

(PALAS 390) Popular Culture in Latin America
Materiality and Identity
Universidad de Belgrano
Prof. Patricia Anderson (M.A)
2025-1

Course description:

This course examines aspects and manifestations of popular culture in Latin America to understand how identity is constructed, negotiated and defined by non-hegemonic social sectors and actors. Using an intersectional approach, we will delve into specific examples and material expressions of culture and explore how the realm of culture becomes a space for asserting and displaying different kinds of power. Food, drink, clothing, music, art, and sports shape the manner in which Latin America is collectively imagined. In the post-pandemic world, where localized and traditional worldviews are increasingly challenged by globalization and the erasure of difference, the cultural world emerges as a site of resistance that allows for the proud manifestation and performance of alternative racial, gender and class-based identities.

Course requirements

Each class is based on a specific topic with associated mandatory readings, visual and audio material, and in-class activities. It is expected that students come to class prepared for an informed debate and discussion of the topic of the week. Besides the classroom, this course requires the participation in “experiences”, or informed and active explorations of the urban landscape. Each student will write two brief personal reports based on this experience. In addition, each student will select a contemporary or historic Latin American cultural production and evaluate its relevance and significance to the way the region has been imagined and recreated. These findings will be presented orally to the rest of the class, together with “thinking questions” to trigger interaction and independent thinking. Ultimately, we will focus on a diversity of Latin American cultural expressions to deepen students’ understanding and experience of the region.

Course objectives

- To learn about the importance of culture in the construction of multiple layers of identity
- To develop tools to detect, observe and analyze a variety of cultural productions
- To trigger independent and original thought by fostering a space for discussion and exchange
- To expose students to diverse academic sources and materials
- To demonstrate the relevance of an active engagement with the learning experience

Grading policy

Participation	10%
Oral presentation + leadership	10%
Experiential reports (2)	30%
In-class assignments (2)	30%
Final presentation	20%

Class Schedule

Week 1: W 5 March

Introduction to cultural studies.

Objectives of the course, subject matter, and understanding the relevance of culture.

Week 2: M 10-W 12 March

The struggle for identity in Latin America.

Race, class, gender and intersectionality.

Required reading:

Isabel de Guevara, "And the men were so weak", letter

Marisel Melendez, "Visualizing difference: The rhetoric of clothing in Colonial Latin America," *The Latin American Fashion Reader* (ed. Regina Root) 2005

Week 3: M 17- W 19 March

Urban spaces and cultural productions.

The city of Buenos Aires and cultural dynamics in the streets.

Out-of-classroom experience: curated walk through Belgrano (classroom hours)

Required reading:

Mary Weismantel, *Cities of Women*, (2008) excerpts

Week 4: M 24-W 26 March

Indigenous cultures.

Weaving the past and performing identity through textiles and fashion. The cholitas in Bolivia. Cultural appropriation.

E. Demaray, M. Schenk, M. Littrell, "Representations of tradition in Latin America boundary textile art," *The Latin American Fashion Reader* (ed. Regina Root) 2005

Experiential report 1 is due this week

Week 5: M 31 March and W 2 April

Food and drink in indigenous cultures. The Pacha Mama cult. Food and nationbuilding. Globalization, identity and food culture.

Out-of-classroom experience: traditional food in traditional venues. Guidelines will be provided in class.

Required readings:

Juana Manuela Gorriti, Cookbook excerpt

Presentation and Leadership:

Justin Jennings, "A glass for the gods and a gift to my neighbor: Alcohol in precolumbian Andes," *Alcohol in Latin America* (ed. Gretchen Pierce and Aurea Toxqui) 2014

Week 6: M 7-W 9 April

Afro Latin America and the power of music and dance.
From capoeira to samba. The Carnival and the liminal world.

Presentation and Leadership:

Darien Davies, Racial Parity and National Humour: Exploring Brazilian samba from Noel Roa to Carmen Miranda, 1930-1939, in *Latin American Popular Culture* (2000)

Experiential report 2 is due this week

Week 7: M 14- W 16 April

Popular religiosity in the Afro and mestizo communities. Catholicism and Candomble. Black saints, horned devils and ancestor worship.

