

Introduction

Nightmares of the Lettered City

Anyone who fights with monsters should take care that he does not in the process become a monster. And if you gaze for long into an abyss, the abyss gazes back into you.

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*

Toward a Cultural Teratology

The Latin American lettered city is haunted by monsters.¹ These monsters turn the lettered city's noble dreams into nightmares. Inescapable and urgent, these nightmares are conveyors of an enigmatic truth. Hence the challenge of the Latin American cultural critic: to reinvent our practice not as the memory of founding fathers (cultural or military ones), heroes, or popular practices (humble albeit respectable) but rather as a sort of cultural teratology. This teratology is diverse. It comprises bloodthirsty bandits that give the rural frontier a hellish quality; rebellious peasants that burn, rape, and destroy apparently without a second (or first) thought; Indians that bind their victims with the intestines of their victim's slaughtered sons; hunger-stricken, harpy-like black females that fight in bloody mud much like dogs—and with dogs—for lard or scraps of animal entrails; disease-ridden immigrants whose deceitful promise of new blood becomes the ominous threat of atavism; prostitutes whose pestilence corrupts the minds and bodies of wholesome family boys—the future of the nation; cannibals; madmen; gays; Jews; communists.

These monsters are formations of the national political unconscious (Jameson 1981), and as such, they are the visible product of transactions between “desire” and “repression.” They are floating signifiers (Laclau 1996) that are key to an understanding of the diverse regimes of representation that define national identities. Therefore, this cultural teratology can be thought of as a genealogy of the nation. Instead of reconstructing a multi-secular narrative of emancipation, achievement of self-consciousness, and exertion of the potentialities of the origin, I propose a genealogy that will trace the piecemeal cultural conflicts of which national imagined communities are an effect, not a *primum mobile*. In other words, it will specify the

ways in which these monsters, understood as identities differing from the man of letters (*letrado*) who is masculine-literate-“white”-proprietor-urban-Europeanized, were less a threat to Latin American national cultures than the secret dynamo that drove their definition. Said genealogy brings to light many of the family ties between heroes and monsters and between the fathers of the nation and its outcasts and many of the dangers that the monsters’ furtive lurking in the dark margins comes to metaphorize.² These monsters are not the children of a bizarre “Latin” imagination but urgent political responses to real conflicts. One of the most prominent characters within this cultural teratology is the (in)famous Latin American bandit, the dark hero of Latin American rural history.

Bandits

Plateado, bandido, cangaceiro, gaucho malo, llanero, jagunço, bandolero, abigeo, desertor, cabra, vago, malentrenido, insumiso, salteador, fanático, guerrillero, gavillero, agavillado, forajido, malhechor, cimarrón, muchacho del monte, montonero, malandro, Hermano de la Hoja, matrero, malebolo. These are a few among the many names for those engaged in a particularly pervasive form of violence in rural Latin America. Bandits are much more than rural thieves (*ladrones en despoblado*) or cattle rustlers (*abigeos, cuatreros*). Although the figure of the bandit is primarily associated with robbery or an attempt against private property (kidnapping for ransom, blackmailing, protection rackets, cattle rustling, jacquerie), brigandage may comprise such diverse offenses as resisting authority, smuggling, homicide, conspiracy to commit crime, possession of prohibited weaponry, vagrancy, desertion, rebellion, and poaching. Any challenge to state rule could be and frequently was, at one point or another, labeled “banditry.” This protean character of the bandit is one of the reasons for its continued political relevance and cultural productivity, and a determination to understand both of these aspects is what gave rise to this book. Bandits and rural insurgents are among the better known characters in Latin American history, from Tupac Amaru to Emiliano Zapata and Che Guevara through, of course, Pancho Villa (all four labeled as bandits at one point or another in their careers). However, little has been done outside the realm of historical studies to examine in a comprehensive fashion (beyond particular cases or particular regions) the ways in which banditry has been depicted in elite discourse, and how this represen-

tation has been crucial to the constitution of Latin American national cultures as we know them today.

Although I draw upon the works of Adolfo Prieto, Josefina Ludmer, and Nina Gerassi-Navarro, I intend for this book to fill a void in Latin American cultural criticism. This work is particularly timely because in the academic and political agendas of Latin American studies, the inquiry into the interactions between elite culture and subaltern culture occupies a central position.³ As such, part of my goal in writing this book was that it would be relevant beyond literary criticism. I want it to be read as part of a series of studies that map foundational tropes in Latin American national cultures of the nineteenth century. Indeed, the exploration of the symbolic mechanisms of construction and negotiation of identities—Latin American “fables of identity” (Ludmer 1999, 470)—has led to important works in the field of cultural and literary studies that have “tried to articulate the foundational period of national literatures with the nation-state process of formation and institutionalization in Latin America, trying to focus on the complex process of mediations and representational strategies through which social actors try to define themselves” (Moraña 1984, 42). The contention of this book is that the rural rebel labeled a bandit by the state was among the foremost cultural Others of Latin American modernity. As such, it is essential to our understanding of the form that said modernity assumed, as well as its contradictions and shortcomings.⁴

As John Beverley states, the bandit (together with the Indian or the runaway slave) was the “main demoniacal force in the liberal epic” of the nineteenth century (1987, 102). The meaning of this statement is twofold. The bandit-as-demon (a topic that the European gothic novel took quite literally, as in the case of *The Manuscript Found in Saragossa*, by Count Jan Potocki) can mean the bandit as “adversarial force” of liberal discourse. Additionally, through the form of possession, the bandit is regarded as the evil, hidden “driving force.” This ambiguity points to the constitutional split of the bandit trope and its changing relationship to hegemonic identities.⁵

As an adversarial force, the bandit as Other is essential in the constitution of the citizen as Self. As Jean Baudrillard points out, “Power exists solely by virtue of its symbolic ability to designate the Other, the Enemy, what is at stake, what threatens us, what is Evil” (1990, 82). The cultural history of Latin American banditry amply proves this postulate. The letrado

elite excluded certain rural practices and rural subjects. This exclusion certainly had a crucial material dimension, since “bandits” were targeted for suppression, but it was at the same time a rhetorical one, since it was made possible by the mobilization of the trope of banditry.⁶

