americana seja caracterizada por um processo de síntese de várias fontes - das quais uma é a europeia - os aspectos culturais de resistência e originalidade precisam ser

considerados plenamente. O universalismo ou o cosmopolitismo da América Latina não deve ser confundido com o Ocidentalismo advogado por algumas elites. Dessa maneira, a cultura latino-americana pode ser entendida como um processo em evolução de resistência e síntese, original e criativo, cuja situação de frescor e novidade é único relativamente a outras culturas. Breves estudos de casos tirados da poesia e da música popular da América Latina são analisados para dar apoio substantivo ao argumento.

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The search for national and continental identity has been a major theme in Spanish American thought since its beginnings as American in the struggle for independence from Spain. In the nineteenth century intellectual and political leaders—such as Simón Bolívar in his “Jamaica Letter” (1815) and his “Address at Angostura” (1819), and José Martí in “Our America” (1892)—discussed the question of the ethnic and cultural identity of Spanish Americans in the context of advancing the political and military struggles for independence that they led for South America and Cuba respectively. In the twentieth century José Enrique Rodó’s seminal essay *Ariel* brought to the forefront, with renewed vigor, the problem of Latin American identity and spurred a literary and philosophical debate in which there have been distinguished participants such as Pedro Henríquez Ureña, Fernando Ortiz, Alfonso Reyes, Samuel Ramos, José Vasconcelos, Francisco Romero, Leopoldo Zea, and Octavio Paz, among others.[1] A fundamental question has been whether Latin America has a unified identity in which each particularity—political, social, cultural—is an intrinsic part of a universal whole, or whether there is no such identity, only local or regional particularities devoid of any universality. In this essay we address one dimension of this question, taking as a new starting point Fernando Zalamea’s *Ariel y Arisbe* (2000), a work that brought a fresh Peircean perspective to this problem and opened up some possibilities for further analysis of the question of Latin American identity, especially with regard to its culture. As Gregory Pappas puts it in his review of *Ariel y Arisbe*, Zalamea addresses from a Peircean stance questions that have been central to Latin American thought: “Is there a Latin American identity that goes beyond the boundaries of its nations and differences? Is Latin America simply a place in the world where other cultures have met but without developing a distinctive character (i.e., independently of its relations to others)? Should people in Latin America be content with merely affirming what is most local and regional to them?” (Pappas 2001, 150).

Zalamea’s main concern in *Ariel y Arisbe* is that “postmodern” ideas in Latin America have led to the false conclusion that there is no Latin American unity, no synthetic universality, but only local particularities. This conclusion thwarts the great political and cultural projects of unity; at the very least, Latin American thought becomes confused about and out of sync with Latin American reality. In response, Zalamea attempts to rescue the Universalist, cosmopolitan tradition of Latin American thought since it is more adequate to Latin American *reality*. Deploying some central concepts of

Peirce's architectonic system, such as universality, generality, continuity, and the logic of relations, Zalamea shows that the "postmodern fallacy" is based on two true, explicit premises and one false, implicit premise. The explicit premises are: (1) in order to know reality, modernity elaborates general systems that try to comprehend the world, but (2) these systems are constructed at a metalevel that depends on the local circumstances in and from which the systems are constructed. Therefore, access to the universal is self-contradictory since the global systems necessarily depend on the local ones. The false, implicit premise is that in order to coordinate the local or particular spaces a previous Absolute space is required for their integration; that is, the universal must be anchored in the Absolute. Zalamea, by way of Peirce's logic of relations, replies that the universal is cognizable without the necessity of the Absolute. The progressive, relational integration of the different local systems allows the detection of some invariants, that is, of some universals within all these systems—e.g., Peirce's three categories of originality (firstness), resistance (secondness), and generality (thirdness). Pappas summarizes Zalamea's thesis succinctly:

Peirce showed how universals are possible without absolutes. He provides an evolutionary model where there are constants or stabilities that have persisted without the need to fix their reality as an absolute. Hence, we are not always trapped in what is local and need not succumb to extreme relativism. From a Peircean perspective postmodern thought relies on a dogma (and dualisms) that ignores the complementary reality of what is general-universal with what is local. It is the mutual modification of both that makes reality so complex. Peirce's radical turn [Zalamea 2000, 139] avoids dualisms by affirming that relations precede subject and object. (Pappas 2001, 151)

Peirce's architectonic, then, demonstrates the *real* possibility of accessing the universal from a substratum of relative relations, without the necessity of presupposing the Absolute (Zalamea 2000, 179-80).