Required reading:

Valdina Pinto and Rachel Harding, "Afro-Brazilian Religion, Resistance, and Environmental Ethics," *Worldviews* 20:1 (2016)

Week 8: M 21 W 23 April

Body politics and the political spectacle.
Culture and identity in Classic Peronism
Eva Peron and her role as First Lady
Prof. Claudia Soria will be teaching this module

Week 9: M 28-W 30 April.

Body politics and the political spectacle.
Film (excerpts) to be seen in class on Monday TBA
Culture and identity in the Peronist Left (Montoneros).
Prof. Claudia Soria will be teaching this module

Week 10: M 5-W 7 May

Masculinity and femininity in Latin America: performing gender through cultural representations: the macho, the mother, the whore, the virgin.

Required reading:

Bejarano, Cynthia L. "Las Super Madres de Latino America." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 23, no. 1 (March 2002): 126

Presentation and Leadership

Graziano, Frank. "Petitionary Devotion: Folk Saints and Miraculous Images in Spanish America."

Week 11: M 12-W 14 May

Queering culture: erasing gender binaries, re-affirming and celebrating difference.

Non-hegemonic identities in Latin America's culture past and present

Required Reading:

Kevin Clarke, Should the Catholic Church recognize a "queer" saint?
<https://www.vice.com/en/article/yw3n3y/should-the-catholic-church-recognize-a-queer-saint>

Lynn Stephens, Sexualities and Genders in Zapotec Oaxaca, *Latin American Perspectives* 29 (2), 2002

Week 12: M 19-W 21 May

Special seminar on sports and culture. Modernity, sports and the body. Identity and the power of community. Sports and politics

Presentation and Leadership

Anderson, Patricia. "Sporting Women and Machonas: negotiating gender through sports in Argentina, 1900–1946." *Women's History Review* 24.5 (2015): 700-720.

Week 13: M 26-W 28 May

Poverty and exclusion: popular culture in the margins. Music: narcocorridos, cumbias villeras and bailes funky. The vindication and appropriation of identity through art.

Debate: gentrification, "slum tours" and the commodification of poverty.

Presentation and Leadership

Paul Sneed, "Favela Utopias: Bailes Funk in Rio's Crisis of Social Exclusion and violence," *Latin American Research Review* 43 (2), 2008.

Week 14: M 2-W 4 June

In-class final oral presentations

Week 15: M 9-W 11 June

Final remarks and concluding thoughts.

Mandatory Bibliography

Isabel de Guevara, "And the men were so weak", letter

Marisel Melendez, "Visualizing difference: The rhetoric of clothing in Colonial Latin America," *The Latin American Fashion Reader* (ed. Regina Root) 2005

Mary Weismantel, *Cities of Women*, (2008) excerpts

E. Demaray, M. Schenk, M. Littrell, "Representations of tradition in Latin America boundary textile art," *The Latin American Fashion Reader* (ed. Regina Root) 2005

Justin Jennings, "A glass for the gods and a gift to my neighbor: Alcohol in preColumbian Andes," *Alcohol in Latin America* (ed. Gretchen Pierce and Aurea Toxqui) 2014.

Jeffrey Pilcher, "Many chefs in the national kitchen: cookbooks and identity in 19th century Mexico," in *Latin American Popular Culture* (ed. Beezely and Nagy) 2003.

Valdina Pinto and Rachel Harding, "Afro-Brazilian Religion, Resistance, and Environmental Ethics," *Worldviews* 20:1 (2016)

John Charles Chasteen, Black Kings, "Blackface Carnival and Nineteenth Century Origins of the Tango," in *Latin American Popular Culture* (ed. Beezely and Nagy) 2003

Eduardo Archetti, "Masculinity Primitivism and Power: Gaucho," *Tango and the Shaping of Argentine National Identity, Gender, Sexuality, and Power in Latin America since Independence* (ed. W. French and K. Bliss) 2007.

Lynn Stephens, Sexualities and Genders in Zapotec Oaxaca, *Latin American Perspectives* 29 (2), 2002

Kevin Clarke, Should the Catholic Church recognize a "queer" saint?
<https://www.vice.com/en/article/yw3n3y/should-the-catholic-church-recognize-a-queer-saint>

Bejarano, Cynthia L. "Las Super Madres de Latino America." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 23, no. 1 (March 2002): 126

Sneed, Paul, "Favela Utopias: Bailes Funk in Rio's Crisis of Social Exclusion and violence," *Latin American Research Review* 43 (2), 2008.

Note: Additional visual and reading matter will be provided for in-class work weekly