This labeling played an integral part in the legitimation of an elite-led project of nation-state building in Latin America and thus was a defining feature of the Latin American historical experience. As Miguel Ángel Centeno brilliantly proves, Latin America “lacked [the] identification of an external enemy that encouraged the development of a national identity. As far as state elites are concerned, the greatest threat to their power has not come from competing elites across the border, but from the masses below. . . . The enemy of ‘la patria’ was not perceived as the nation next door, but as those in the population who threatened the social and economic status quo” (2002, 90). Banditry is born as a trope when, from the state’s viewpoint, popular illegalities are represented as crimes and its subjects as criminals (Foucault 1975, 83, 292).⁷ This labeling is faced with resistance (cultural or otherwise) from below, which is why, in the protracted debate on the existence and nature of social banditry, it has been hard to reach a concrete definition of what the bandit does (that is, the exact nature of his offense). The bandit is not the thief, the smuggler, the poacher, the cattle rustler, or the vagrant. There would be no banditry without one of these offenses, however, and since no particular action is deemed banditry, any action could be (and was) deemed banditry, a catchall word used much in the way that “terror” is currently used in the United States. Because of this, Gilbert Joseph states that the term belongs to the “metalanguage of crime” (1994, 160).

This impossibility of defining banditry once and for all would account for the conspicuous absence of banditry as a codified offense in penal codes, in spite of the fact that we find the term everywhere in literary works, journalistic sources, travelogues, and memoirs. Mid-nineteenth-century Mexico was, by all accounts, the golden age of Latin American banditry. In certain areas, gangs numbered in the hundreds, waging war much like regular armies, celebrating unofficial treaties with governments and controlling significant tracts of territory (Vanderwood 1992). One would imagine that legislation would reflect this situation, since banditry amounted to a formidable challenge to state building. However, in the Mexican penal code of 1871, the brainchild of liberal penal thought, banditry is not defined as a crime (Vanderwood 1992, xxxv). Actually, the very word banditry does not appear

at all in the more than three hundred pages of the code. Different offenses associated with banditry do indeed appear (such as highway robbery [*robo en despoblado*], association to commit crime [*asociación para cometer robo*], kidnapping for extortion [*plagio*], and rebellion), but banditry does not. Similar situations are found in other Latin American penal codes of the nineteenth century.

In any case, it is safe to say that a bandit is he who maintains through his actions (which may not form part of a conscious “political program”) his “right” (usually uncoded) to engage in certain practices that collide with a legality-in-the-making that portrays such actions as out-and-out crimes. Since banditry is the name for a conflict revolving around representation, it does not name an essence but an identity in constant flux. Banditry is the product of the encounter between a hegemonic effect of identification (Laclau 1996, 3, 6) and popular illegalities. Each appearance of the bandit in the text of a culture is the trace of a conflict, “not the majestic unfolding of an identity but the response to a crisis” (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 7).⁸

Rafael Muñoz, author of *¡Vámonos con Pancho Villa!* (1931) and one of the best writers of the genre called the novel of the Mexican Revolution, offers an excellent example of banditry considered as a mark and a signifier. After being defeated by the Carrancista general Álvaro Obregón, the División del Norte (Villa’s famous army) was a shadow in constant flight and was limited in resources and human support. In fact, the División del Norte was no longer an army; it had become a “gang.” Tiburcio, the main character of the novel, is loyal to Villa to the bitter end (until death), and unlike so many others, he refuses to desert his chief. Tiburcio muses,

And now, what are we? . . . Tiburcio’s mind plunged into an abyss.

—We are bandits.

All of us? No! But there is a sign that makes us all the same, a mark that distinguishes us from the rest of humankind, a sign that separates and stops us. We are bodies destined to the gallows. Once we are rounded up, once we are captured, we are going to die. Those of us who do not get away will hang from the trees. Anyone who sees us there will rejoice upon discovering the sign, the word branded on our foreheads. Not all of us are bandits, but those who are captured will not have time to say it, or even to implore clemency. (Muñoz 1931, 110)

With a lucidity arising from his utter hopelessness, Tiburcio realizes that he and his fellow fighters have become bandits. They are bandits indeed, but not because they are more violent, greedy, or corrupt than before. Tiburcio

realizes that banditry is a mark (*señal*), a word that sets them apart from the rest of humankind. (After the defeat, Villa, formerly the “Mexican Napoleon,” becomes a bandit who is hunted down like a wild animal, and as such he hides in a cave to lick his wounds.) Being bandits is not something that they do; in this case, they are just running away from their enemies and living off the land much like they did before. Instead, it is an identity effect embedded in a political conflict, a position before the law, like the outlaw in the Anglo-Saxon tradition (Prassel 1993).

I mentioned that the bandit-as-demon was also a driving (possessing) force. As such, it shows the lack of suture in the tissue of the social body. That is, it exposes the precarious and contested character of all dominance and all identity. Tiburcio clearly realizes that banditry is not a practice but a “mark” (a signifier) branded on a practice and as such, it brings the practice under the gaze of the state. Therefore, contingency, or the lack of a “natural” relationship between mark and practice, is its defining character. There was nothing that Tiburcio or Villa did differently to cause their demotion from liberators to bandits. What was different was their position in a precarious interplay of forces.⁹ However, for the same reason that the bandit trope marks what needs to be excluded, subordinated, or suppressed, it also marks what escapes the material and symbolic control of the elite. It is what exceeds its paradigms. This excess denaturalizes the hegemonic identity and its mechanisms of representation, since it shows the fissures that tear it. As an “imagined” identity the bandit is a testimony of domination as well as of resistance and of the anxiety that such resistance triggers within the elite. Therefore, the bandit can embody the mythopoetic power of the elite, as well as the mythopoetic capabilities of what Pier Paolo Portinaro refers to as “savage powers” (1999, 11), Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2004), as “constituent power,” or Baruch Spinoza as the “multitude.”

