The real Latinos - A search for an ‘authentic’ Latin Culture in Australia

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Abstract

This paper explores the notion of ‘authenticity’ in relation to the expression and promotion of Latin American cultures in Australia. The popularity of all things Latin is a cultural site for observing the overlapping, but distinctive and even contradictory cultural spheres in which the images and practices of being ‘Latin’ are promoted, consumed and experienced in Australia. The paper does not adopt a position of authority from which an evaluation of what is ‘authentic’ Latin culture can be made. Rather, it compares three different cultural fields in Australia in which notions of Latin American cultural authenticity are produced.

The first of these fields is the commercial setting in which the prominent images that are used are those of the exotic / erotic Latin otherness (Latinlover.com.au). It is here that Latin culture is promoted as part of a global phenomena of the sexy ‘world wide Latin fever’. The second field operates as part of official Australian multiculturalism, where ‘ethnic culture’ is often celebrated as the expression of ‘cultural diversity’. Within this setting ‘authentic’ representations of culture are promoted as localised versions of culture within a specific ‘ethnic community’. The third level is that of the migratory experience itself. It is here where the motivation and expression of ‘our culture’ is both localised and diasporic. A nostalgic expression of complex and often painful migratory experiences, that are both about familiarity and otherness and are part of the migratory construction of ‘feeling at home’ in the new place.