With this theoretical disputation in the background, Zalamea argues more broadly that Latin America is a place of generality and relationality, of resistance and hybridization, at the limits of Western culture; that is, Latin America is a relational place within a cultural continuum. The identity of Latin America, therefore, does not consist in a sum of characteristics predicable of a Latin American essence, as many intellectual efforts in Latin America have presupposed. Rather, Zalamea argues that the concept of essential identity must be foregone in favor of a concept of Latin America as a place of mediation and relationality between the "center" of Western culture—i.e., Europe—and its borders (Zalamea 2000, 113-22). From its place at the limit of a continuum, Latin America resists the center, and the force of this resistance liberates tremendous creative and synthetic energy in the formation of artistic, literary, musical, social, ethnic, and political hybrids. This act of resistance requires a two-fold effort: on the one hand, it demands profound knowledge of that which is being resisted, and on the other it demands a response that is no mere negative reply but positive creation. For Zalamea, Latin America's cultural resistance to the center of Western culture from its limits consists in synthesis and creation, not reaction (Zalamea 2000, 176-78).

We believe Zalamea's work points out an interesting philosophical perspective from which to reflect on Latin America's culture. Prior to developing our analysis, in the first section of this article we offer some preliminary clarifications regarding our purpose in inquiring philosophically into Latin American culture and the way in which we employ terms such as "identity" and "culture." In the second section we advance our thesis on the character of Latin American culture based on a critique of some of Zalamea's ideas on this question, including some relevant case studies of Latin American cultural expression, before drawing a brief general conclusion in the third section.

### **Preliminary Considerations on Addressing the Question of Latin American Culture**

As we indicated at the outset, the question of national and continental identity in Latin America has had a long and, we should add, controversial history. Asking the question anew may raise philosophical suspicions from the start. Even without revisiting the entire controversy, we can observe that readings of Octavio Paz and Jorge Luis Borges, for instance, might prevent us from thinking of Latin American nations in terms of "identity," and we may tend to think that attempts to find "identity" are violent. The invention of essentialist "national identities" during the nineteenth century, for example, was a major strategy used by local oligarchies in various Latin American nations in order to promote the formation of small nation states that they could more easily control, in detriment of projects of unification or federation such as that of Bolívar in South America.[2] Thus one may ask what is the main point of searching for an identity: are the aims political, revolutionary, social, economical, or otherwise? Furthermore, among the things that unite the countries of Latin America, one of the most apparent is the existence of the same problems in various countries: a high percentage of poverty, oligarchic and predatory elites, rich natural resources, and a lack of clear national projects, which can itself be seen as a symptom of a lack of a clear sense of identity. Unity based on shared aims or ideals is far less evident. So what is the purpose of asking the question?

First and foremost, our aim is self-understanding with regard to our larger continental *culture*. We propose a study in the philosophy of culture, particularly with respect to Latin America, in order to understand as systematically as possible the elements of identity and difference, continuity and discontinuity, that characterize the culture of Latin America. Perhaps we are responding to a basic philosophical drive to reflect on and understand ourselves, at least with regard to our cultural context, without trying to posit any cultural determinism. We think that it is worthwhile to try to understand philosophically the larger culture in which we live or have lived and consider our own, a culture in which 515 million people lived in the year 2000.[3]

We are aware, however, that any such effort at cultural reflection has political dimensions and consequences. Although our intention is not to analyze, much less advocate, any particular political projects here, we do think that in this twenty-first

century Latin American nations are being forced to reflect on, address, and engage the larger cultural, social, economic, and political context that surrounds them. Isolationism and “living with our backs turned toward each other,” so to speak, is no longer possible. Thus our proposed effort is, at least implicitly, oriented toward the future, toward the possibility of Latin American nations having a clearer sense of identity and difference, continuity and discontinuity, in their shared culture—a self-understanding that may elucidate social and political goals that could be held and pursued in common. In this sense, the ultimate upshot of our investigation may not be so different from the history of one of the main strains of Spanish American thought. As Octavio Paz, following Spanish philosopher José Gaos, writes in *Labyrinth of Solitude*, “Spanish American thought begins as a justification of Independence but transforms itself almost immediately into a project: America is not so much a tradition to be carried on as it is a future to be realized” (Paz 1985, 119). Here in fact we find a point of contact with distinctly future-oriented pragmatist thought, which would conceive the cultural, social, and political life of Latin American nations to be defined and guided not so much by tradition as by their aims and ideals for the future.

Second, we recognize that the notion of cultural identity is highly problematic, especially because it is usually associated with essentialist and determinist notions of a national or regional “being” and with the political elimination of difference. This difficulty has muddled otherwise distinguished efforts at understanding national or regional cultures in Latin America. For instance, it has been argued that although in *Labyrinth of Solitude* Octavio Paz tries to avoid any essentialist notion of culture, he has a tendency to write of authentic social, cultural, and juridical forms as those that would give expression to a Mexican “being” (Campos 2007; see Paz 1997, 163). This gives rise to a troublesome conception of inauthenticity as the “ontological rupture” between a Mexican “being” and its historical forms of political expression (Aguilar 1978, p. 36). This undermines Paz’s overall thrust, which is rather to conceive of authentic institutions or “forms” as those that serve as vehicles for the *living cultural practices* of particular societies such as that of Mexico (Campos 2007). We thus want to reject any ontological notion of a continental identity linked to an essential being. If we are to keep any conception of identity, it should be closer to identity understood as the character of our cultural practices, of our ways of living communally.