The bandit trope is, within the text of Latin American culture, both the product of and the arena for the struggles between the lettered city and the various social sectors that challenged its dominance. Banditry defines, in a contingent, ever-changing fashion, the identities of the adversaries within this struggle. In Latin America, banditry defied what Michel Foucault called “the rule of optimal specification” as the cornerstone of the semio-technique that defined the modern approach to the “power to punish.” This rule, as Foucault reconstructs it, states that “for penal semiotics to cover the whole field of illegalities that one wishes to eliminate, all offenses must be

defined; they must be classified and collected into species from which none of them can escape. A code is therefore necessary and this code must be sufficiently precise for each type of offense to be clearly present in it" (1975, 98).¹⁰

Banditry is crucial in the constitution of the paradigms of bandit/citizen and outlaw violence/state violence. At the same time, however, it is what makes those paradigms unstable and ultimately untenable. Therefore, our reading of the vast literary tradition dealing with banditry in the so-called "long nineteenth century" will always be twofold and traceable to Derridean deconstructionism. To begin, we should identify the operations through which the *letrado*, in specific conflicts, carries out a mapping of the social terrain in which the opposition between lawful and outlaw violence is the defining feature. In addition, we should show the ways in which this very opposition is interdicted and erased (again, in the Derridean sense) and how *letrado* thinking is brought to its own limits.

The bandit is perhaps the most important in a series of *dramatis personae* that in postcolonial Latin American culture function as frontiers between "domains of sovereignty" (Chatterjee 1993, 6). This character is particularly fit to embody the many unresolved ambiguities of Latin American modernity. As such, an in-depth examination of the bandit trope would allow us to "write into the history of modernity [i.e., Latin American modern culture], the ambivalences, the contradictions, the use of force, and the tragedies and the ironies that attend it" (Chakrabarty 1997, 288).

In addition to being a problematic juridical figure, the bandit is a literary, historical, and scientific figure that makes conflict visible within the social realm. This conflict has an economic basis, but it goes well beyond this notion. The vast plains of Venezuela (*llanos*) and Argentina (*pampas*) offer important cases in point. Transforming the Venezuelan *llanero* bandit and the Argentine *gaucho malo*, respectively, into totalizing metaphors for the whole rural population was a strategy the elite used to intervene in a multi-secular struggle for the appropriation of resources (wild cattle and horses). This metaphor also highlighted alternative concepts of property (the liberal-landowner concept versus the traditional community-oriented concept of the seminomadic hunter-shepherd), alternative concepts of violence (the state monopoly on violence versus the individual ownership and administration of it), and alternative concepts of citizenship, community, and rights. Following this "original" scene of formation of the bandit trope,

many quarrels in Argentine or Venezuelan culture were depicted (i.e., narrated) using the rural bandit as “conceptual persona” (Deleuze and Guattari 1991). Banditry is thus what Josefina Ludmer has termed a difference effect between two orders in conflict and reciprocal transformation (1988, 16). As a difference effect, the bandit trope appears initially from the state gesture of expulsion. It is important to remember that the etymology of *forajido* is precisely *salido afuera*, whereas that of *bandido* is not thief, but rather *proscrito*, from the Italian *bandir* (Corominas 1954, 487), and that the canonical lexical definition is that of the “*fugitivo llamado por bando*” (*Diccionario de la Real Academia Española* 1992, 260). The *Tesoro de la lengua castellana o española* (1611) makes this connection even closer. It includes the notions of *bandido* and *bandolero* within the entry *bando*, defined as “the proclamation ordering a criminal who has dropped out of sight to appear before the authorities.” From this derives the use of the names *bandidos* and *bandoleros* (*el pregón que se da, llamando a algún delincuente que se ha ausentado, y de aquí se dijeron “bandidos” y “bandoleros”*) (Covarrubias Orozco 1611, 162).

The proclamation or bulletin (*bando*) was not initially intended to be read to the bandit, who would have been busy running away from the looming gallows. It was meant for those who were not bandits, for those who did not (openly) support them, and for those who obtained a collective identity vis-à-vis that Other who was just (symbolically) “thrown out.” (“Cast aside,” “thrown down,” or “thrown out” are some of the etymological meanings of “abject,” past participle of the Latin word *abicerere*.) Therefore, the bandit was the occasion for a state-lettered performance of exclusion (the reading of the proclamation or bulletin). This performance creates a public sphere. The axes of this public sphere are the letter (the written document that enforces the law) and the state (the public official who reads the proclamation). Its exterior limit is precisely the bandit, lurking frightened or defiant in the neighboring countryside.

However, this image is an oversimplification since the bandit is never a simple criminal. Popular appropriations of the bandit appear in ballads, yarns, and oral traditions (e.g., *corridos*, *folletines*, and *cordel* literature in Mexico, Argentina, and Brazil, respectively). These appropriations transformed the outlaw into a hero for communities that resisted the advance of capitalism as well as the diverse forms of coercion and disruption that it implied. In these cases, bandit narratives are a form of negative reciprocity (as defined by James Scott) that allows a given community to voice a desire or a

challenge without risking a reprisal. These popular appropriations of the bandit figure belong to an intermediate zone between public transcript and the hidden transcript (see Scott 1990).¹¹ Bandit narratives are thus public performances that are admitted only with suspicion and apprehension by elites. An excellent example of this in-between, dangerous condition is the cultural war that erupted in turn-of-the-century Argentina around bandit narratives known as *folletines criollistas* (see Prieto 1988) or the recent widespread debate on the banning of *narcocorridos* in Mexico (Wald 2001), both of which are forms of popular expression considered out-and-out incitements to crime.

Although the cases presented above may give the impression of a false ideological purity, elite-concocted tropes or popular appropriated tropes are rarely mutually exclusive options, since the bandit lives and preys on his victims at a crossroads. Often, the brigand figure stands for changing military, political, or cultural alliances between popular sectors and the elite, examples being the gaucho genre in Argentina or the regionalist and social novel in Brazil (e.g., the works of Jorge Amado). In other cases, bandit narratives may represent what Raymond Williams in 1991 termed the “selective appropriation” of traditions of rural insurgency (e.g., the novel *Astucia* by Luis Inclán on tobacco smugglers in Mexico known as the “Brothers of the Leaf”).

A remarkable illustration of this complex dynamic is the figure of Jesús Malverde, the “angel of the poor.” Jesús Malverde’s existence is still debated, but tradition has it that he was a peasant bandit from the Mexican state of Sinaloa. He met the fate of most peasant bandits: capture and summary execution. Also, like many peasant bandits, he posthumously became an object of popular devotion. He is now the patron saint of drug dealers (*el narcosantón*), and the Culiacán chapel dedicated to him is cluttered with votive offerings (*exvotos*), some bearing surnames that appear in the police chronicle: Quintero, Gallardo, Félix, Carrillo. According to legend, the initials “R.C.Q.” on one of the engravings bear witness to a donation by none other than Rafael Caro Quintero, a Mexican drug lord (Wald 2001, 616–24). Malverde thus connects multiple cultural lines. On the one hand he connects the traditions of insurgency deeply embedded in local culture, such as the stories on Heraclio Bernal, a.k.a. “El Rayo de Sinaloa” (who is remembered, as is Malverde, in corridos, legends, and old wives’ tales across Mexico), with the new Mexican American culture.¹² (Malverde is well known—just like the narcotics that are cultivated in or transported through Sinaloa

—in Los Angeles or Chicago as well as in Culiacán.) In addition, Malverde connects popular traditional Catholicism with modern icons of consumption and mass culture. Furthermore, he ties the old rural *corrido de bandidos* or *corrido de valientes* to the postmodern urban-rural *narcocorridos* hip among Mexican and Mexican American youth affiliated with the culture of violence. Finally, the example of Malverde shows the “deep Mexico,” with its intact myth-producing capacity, juxtaposed against the postmodern, “for-export” image of Mexico.

Another outstanding example of the bandit figure playing on both sides of the divide is the cultural history of Joaquín Murieta, described by Ireneo Paz, one of his early biographers, as “the most celebrated California bandit,” a phrase that became the subtitle of the first novel about Murieta. The story of Murieta is paradigmatic in its incidents, since it pertains to a particularly relevant contact zone (Pratt 1992) and since it came to represent the conflict-ridden frontier between the United States and Mexico in the immediate aftermath of the U.S.-Mexican War in 1846–1848. As such it was mobilized by Anglo Americans, Mexican Americans, Europeans, and Latin Americans alike. Murieta also offers a rare case study of the Latin American bandit whose cultural career spans from the 1850s to the present. There are countless variations of Murieta’s biography, but most agree on some basic facts. Murieta was a hard-working, American-friendly Mexican miner and rancher in California shortly after its conquest by the United States. In spite of his intentions to advance in the newly formed Californian society, he falls prey to endless abuse by Anglo Americans. He is forcibly displaced from his claim; his brother is lynched after a false accusation of horse stealing; his sweetheart is gang-raped. Murieta is driven to a point at which he vows revenge against all Americans, and, in classic social bandit fashion, he becomes an avenger set out to right wrongs. However, he wants to right not only the wrong done unto him but also the injustices committed against his “kind”: the Californios and Mexicans under American rule. In some versions of the story (see Paz 1904), Murieta is even portrayed as a leader with the long-term goal of leading a general uprising of Mexicans and Californios so as to return California to Mexico.

Murieta was the first and most prominent in a series of Mexican American outlaws that includes Tiburcio Vázquez, Gregorio Cortéz, Juan N. Cortina, and Eligio Baca and whose last individuation in this series is the legion of drug dealers, both big and small, of the Mexico-U.S. border who have be-

come heroes in the epic of the *narcocorridos*. Murieta's head—decapitated, displayed in freak shows, later lost in some bizarre turn of history—is a macabre metaphor that for Richard Rodriguez represents Hispanic California's violent and suffering past (Rodriguez 1992).

In spite of this lurid story, scholars now agree that Murieta never existed (Leal 1999; Thornton 2003). He was born of both fear and greed: the Anglos' fear as they faced the violence of Mexican rebels and outlaws and the greed of the California Ranger Harry Love and his men. The rangers invented Murieta to justify the killing of a Mexican whose name will be forever a mystery and to claim the reward money offered by the state of California for the capture of the bandit(s) that roamed Calaveras County (Leal 1999, 14). Maybe there were several men who could have been Joaquín Murieta; maybe there was no such person at all. For some, Murieta is a fiction written into history by the state of California and the Anglo American press in order to label as criminal the threat (more or less imagined) of an interclass alliance between Mexicans and Californios struggling for land, cattle, and mining rights in Southern California (Leal 1999, 2; Jackson 1955, xxiv). The first example of the unruly Mexican bandit (later termed "greaser"), Murieta was a tool in a campaign of counterinsurgency, land occupation, and cultural discrimination that encompassed the whole Southwest, as evidenced in the sad history of the Texas Rangers (the infamous *rinches*) and the cinematographic stereotype of the greaser (Woll 1987).

Murieta was far more than a badge of infamy upon Hispanics in the United States, however. He was "stolen" by Hispanics from the Anglos as bounty in a cultural war that is still raging. After the popularization of his figure by Cherokee American writer John Rollin Ridge (a.k.a. Yellow Bird) in the novel *The Life and Adventures of Joaquín Murieta, the Celebrated California Bandit* (1854), Murieta embodied several types of heroes: a popular hero in the corrido tradition ("El corrido de Joaquín Murieta"); a cultural hero of Hispanidad versus Anglo culture in Ireneo Paz's *Vida y aventuras del más célebre bandido sonoreño Joaquín Murieta* (1904); a class hero in Pablo Neruda's *Fulgor y muerte de Joaquín Murieta, bandido chileno injusticiado en California el 23 de julio de 1853* (1966); an anti-imperialist hero in Antonio Acevedo Hernández's play *Joaquín Murieta* (1938); a totalizing icon of the "Chicano nation" in Rodolpho "Corky" Gonzales's epic poem *I Am Joaquín* (1967); and finally a model for Chicano resistance in Oscar "Zeta" Acosta's *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* (1973).

On the opposite side of this cultural war is Bruce Thornton's excellent book *Searching for Joaquín* (2003). Thornton argues that the mobilization of the image of Murieta by Chicano militants and intellectuals implies a fundamental fallacy: their denial of the fact that the Murieta myth was avidly consumed by Anglos and people of many different ethnicities alike (a statement that he backs up with an impressive amount of scholarship). For Thornton, Murieta embodied the nostalgia for a simpler, more bucolic California in the face of accelerated transformation and social tensions and not the battle cry of a humiliated Hispanic California.