Moreover, we think of Latin American culture as an *evolving general process* rather than as the expression of a fixed essential being. It is a process that has a general direction and structure, without being overdetermined in advance or completely devoid of generality and continuity, and without reducing spontaneity, freshness, and originality in its evolution. Peirce’s system thus provides the best philosophical framework to inquire into the structure of this process. Seeing this clearly, Zalamea has opened a nonessentialist path to conceptualize Latin American culture. As Pappas observes, “Zalamea tends...to contrast Peirce’s view of universals with traditionalist essentialist views and with recent postmodern thought. For Peirce universals are generals that evolve, they are not static, as in Plato. The Peircean continuum is a space where the particular fuses into the general. But Peirce’s system also avoids the nominalistic and relativistic emphasis of the contemporary world” (Pappas 2001, 151).

Given these considerations, then, we think it best to avoid as much as possible the term “identity” due to its essentialist baggage. We will rather characterize Latin American culture as an evolving general process, and if we make limited use of the term “identity” it should be understood as the character of the cultural practices that manifest that process.

Third, since we are proposing a study in Latin American culture, we should define the sense in which we use the term “culture.” For the purposes of this article, we will define culture as “the web of coordinated and interrelated habits that guide the social life of a community and the manifold forms of expression of these habits.” These social habits guide not only the political and economic life of a community—that is, the ways to organize power, use resources, produce and distribute wealth, and employ the very daily labor of its members—but also, for example, its various forms of artistic and culinary expression and its sporting and leisure activities. Thus political institutions, artistic genres, and culinary and sporting traditions are all part of the Latin American culture that interests us, even if for our purposes in this study we concentrate on some examples of literary and musical culture.[4]

Finally, one may ask, if our interest is in Latin American culture why write in English? We offer two reasons. First, we aim for this article to serve as a bridge between recent scholarship on Latin American thought written in English (e.g., Mendieta 1999, Gracia 2000 and 2008, Hurtado 2006, and Pereda 2006) and Spanish- and Portuguese-language scholarship on the philosophy of culture with a pragmatist orientation (e.g., Zalamea 2000, Esteban 2001). Our essay is a response to Guillermo Hurtado’s call for a Pan-American philosophical dialogue (2006, 212-13), especially among pragmatists and Latin American philosophers who insist that “our thinking must be congruous with our reality” (2006, 211). Second, we would like to give play to Jorge Gracia’s recent thesis that Latino philosophy includes “the philosophical work produced by Latinos both in Latin America and the United States” (2008, 129). In our case, we aim to be part of a dialogue among philosophers that share an interest in various aspects of Latin American life and culture, whether they write in English, Spanish, Portuguese, or French in the Americas. With these preliminary considerations stated explicitly, we now turn to our main analysis.

## Cultural Originality and Resistance

In favoring the Universalist tradition in Latin American thought, Fernando Zalamea effectively demonstrates the relationality of Latin America to what he considers to be the “center” of Western culture. However, he often omits the indigenous aspects of Latin American relationality, and he openly dismisses the *indigenista* tradition that argues for Latin American identity as *Native American* and not as Western.[5] We doubt this need be so, especially in a Peircean analysis. The very understanding of Latin America as a relational and mediating place at the limits of Western culture could synthesize the *Universalist* and the *indigenista* traditions of Latin American thought.

That is, Latin America is not only related to the West as a locus of creative synthesis by way of resistance to the cultural center; it is also related to the West as a place of otherness, of being outside the limits of the West. In Latin America, resistance to the West is also openly and manifestly at work as otherness, and this resistance gains much of its force from its indigenous cultures. The same could be said, we believe, about the influence of African culture in many regions of the Americas: the African elements of Latin American culture are not well understood if they are regarded as being at the limits of the West.

However, Zalamea goes so far as to claim that Latin America is one of the “internal borders” of Western culture, the other internal border being Russia, while Africa and “the East” are its “external borders” (Zalamea 2000, 119). Leaving aside for now the misguided culture-centrism in this view, this belittles the importance not only of Native American but also of African and even Asian influences in Latin American culture. In order to retain Zalamea’s position, one possibility would be to claim that Latin America is also related to the West as a place of growth of its limits—that is, as the *otherness* of indigenous, African, and Asian America is relationally linked to the so-called “Western center,” it becomes an integral part of a continuum, and Latin America is the locus of the integration. However, even the very concept of Latin America as limit requires further inquiry: If Latin America is outside, at, and inside the limits of the West, what happens to the conception of Latin America as limit? What happens to the center of the continuum? Is the universal continuum within which Latin America belongs really a Western continuum and is Europe really the center of the continuum? Perhaps we can propose an alternative thesis, namely, Latin America mediates, as a place of cultural convergence and synthesis, between two extremes: the West and its others.