This enumeration, lengthy as it is, does not take into account the countless repetitions, perversions (e.g., Zorro) and plagiarisms of Murieta's history in the novel, drama, and cinema of both the Americas and Europe, in Spanish, English, and French.¹³ Like Martín Fierro, the *desperado* contemporary of Murieta at the other end of the continent, Murieta "can be everything for everybody, because he is capable of almost endless repetitions, versions, perversions" (Borges and Guerrero 1954, 537). Thus, on one side or the other of the social divide—from *El periquillo sarniento* (1816) by José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi to Mexican hip-hop—narratives on banditry serve to map essential segments of the heterogeneous discursive and geopolitical space that we call Latin America.¹⁴

The Bandit Debate

The classic definition of banditry was coined by Eric Hobsbawm in 1969 in the first edition of his book *Bandits*.¹⁵ Bandits "are peasant outlaws whom the lord and state regard as criminals, but who remain within peasant society, and are considered by their people as heroes, champions, *avengers*, fighters for justice, perhaps even leaders for liberation, and in any case men to be admired, helped and supported. This relation between the ordinary peasant and the rebel, outlaw and robber is what makes social banditry interesting and significant. It also distinguishes it from other kinds of rural crime" ([1969] 1981, 17). Bandits are subjects of rural violence that are perceived as a threat to the state's monopoly of legitimate violence because they either enjoy (or are perceived to enjoy) more or less voluntary support from a group beyond the gang itself or they share (or are perceived to share) certain values with a larger community. Because of this support, they go beyond mere criminality.¹⁶ Although obtaining a "booty" is always a paramount goal, it is not the only one. It is essential that the bandit be recog-

nized by the rural community, by the state, or by a sector of the state as a bearer of violence (or what the state considers to be violence).

Unlike the social bandit, the criminal does not know any affiliation beyond his gang. The criminal may be employed by someone, but this relationship belongs to the market of violence—and it implies violence as a commodity—and therefore cannot be properly termed an “affiliation.” The bandit’s group of affiliation can be extremely diverse: peasantry, small to large landowners, family or patronage networks, ethnic groups, alliances across class and/or regions, or combinations of all of the above. These alliances are never, at least from a Hobsbawmian point of view, “subcultures,” but rather they are part of a fully developed rural culture. They vary greatly in their solidity and capacity to withstand time and challenges and stand more or less successfully against and beyond the state definition of politics, since they do not have state takeover as their main goal, unlike other forms of peasant insurgency, such as the Marxist-inspired guerrilla of the twentieth century.

This relationship between bandit and group of affiliation opposes state law and may be a principle of legitimacy for the use of violence based upon nondominant codes (oral or traditional: family ties, patronage, neighborhood ties, etc.) or in heterodox appropriations of dominant codes (property or conceptions of authority belonging to political systems already extinct, religious syncretism, etc.). Therefore, the bandit’s capacity to claim a particular kind of sovereignty and/or extract resources from civil society on a more or less regular basis (sometimes in collusion with, sometimes in opposition to analogous efforts by the state) is just as important—if not more important—than the existence of desired valuables. In the ideal model of social banditry, the material or cultural solidarity between bandit and community of affiliation is the feature that separates the bandit’s actions from mere criminality. However, Alan Knight, one of the most prestigious supporters of the social banditry model in the Latin American case, points out that the distinction between bandits and criminals, although analytically relevant, is extremely problematic when confronted with historical facts and specific cases, because it is highly relative in time and space. Latin American bandits inhabited fluid and changing situations, unlike, for example, the Irish rapparees of the seventeenth century, who practiced robbery following pre-existent and well-defined distinctions between friend and foe (Catholic Irish/Protestant English). In Latin America, the social bandit of

one region is the criminal of another. The social bandit of today, enjoying widespread peasant support, is the criminal of tomorrow, opposed by the same peasants who once may have supported him (Knight 1986, 2:354–55). This fluctuation returns us to our initial assertion of the impossibility (and the ultimate inappropriateness) of providing a positive, essentialist definition of banditry, or of deciding, once and for all, if a certain peasant rebel is a criminal or a social bandit. It is only possible to analyze bandit narratives as ephemeral, conflict-embedded effects of difference.

In Hobsbawm's initial formulation, epidemic social banditry is opposed to endemic banditry, permanent in all rural societies to the point of becoming a sort of natural fact of life. As an example of endemic banditry, in Akira Kurosawa's film *Seven Samurai* (1954), a wailing female peasant enumerates the evils that plague peasant existence. In no particular order, she mentions taxes, draft, war, drought, famine, and bandits (the last being the theme of the movie). Epidemic banditry, on the other hand, occurs in contexts of accelerated social transformations, such as the one occurring in Mexico toward the end the colonial period, with its collateral effects on population growth, land scarcity, inflation, and increased trade and opportunities for robbery (Taylor 1982, 56). In this case, it is a form of both resistance and adaptation to the advances of commercial agriculture and the modern state. It could also be a symptom or product of a generalized crisis (e.g., revolution, war, or dynasty change) in the legitimacy of an established order. Relevant historical examples include banditry during the French Revolution (see Andress 2000), during the European Thirty Years' War (see Danker 1988), during the Mexican Revolution (see works by Knight as well as Frazer 1997), during the war for Cuban independence (see Perez 1989), or in Republican China (see Billingsley 1988). Epidemic banditry could also respond to ecological changes such as droughts or to crop failures (see Archer 1982, 68).

Hobsbawm took up the notion put forward by Friedrich Engels, who regarded criminality as a form of "primitive protest" (1845, 149, 242–43, 309), and adopted Fernand Braudel's idea that banditry was an "incomplete revolution," that is, a revolution carried out by a group lacking class consciousness in a landscape of widespread peasant rebellions in the Mediterranean Basin (1949, 738–39). According to Hobsbawm, banditry, mafia, millenarianism, and labor sects are all forms of "primitive rebellion." He includes in the spectrum of "primitive rebellion" all archaic or pre-political

peasant movements that depend upon the material and cultural resources of the peasant communities whose universe they express or defend (hence the social character) but that are doomed to extinction with the advent of modernity (Hobsbawm [1969] 1981, 10; 1973, 20).

Hobsbawm identified four varieties of social bandit: the noble robber (e.g., Robin Hood), the avenger, the haiduk (or what Christon Archer aptly called “guerrilla bandit”), and the expropriator.¹⁷ In Latin America, the “guerrilla bandit” (Pancho Villa, Manuel Lozada) and the avenger (Lampião, Juan Moreira) were the most prominent examples of the social bandit. However, Latin American literature is also well populated by noble robbers, even if they are not the most prominent figures in national imaginaries. Among the better known bandits are Fiero Vásquez, champion of the indigenous community of Rumi in *El mundo es ancho y ajeno* (1941) by Ciro Alegría; Lucas Arvoredó in *Seara vermelha* (1946); and Lampião in *Capitães da areia* (1937) by Jorge Amado; “Ñato Eloy,” Chilean brigand and popular poet killed by police in 1941 (and hero of the 1960 novel *Eloy* by Carlos Droguett); Heraclio Bernal from Sinaloa and Chucho el Roto, heroes of corridos and countless novels and movies; the Argentines Mate Cosido and the Velázquez brothers (from El Chaco province); and Vairoletto (from the dry pampas [*pampa seca*]) and the bandits who lead the Andean *comuneros* in their struggle against the abuses of the Cerro de Pasco Corporation in Manuel Scorza’s *Redoble por Rancas* (1970). To my mind, however, the most clear-cut example of the noble robber is the commendable Tuerto Ventura in *Los días terrenales* (1949) by José Revueltas (1914–1976). Ventura, a cattle rustler and indigenous community leader, represents the dreams for justice of “Acamapichtli or Maxtla, of Morelos or Juárez” because of his face, scarred by violence. The charismatic leadership of this bandit had no limits since “everybody loved him, and everybody was ready to plunge with him from a cliff” (1949, 14).

Some scholars, without flatly denying the relevance of the “social bandit” model, understand particular occurrences of epidemic banditry as struggles that revolve around different lines of conflict. For Pat O’Malley (who researched the case of the Australian bushranger Ned Kelly) banditry is a form of class struggle between the rural proletariat and rural bourgeoisie. Even though such struggle happens outside the channels of institutional politics, it still happens in a fully formed class society and not, as Hobsbawm proposes, in a context of transition toward capitalism (O’Malley 1979, 494–

99). Other scholars, such as Ralph Austen (for the African case) or Alberto Flores Galindo (for the Andean case) consider banditry a form of racial struggle whereby banditry is part of a larger dispute over economic resources or political predominance, where class is not necessarily the most relevant category of analysis (Austen 1986; Flores Galindo 1990). Fernando Ortiz, for his part, considers banditry in Cuba a byproduct of runaway slavery (*cimarronaje*). Therefore, he does not deem it a phenomenon related to the displacement of “traditional peasants” by sugar plantations (since “traditional peasantry” was nonexistent in Cuba). Rather, he regards it as a phenomenon of resistance with its origin in the plantation system itself, which is to say he understands banditry not as a phenomenon triggered by the transition toward capitalism but as a byproduct of rural capitalism (Ortiz 1995, 190).

In the latest edition of his book *Bandits* (2000), Hobsbawm acknowledges the existence of social banditry in history before the rise of capitalism, as in the case of rural societies that resisted the advances of other rural societies (e.g., sedentary peasants raided by nomadic shepherds or rural communities resisting the advances of rural empires). He also points out that banditry can thrive in late capitalism, such as the contemporary banditry associated with the demise of nation-states, Afghanistan, countries that comprised the former Yugoslavia, and Chechnya all being examples (Hobsbawm [1969] 2000, 9).

Postnational, globalized banditry is also analyzed by Steven Sampson (2003) vis-à-vis the contemporary process of reformulating the nation-state. In Sampson’s account, this new form of banditry articulates the conflicts in a globalized arena, whereby banditry interacts and competes for sovereignty not (or not only) with traditional nation-states but also with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), international peacekeeping forces, mercenary private security outfits, and so forth. He mentions “northern Albania, eastern Bosnia, sections of Kosovo, the northern Caucasus [including Chechnya], [and] large portions of Africa” as places where the fragmentation of traditional political units (e.g., communist states) are “hot spots” for this new form of insurgency (2003, 314).

In some cases, banditry is not really a symptom of a crisis (a meaning embedded in the term “primitive rebellion”). Rather, it may be part of a process of negotiation either among segments of the elite or between rural elites and sectors of the rural poor. For Hobsbawm, Ethiopian banditry offers a

case in point: it did not emerge as a sign of crisis; rather it was an accepted venue of political competition for positions within the political order and was therefore integrated into the social fabric. Ottoman banditry, as superbly analyzed by Karen Barkey (1994), represents a rather different case. In the seventeenth-century Ottoman Empire, bandits entered into complex arrangements with Ottoman rulers. Under this arrangement, bandits did not challenge the centralizing efforts of rulers; rather they became timely allies in these efforts. In this way, bandits were able to mollify threats of peasant unrest, which in the Ottoman Empire were kept to a minimum when compared to similar situations in other regions of the Mediterranean Basin. As a final example, in northeastern Brazil the *cangaceiros* functioned as retainers for landowners (*coronéis*) or as the fighting force in decades-long family feuds, and they were an accepted and appreciated way of conducting politics in the absence of a strong state presence.