But even this is inadequate because, in the respect under consideration, Zalamea’s view fundamentally, though probably unwittingly, subscribes to some version of what Roberto Fernández Retamar calls the “white legend” about the “civilized West” (Fernández Retamar 1976, 60). Fernández refers to “that singular myth according to which Reason was revealed to Greece, became an Empire in Rome, and assimilated a Religion that was destined, after several centuries in hibernation, to reappear like an armed prophet in the works of the (post-barbarian) Westerners, who were to spend the next several centuries fulfilling the onerous mission of bringing the light of ‘civilization’ to the rest of the planet” (Fernández Retamar 1976, 63). This myth belies “the fact that the so-called Greek miracle had solid Afro-Asian roots” (Fernández Retamar 1976, 65). It also belies the historical fact that Spain “was the conduit through which the influence of Arab civilization...and Arab culture...entered Europe and brought new life to the still pallid European cultural world. This influence made itself felt in its philosophy, its literature, its science, its technology, its agriculture, its customs, in Aquinas, and in Dante” (Fernández Retamar 1976, 64). The proposals of some Spanish American thinkers to “Westernize” in order to modernize our societies and cultures have historically been culprits in subscribing to these misguided views (Fernández Retamar 1976, 57). Moreover, as Fernández would insist, if we want to understand the roots and character of Latin American culture we need to acknowledge the importance of our Iberian heritage (Fernández Retamar 1976, 56), and for this we

must remember that “Christians, Moors, and Jews, all equally Spanish, lived side by side for more than seven centuries, mutually and fruitfully influencing each other” (Fernández Retamar 1976, 63-64). The notion that Latin America is linked culturally to a Western center is therefore extremely inadequate.

A central problem, then, is Zalamea’s identification of the Universalist, cosmopolitan aspects of Latin American culture with its allegedly Western aspects. There is a tradition of identifying universalism with “Occidentalism” among Latin American intellectuals. According to this view, Latin American culture is mainly characterized by receiving, critiquing, revising, and synthesizing Western culture. But this identification of universalism with Occidentalism need not be the case. Instead, Latin American culture can be regarded as Universalist and cosmopolitan precisely because it is not merely or mainly Western but Native American, African, and Asian as well. All of these sources feed the peculiar cultural syntheses at play in Latin America.

To give a concrete example, Zalamea appeals to case studies in Latin American arts and letters to show that, at their best, they are cosmopolitan and occidental. The Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier, for instance, whom Zalamea includes as part of the Universalist tradition, is at once a master of the letters in America and the West. But we can also say that the poet Nicolás Guillén is a cosmopolitan writer whose work reflects and expresses at once his Spanish and Afro-Cuban roots. We can call them both cosmopolitan Americans, without needing to label them Western. Consider Guillén’s poem “Búcate Plata” from his first book of poetry, *Motivos de Son* (1930), written with the structure and rhythm of *son*, a Cuban musical genre:

*Búcate plata,  
búcate plata,  
porque no doy un paso má:  
etoy a arró con galleta,  
na má.*

*Yo bien sé cómo etá to,  
pero viejo, hay que comer:  
búcate plata,  
búcate plata,  
porque me voy a correr.*

*Depués dirán que soy mala,  
y no me querrán tratar,  
pero amor con hambre, viejo,  
¡qué va!  
Con tanto zapato nuevo,  
¡qué va!  
Con tanto reló, compadre,  
¡qué va!  
Con tanto lujo, mi negro,  
¡qué va!* (Chang-Rodriguez and Filer 1988, 396)

If one listens to the poem, one hears the accents of Afro-Cuban speakers and the



rhythm of one of their traditional musical genres. At the same time, it is obviously recited in Spanish. We believe it would be inexact and unnecessary to characterize it as either Western or African; it is Afro-Cuban and it is part of the shared cultural heritage of Latin America. Guillén himself wrote musically on the synthetic character of his own culture in his poem “Balada de los dos abuelos” from his book *West Indies, Ltd.* (1934):

*Sombras que sólo yo veo,  
me escoltan mis dos abuelos.*

*Lanza con punta de hueso,  
tambor de cuero y madera:  
mi abuelo negro.  
Gorguera en el cuello ancho,  
gris armadura guerrera:  
mi abuelo blanco.*

*Pie desnudo, torso pétreo  
los de mi negro;  
pupilas de vidrio antártico  
las de mi blanco!*

*Africa de selvas húmedas  
y de gordos gongos sordos...  
—¡Me muero!  
(Dice mi abuelo negro.)  
Aguaprieta de caimanes,  
verdes mañanas de cocos...  
—¡Me canso!  
(Dice mi abuelo blanco.)  
Oh velas de amargo viento,  
galeón ardiendo en oro...  
—¡Me muero!  
(Dice mi abuelo negro.)  
¡Oh costas de cuello virgen  
engañadas de abalorios...!  
—¡Me canso!  
(Dice mi abuelo blanco.)  
¡Oh puro sol repujado,  
preso en el aro del trópico;  
oh luna redonda y limpia  
sobre el sueño de los monos!*