Hobsbawm's model continues to inform many recent and current approaches to the problem. Examples include Gonzalo Sánchez and Donny Meertens's *Bandoleros, gamonales y campesinos: el caso de la violencia en Colombia* (1983), Knight's *The Mexican Revolution* (1986), Ana María Contador's *Los Pincheira: un caso de bandidaje social: Chile, 1817–1832* (1998), and Hugo Chumbita's *Jinetes Rebeldes: historia del bandolerismo social en Argentina* (2000). However, in the Latin American context, critiques of Hobsbawm's model are abundant. The so-called revisionist school flatly denies any social character to banditry (the main thrust of Hobsbawm's model). This line of thought is brought forth by the remarkable volume *Bandidos*, edited by Richard W. Slatta (1987), which was intent upon discussing (and debunking) Hobsbawm's thesis as applied to the Latin American case. Revisionism objects to the very existence or at least relevance of the bandit-peasant link, which is essential in the "social" character of banditry. In earlier editions of *Bandits* (1969, 1972, 1981), Hobsbawm tended to emphasize this horizontal link, based on material and cultural commonality and solidarity, either real or symbolic (*vis-à-vis* the landowning classes or state officials). It is in this way that banditry may become a forerunner of full-fledged class struggle (hence the "primitive" in "primitive rebellion"). Revisionists such as Paul Vanderwood, for Mexico, or Linda Lewin, for Brazil, deny this link and emphasize the vertical alliances that bandits forged and preferred. These vertical alliances could cross class lines (as in the case of patronage networks), or they could link bandits and landlords or local politicians, thus

denying the “social” content to banditry and making it synonymous with out-and-out criminality or even with one of the means of landowners’ social control. For Vanderwood, banditry is a means of upward social mobility or an alternative to accepted means of profit, as he defines bandits as “mainly (but not only) self interested individuals and their followers who found themselves excluded from the possibilities and opportunities, not to mention the benefits, of society at large, and who promoted disorder as a lever to enter a system reserved for a few” (1992, xv). Literary examples of these vertical alliances between bandits and landlords, designed to keep subalterns in check, are present in two of the most important novels of twentieth-century Latin America: Juan Rulfo’s *Pedro Páramo* (1955) and Jorge Amado’s *Terras do sem fim* (1943). In the first case, the local landlord (Pedro Páramo) recruits (literally buys) a band of insurgents who had come with the original intent of plundering his hacienda. Instead, he puts the group under the command of his own retainer, the trusted Damasio, a.k.a. *El Tilcuate*. While officially revolutionaries, these guerrilla-bandits have the unofficial task of protecting Páramo from any possible advances by the real revolutionaries. In Amado’s case, the bandits (*jagunços*) are the essential manpower that allows the landowners to maintain and increase their holdings, either by violently dispossessing (and sometimes assassinating) peasants and smaller landowners or by fighting against other large landowners. In both cases, banditry is a means of social mobility. *El Tilcuate* is given a ranch and cattle as a payment for his loyal services, the *jagunços* earn many times the pay of regular rural workers, and they are entitled to certain deferences both by their masters and their subordinates.

A number of critiques of Hobsbawm’s model focus on the paramount place that he assigned to oral testimonies or literary reconstructions of past bandits as he put together his model. This debate relates to another one involving the remarkable uniformity of banditry as it appears in songs, tales, and written testimonies. This uniformity is an essential element in Hobsbawm’s model. An important question in this debate then becomes, Should this uniformity be considered a trait of banditry per se, as emanating from peasant culture, or should it be considered *a posteriori* reconstruction by intellectuals? Revisionists deflate the value of Hobsbawm’s oral and literary sources, and they stress the importance of police and court records, which they regard as more reliable.

This critical current of historical thought, sometimes a little too intent

upon refuting Hobsbawm's model, has indeed produced some of the most important case studies in the field.¹⁸ Revisionism considers banditry as just another form of criminality. (Paul Vanderwood even coined an expression counter to "social bandit": the Mexican "profiteering bandit.") Its social effects, if any, are not (as the legend goes) emancipatory; quite to the contrary, banditry favors the status quo since it may become an alternative way of climbing the social ladder and an informal instrument of elite control of the peasantry. For revisionists, banditry is, in the final analysis, compatible with the interests of the elite.

Rosalie Schwartz makes another good point against the "social bandit" model in her analysis of Cuban banditry. She opposes Louis Perez's take on Cuban banditry, which closely follows the "social bandit" model. Schwartz, investigating class origins and regional patterns of nineteenth-century Cuban banditry, shows that banditry was more intense in the most developed regions of Cuba and that the bandits were far from being destitute peasants; rather they were sons of somewhat well-to-do ranchers and small landowners. Thus, as Schwartz explains, banditry in the Cuban case lacked any true "social" (in the Hobsbawmian sense) thrust and much more closely resembled the profiteering banditry mentioned by Vanderwood (Schwartz 1982, 1989).

The distillation of this critical current can be summarized in the deliberately terse definition provided by Slatta: "Banditry is the taking of property by force or by the threat of force" (1994, 76). It should be noted that this definition limits banditry to robbery, as conceived, for example, during the seventeenth century in *The Third Part of the Institutes of the Laws of England* (1634): "'Robbery is a felony by the Common law, committed by a violent assault, upon the person of another, by putting him in fear, and taking from his person his money or other goods of any value whatsoever'" (Coke quoted in Spraggs 2001, 1). The attack on property, as mentioned before, is a key element in the definition of banditry, but a definition limited to that aspect leaves unexplored several factors crucial to the understanding of banditry.

The first factor is that, until the twentieth century, "property," in the Latin American context, was not an obvious and unequivocal concept. Indeed, the concept was undergoing profound transformations. The bloody struggles between liberals and conservatives in core zones of the region were an expression of this phenomenon, because the ancestral corporative rights of the peasant communities and of the Church were being challenged

by the new liberal concept of individual property. Even less clear was the concept of property in frontier zones such as both banks of the Río de la Plata or the Venezuelan llanos. In these regions the claim to property was not established before the struggle. To impose a certain notion of property rights was the ultimate goal of the struggle, since cattle (*cimarrones* or *orejanos*) often did not have a clear proprietor (Storni 1997). Therefore, “crime against property” was not a crime that was easily defined.

Secondly, as Centeno summarizes the situation, Latin America, with the exception of the income related to foreign commerce, did not have a fully functioning central tax system for most of its postcolonial history (2002, 6). This lack of a revenue base made state support for armies and police forces practically impossible. Due to this fact, “the taking of property by force or by the threat of force” was one of the main activities of all armies and state armed forces well into the twentieth century. The only differences between banditry and army expropriations were the scale of plundering as well as the inherently dubious state sanction of the army’s actions. Therefore, unless we agree upon the fact that Slatta’s definition applies to most armed forces throughout the “long nineteenth century” (something that would not be completely far-fetched, as the Mexican Revolution shows), one cannot accept Slatta’s definition unequivocally.