*¡Qué de barcos, qué de barcos!  
¡Qué de negros, qué de negros!  
¡Qué largo fulgor de cañas!  
¡Qué látigo el del negrero!  
Piedra de llanto y de sangre,  
venas y ojos entreabiertos,  
y madrugadas vacías,  
y atardeceres de ingenio,  
y una gran voz, fuerte voz,  
despedazando el silencio.  
¡Qué de barcos, qué de barcos,*

*qué de negros!*

*Sombras que sólo yo veo,  
me escoltan mis dos abuelos.*

*Don Federico me grita  
y Taita Facundo calla;  
los dos en la noche sueñan  
y andan, andan.  
Yo los junto.*

*—¡Federico!  
¡Facundo! Los dos se abrazan.  
Los dos suspiran. Los dos  
las fuertes cabezas alzan;  
los dos del mismo tamaño,  
bajo las estrellas altas;  
los dos del mismo tamaño,  
ansia negra y ansia blanca,  
los dos del mismo tamaño,  
gritan, sueñan, lloran, cantan.  
Sueñan, lloran, cantan.  
Lloran, cantan.  
¡Cantan!*

(in Chang-Rodriguez and Filer, 1988, 396)

The very title of the poem labels it a ballad, a song. The poem sings to the cultural origins of Afro-Cubans, personified in the poet's grandparents, a "white" Spanish soldier and a "black" African slave, and it ends with these poetical grandparents embracing, screaming, dreaming, crying, and singing together—singing through the voice of the poet that joins them. After listening to these poems and reflecting on the culture that inspires them, it would be imprecise to label them as "Western" or, worse, "marginally Western."

Moreover, while Zalamea partially recognizes the importance that resistance to Western culture plays in the forging of Latin American culture, he disregards the importance of originality and creativity in our culture independent of links to the West. This may be due in part to the case studies that he considers, most of which refer to writers and painters working in genres that are typically associated with the "high culture" of the West.[6] Latin American culture is original not merely in resisting or reworking its Western cultural heritage, however, but also in creating fresh forms of expression that are largely independent of Western influences. Afro-Caribbean and Afro-Brazilian music are cases in point: they are Latin American musical traditions that draw extensively from sources outside of the West to create new, original, living cultural expressions.

Let us consider a case from Brazilian culture. We should ponder the lesson we learn from the following poem, originally written as lyrics to a song titled "Querelas do Brasil," composed by Maurício Tapajós with lyrics by Aldir Blanc:

*O Brazil não conhece o Brasil*

*O Brasil nunca foi ao Brasil  
Tapi, jabuti, liana, alamandra, alialaúde  
Piau, ururau, aquiataúde  
Piau, carioca, moreca, meganha  
Jobim akarare e jobim açu  
Oh, oh, oh*

In this first stanza, the idea that the Americanized elite (in the Anglo sense of America as United States of America) does not know the real country strikes us directly: *Brazil* does not know *Brasil*. In Portuguese, *Brasil* is the correct spelling; the internationalized, anglicized spelling *Brazil* can be seen as a synecdoche either of the relation that the elite establishes with the country and its genuine values or of the violent process of capitalization and Americanization of the national culture advanced by the cultural industry. This is ironically indicated by the words *alialaúde* and *aquiataúde*. *Alialaude*: *ali* (there) is the instrument, the *lute* of the troubadours. Where is this *ali* (there)? Possibly, or even plausibly, in one of the centers of the capitalist economy, Europe or the United States of America. The idea is that outside *Brasil* music is better. It may also be a reference to the positive assessments Brazilian culture receives abroad while being despised in the country – the music is in the chant of the animals, hidden in the forest, but we do not listen. Brazilian cultural products become valuable in the country only after receiving appraisals abroad; and sometimes this is even more complicated, for there is often a kind of despising gaze of envy accompanying this assessment. *Aquiataúde*: *aqui* (here), in *Brasil*, *ataúde*—that is, coffin or casket—meaning that here art is dead, or the ears of the Americanized elite and people are dead to native forms of art, which are generally considered in a pejorative way only as manifestations of folklore. The general idea is quite clear—the need for a period abroad brings legitimation to certain cultural products. The main reference is clearly to Antonio Carlos Jobim, Brazil's greatest popular music composer, father of *bossa-nova* (together with João Gilberto and Vinícius de Moraes). Jobim appears as *akarare* and as *açu*, two indigenous adjectives: the first one possibly meaning poison, and the latter meaning big or great. Jobim in fact integrated all kinds of Brazilian rhythms and forms of music in his work through the years—*samba*, *maxixe*, *xaxado*, *frevo*, *carimbó*, *xote*, and so on—synthesizing everything in this musical language called *bossa-nova*, and going much further than any other Brazilian composer toward incorporating formal structures that he learned from Villa-Lobos, Debussy, and Chopin, to cite only three major composers.

The message, then, is clear. The following stanzas emphasize it by stating that the richness of the genuine Brazilian culture is not acknowledged by Americanized Brazil:

*Pererê, camará, gororô, olererê  
Piriri, ratatá, karatê, olará*

*O Brasil não merece o Brasil  
O Brasil tá matando o Brasil  
Gereba, saci, caandra, desmunhas, ariranha, aranha  
Sertões, guimarães, bachianas, águas  
E marionaíma, ariraribóia*

*Na aura das mãos do Jobim açu*

*Oh, oh, oh  
Gererê, sarará, cururu, olerê  
Ratatá, bafafá, sururu, olará  
Do Brasil S.O.S. ao Brasil  
Tinhorão, urutú, sucuri  
O Jobim, sabiá, bem-te-vi  
Cabuçu, cordovil, Caxambi, olerê  
Madureira, Olaria e Bangu, olará  
Cascadura, Água Santa, Pari, olerê  
Ipanema e Nova Iguaçu, olará  
Do Brasil S.O.S. ao Brasil  
Do Brasil S.O.S. ao Brasil*

In mentioning “Tinhorão” the authors refer to the contention of Brazilian music historian José Ramos Tinhorão against *bossa-nova*, which he claims to be Americanized.[7] The authors respond with irony—Tinhorão misses the point and misidentifies the enemies, which are not Jobim or *bossa-nova*, but the unwillingness or incapacity to recognize the diversity and richness of Brazilian culture, composed of European, indigenous American, African, and Latin-American ingredients with no preeminence of one over the others. The final lines, moreover, call on all social classes—the synecdoche again, the names of the neighborhoods standing for the richer (Ipanema) and the poorer (Madureira, Bangu, Pari, and so on) classes.

The very rhythm of the song is difficult to classify.[8] It is apparently a traditional *bossa-nova* beat, but it is much more complicated than that. The traditional Brazilian 2/2 makes it clear that the squared 4/4 preferred in the northern hemisphere is not the best choice, and this works as a metonymy of the appropriate lens through which one must see *Brasil*—not one imported from abroad, but one that approximates the country to its Latin-American neighbors and its native roots. The 2/2 of the song is not a traditional *samba*, having a *contratempo* that can be played so as to be midway between traditional *samba* and more modern *bossa-nova*, or so as to be midway between the minimalist *bossa-nova*'s *samba* beat (the guitar emulating the *cuíca*) and the syncopé of the bolero. At any rate, our main point is that both the lyrics and musical composition of the song resist, in a creative and original way, the sort of “Occidentalist” or “Westernizing” position that is intellectually upheld or lived as an attitude by some cultural and intellectual elites in Latin America, and that Zalamea’s analysis and case studies tend to promote. The verse “Brazil does not know *Brasil*” could be generalized to such positions and attitudes across Latin America. Moreover, this general character of cultural originality and creativity, exemplified here by a Brazilian case, may be found by way of particular cultural expressions across all of Latin America.

A recognizable strength of Zalamea’s approach is its appeal to cultural case studies. To his literary examples we have added musical ones – or poetical ones closely akin to music – to present, we believe, a more adequate characterization of Latin American culture. Moreover, we feel that Peircean semiotics provide good reasons to investigate cultural originality and creativity through music, even through

those genres that, as noted above, are sometimes contemptuously termed “folkloric.” According to Lucia Santaella, the language of music can be classified as a kind of language without reference outside of itself – it presents only structural relations without specifying them for the actual world or for another semiotic system. That is, music is iconic and does not represent anything outside itself because it lacks indexes (Santaella 2005, 103ff).[9]\_\_Of course, the lyrics of a song can serve this purpose as well as symbolic purpose (signify by convention), as the metonymy and synecdoche above show. Icons are kinds of signs corresponding to the category of firstness. The primary aspects of firstness are possibility, vagueness, indetermination, spontaneity, presentness, immediacy, quality, feeling, uncertainty, hypothesis, and conjecture (CP 1.357-58).[10] The icon then signifies its object by embodying a quality it has in common with the object or by resembling such a quality – it is a quality sign. This seems evident in music, where simple qualitative immediacy, pure presentness, moving and fleeing away predominate. Music allows for comparison to nothing concrete, actual, or determinate.

Moreover, Felicia Kruse (2007) argues that although music is iconic in embodying feeling-content whose proper means of expression is precisely through music, musical signification is not purely iconic since interpreting it involves not only feeling but learning. As Kruse puts it, “To experience the feelings conveyed in a piece of music, one must develop some acquaintance with the music’s style and form by means of logical interpretants: learning to understand at least the basic significative features of the music’s style tradition and developing habits of listening that will allow the music to ‘make sense’” (2007, 630 – 31). Learning to interpret music, we suggest, is contextualized by culture; by living in and being part of a culture people often learn to recognize in at least some musical genres the sources, influences, and traditions that are synthesized in their culture at large. Feeling and learning, some of which is mediated by culture, are both involved in fully experiencing music. As an icon involving symbolic—conventional and cultural—elements, music makes possible, without completely determining, rich experiential and interpretive possibilities. In fact, a major lesson we take from Peirce’s semiotic is that we should not assume that under every interpretation of a sign there lies a definite actual logical and final interpretant – interpretation is always a matter of opening ways, indicating possibilities, constructing horizons.[11]

Most important for us here are these inherent undetermined possibilities of music —music has the capacity to integrate several aspects of the same reality without specifying any deductive relation, since it is primarily iconic. As such, it does not determine any hierarchy but rather integrates all in a continuum of possibilities without determining which *linearity* to follow – without recipes, without defining premises from which conclusions are necessarily to follow. In the case of musical genres that draw from various traditions and cultures, then, there is no need to claim hierarchy or preeminence of any one source over the others, or for the idea of cultural centers and margins. Music thus provides a good way of exploring important aspects of Latin American culture that may be overlooked through artistic genres with different semiotic characteristics. When we consider, for instance, the music of Violeta Parra, Milton

Nascimento, Silvio Rodríguez, Egberto Gismonti, Hermeto Paschoal, Chico Buarque de Hollanda and his musical friendship with Pablo Milanés (and others), Caetano Veloso, Astor Piazzola in Argentina, and Leo Brower in Cuba, who studied Heitor Villa-Lobos' works to compose his own guitar works, we find that music is an important source of cultural identification among Latin Americans. It is inaccurate to tag the common cultural character that underlies this identification as "Western," much less to imply that it is "marginally Western."

## Conclusion

In his essay "Caliban," Roberto Fernández Retamar makes some observations that are useful for understanding the importance of resistance and originality in the evolution of Latin American culture. He quotes José Martí: "We are descended from Valencian fathers and Canary Island mothers and feel the inflamed blood of Tamanaco and Paramaconi coursing through our veins; we see the blood that fell amid the brambles of Mount Calvary as our own, along with that shed by the naked and heroic Caracas as they struggled breast to breast with the gonzalos in their iron-plated armor" (Martí 1884; quoted in Fernández Retamar 1971, 19). Then he comments, "Martí's rejection of the ethnocide that Europe practiced is *total*. No less total is his identification with the American peoples that offered heroic resistance to the invader, and in whom Martí [saw] the natural forerunners of the Latin-American *independentistas*" (Fernández Retamar 1971, 19-20). Crucially, he then adds, "Martí, however, dreams not of a restoration now impossible but of the future integration of our America—an America rising organically from a firm grasp in its true roots to the heights of authentic modernity" (Fernández Retamar 1971, 20). In short, Martí's vision of an emergent Latin American culture appeals centrally and extensively to a Native American legacy of outright resistance to Europe. In fact, Latin American culture "has become a possibility *in the first place* because of the many who have struggled, the many who still struggle, for the existence of that 'great people' that in 1881, Martí still referred to as Spanish America but that some years later he would prefer to name, more accurately, 'Our America'" (Fernández Retamar 1971, 38). A tradition of resistance, then, is at the very core of our culture.

Moreover, Fernández Retamar argues, "In the face of what the conquistadores, the Creole oligarchs, and the imperialists and their flunkies have attempted, our culture—taking this term in its broad historical and anthropological sense—has been in a constant process of formation: our authentic culture, the culture created by the mestizo populace, those descendants of the Indians and blacks and Europeans whom Bolívar and Artigas led so well" (Fernández Retamar 1971, 36). This mestizo culture, which is in constant evolution, is a creative synthesis but it is not merely or mainly a "Western" synthesis in any way. As Fernández Retamar puts it, our mestizo "culture—like every living culture, especially at its dawn—is on the move. It has, of course, its own distinguishing characteristics, even though it was born—like every culture, although in this case in a particularly planetary way—of a synthesis. And it does not limit itself in

the least to a mere repetition of the elements that formed it” (Fernández Retamar 1971, 37). The character of the mestizo culture of Latin America as a creative synthesis “is especially apparent if we consider that [it] is formed not only from European elements... but also from the indigenous and the African” (Fernández Retamar 1971, 37). This is what a strongly “Occidentalist” position such as Zalamea’s forgets.

In sum, we suggest, as a thesis for further study through the type of case studies that Zalamea also proposes, that the evolution of Latin American culture can be understood from a Peircean perspective not merely or mainly as resistance to the center and synthesis at the limits of Western culture, but rather as resistance and synthesis that is original, creative, and its own locus of freshness, relation to other cultures, and universality.

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## Notes

[1] The very expression “Latin American” was invented outside Latin America itself. It arose in Europe in the nineteenth century, and was later taken up by Latin American intellectuals and political leaders that no longer saw Spain or Portugal as cultural models, but rather preferred to be linked with France. For more on the subject, see Mignolo 2005, 77ff; Aims McGuinness, “Searching for ‘Latin America’: Race and Sovereignty in the Americas in the 1850s,” in *Race and Nation in Modern Latin America*, eds. Nancy P. Appelbaum, et al., 87-107 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

[2] For the case of Brazil see, for instance, Lilia Schwarcz, *Dom Pedro II and the Tropical Monarchy of Brazil*, trans. John Gledson (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004). The Brazilian case is indeed unique. Spanish America before independence was a very complex and varied mosaic of groups of every sort, just as the societies in the *Ancien Régime* Europe. In this context one should not neglect the integrating feature that filiation to the Spanish Crown provided. When the links with the European metropolis were dissolved, the transition to the formation of national states was abrupt. In the Brazilian case, the figure of the Emperor D. Pedro I provided in the ideological field an almost natural sense of continuity from the once Portuguese colony to the now Brazilian National Empire. This was a very strong obstacle to identifying Brazil with the other recently independent South American national states, but it also made an immediate identification with European dynastic powers more difficult. For more information see Santos 2004.

[3] See Centro Internacional de Agricultura Tropical (CIAT), United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), Center for International Earth Science Information Network (CIESIN), Columbia University, and the World Bank, 2005, *Latin American and Caribbean Population Database*, Version 3 [online], <<http://www.na.unep.net/datasets/datalist.php3> or <http://gisweb.ciat.cgiar.org/population/dataset.htm>>. [Consulted: February, 15, 2009].

[4] Our definition of “culture” may require, of course, ample philosophical scrutiny in itself, but here we would like only to posit it in order for our theses to be clear. See, for instance, Lúcia Santaella, *Arte & Cultura: Equívocos do elitismo* (São Paulo: Cortez/UNIMEP, 1982), for a more thorough discussion of the concept of culture we adopt here.

[5] The importance of the indigenous culture for the formation of our cultural identity is immense. It is impossible to review all that has been written on the subject. We offer just two sources that show the importance of the subject: Claude Lévi-Strauss, *La Pensée Sauvage* (Paris: Plon, 1962), and review *all that has been written about the subject. For the obstacle to identifying Brazil Emperor D. Pedro I provided an almost Darcy Ribeiro, O Povo Brasileiro* (São Paulo: Cia. Das Letras, 1992). The latter should be read with a critical note, since the very idea of a Brazilian people formed by three distinct “roots” – the European, the African, and the indigenous – can be interpreted in essentialist terms.

[6] Pappas suggests a related point of interest for future work. He queries whether Zalamea’s analysis is too theoretical and requires consideration of the

economic and historical conditions of Latin America (G. Pappas, "Review of Fernando Zalamea's *Ariel y Arisbe*," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 37 no. 1 (2001): 152). Zalamea pays close attention to the Peircean method of inquiry and thus leaves open the possibility of further economic and historical testing of his hypothesis, while he concentrates on artistic and cultural testing through a series of cases studies in Latin American plastic arts, music, and literature.

[7] Among his numerous works, we can indicate his controversial and important book (for this specific debate on "genuinely Brazilian" popular music and culture) *Música Popular: Um tema em debate*, first published in 1966. The lyrics of the song are very ironic with respect to the Brazilian historian. *Tinhorão* is a self-adopted name – he named himself after a poisonous plant of the *araceae* family, and that is why he is placed alongside snakes (*urutú: bothrops alternatus*; *sucuri: eunectes murinus*, from the *Boidae* family, the notorious Brazilian Anaconda), while Tom Jobim is placed with singing passerine birds (*sabiá*: the Brazilian thrush from the *turdidae* family, the most common of which is the *Turdus rufiventris*; *bem-te-vi: Pitangus sulphuratus* from the *Tyrannidae* family, known as the Great Kiskadee in English).

[8] We recommend that interested readers listen to Elis Regina's recording of this song, which is a work of musical genius.

[9] Note also that even though music does not represent anything outside itself, as an iconic form it expresses or embodies qualities of feeling — it does not represent, but it may present. On this issue, see D. Anderson, *Creativity and the Philosophy of C. S. Peirce* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987).

[10] Following standard practice in Peirce scholarship, references to *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce* (C. S. Peirce, *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, vol. 1 – 8, eds. P. Weiss, C. Hartshorne, and A. W. Burk [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1932-58]) are abbreviated as "CP" followed by volume and paragraph numbers. For example, this reference is to volume 1, paragraphs 357-58.

[11] For more on Peirce's semiotic and the role of interpretants on semiosis, see Santaella, *A Teoria Geral dos Signos*, and Thomas L. Short, *Peirce's Theory of Signs* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).