In 1968 Roberto Carri analyzed the case of the Argentine bandit Isidro Velázquez (who thrived in El Chaco province in the 1960s), and he offers the opposite critique of Hobsbawm. (He does, however, recognize the fundamental soundness of Hobsbawm’s model.) Carri acknowledges the “social” character of banditry but resists its definition as “pre-political.” For Carri, the term has an unavoidable Eurocentric connotation because pre-political means diverging from what qualifies as politics (e.g., party politics, unions, NGOs, etc.) in a European (or Europeanized) perspective. Instead, he prefers the term “pre-revolutionary,” which endows the bandit with a fully political character or at least gives a political aspect to the community’s perception of the bandit’s actions. In Carri’s model, the bandit is not considered primitive, although his actions are not yet fully articulated as a revolutionary awareness. Thus, Carri’s position was an early expression of the third position in the banditry debate. This position was adopted by historians specializing in Latin America who incorporated the contributions of Ranajit Guha (1983) and James Scott (1985). Gilbert Joseph, Daniel Nugent, Florencia Mallon, and Rosalie Schwartz, among others, do not examine ban-

ditry as mere criminality or as a rudimentary form of peasant resistance but as a form of peasant politics fully articulated into a peasant consciousness. In their approach, banditry belongs to a continuum of resistance that runs from gossip to open rebellion.¹⁹ The Venezuelan historian Lisando Alvarado also provided an early formulation of this position when he proclaimed that the brigands of the Federal War “were not the predecessors of the February Revolution, but the revolution itself” (quoted in Matthews 1977, 168).

Furthermore, these scholars focus their epistemological and ethical concerns on the impossibility of translating peasant conceptions of politics into a nationalist-statist notion of politics. Both can negotiate and even collude, but they remain essentially heterogeneous. A revealing literary illustration of this distance between forms of lettered national politics and peasant politics is the despair of the pro-Indian engineer Fernando Ulloa, the main character in *Oficio de tinieblas* (1962), a novel by the Mexican writer Rosario Castellanos (1925–1974). Ulloa does not understand why the Chamula Indians, whom he helped to rebel, now wander aimlessly in the mountains pillaging haciendas instead of attacking the cities, hunting down landowners, and organically promoting an agrarian agenda. This situation highlights the fact that the political struggle is also (and in some cases mainly) a struggle to define the dominant conception of what will be understood as “politics” (Lechner 1995). Banditry has not only an economic meaning but also a cultural, identity making meaning for peasants and for those implicated as bandits.²⁰ This affirmation of identity is a key component of all popular bandit narratives and has found expression in literature as well. *Gringo viejo* (1985), by the Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes, offers a good example. In this novel, the revolutionary gang of Tomás Arroyo plunders and meticulously destroys a hacienda. Only one room of the hacienda escapes their fury: the hall of mirrors. For these guerrilla-bandits, the mirrors of this Chihuahuan Versailles allow them their first opportunity to see the image of their entire bodies. Arroyo confesses,

Not my men. They had never seen their bodies in full before. I had to give them that great gift, that feast: now, look at yourselves, move about, lift your arm, you, dance a polka, get even for all the dark years in which you lived blind toward your own bodies, groping in the dark in order to find a body—your own body—so alien and silent and distant as all the other bodies that you were not allowed to touch, or that were not allowed to touch you. They moved in front of their own reflection in the mirror and the spell was broken, gringuita. (Fuentes 1985, 119)

A no less dramatic example can be found at the other end of Latin America. The *sapukay* is the distinctive yell uttered as a sign of joy or defiance, and it is characteristic of the rural populations of the Argentine northeast (Corrientes and Chaco provinces). In 1967, the region's state police attempted to ambush Isidro Velázquez, the famous bandit of the region. When he was about to escape from his pursuers, he could not help but utter his cry of defiance and contempt: "the last *sapukay*." This act of pride made him a target and ultimately led to his demise. Had he not cried out, he might have slipped away. This act of rebellion and affirmation of his identity vis-à-vis state violence is celebrated in Argentina to this day in the very famous *chamamé* (a genre of popular music) entitled "El último *sapukay*," by Oscar Valles.²¹

Thomas Gallant has proposed a new notion of banditry with a twofold goal: to mediate between those who, like Hobsbawm, link epidemic banditry with the transition to capitalism and those, like O'Malley, who emphasize the presence of epidemic banditry in fully developed agrarian capitalist economies (e.g., nineteenth-century Australia and the post-Civil War American Midwest); and secondly, to mediate between those who see in banditry a clear political thrust and those who see in it an exclusively economic motivation (Gallant 1999).

In order to accomplish the first goal, Gallant turns to Emmanuel Wallerstein's model in *The Modern World-System* (1974), arguing that it is fruitless to limit critical research to the development of a single, all-encompassing model of banditry. Instead, Gallant proposes that several models must be devised according to the different societies in which they emerge: core societies (such as England), semiperipheral (such as O'Malley's Australia), and peripheral societies (such as Ethiopia, the nineteenth-century Balkans, or northeastern Brazil, Hobsbawm's favorite cases). In order to accomplish the second goal, Gallant coins the apt expression "military entrepreneur" (following Anton Blok's Sicilian "violent entrepreneurs" and Volkov's "violent entrepreneurship" in Russia), thus capturing the ambiguous relationship between banditry and the law (sometimes enforcing the law, sometimes breaking it), and banditry and economic profit. He explains that "by 'military entrepreneur' I refer to a category of men who take up arms and who wield violence or the threat of violence as their stock in trade. I use 'military' here not in its contemporary common connotation of a national army, but in an older, more ambiguous form referring only to the use of arms and

weapons. They are entrepreneurs in the sense that they are purveyors of a commodity—violence. They may act in the employ of others or as agents in their own right” (Gallant 1999, 26). The notion of violence as a commodity has the particular advantage of helping us to avoid a common intellectual mistake: that of speaking about violence as if it were a purely negative notion. This mindset was the target of Hobsbawm’s critique of the liberal notion of violence in his essay “The Rules of Violence” (1973).

My position is less about the history of banditry per se. I am concerned more with the history of its representation within selected national cultures. This depiction is always a site of conflict and contested meanings where the state struggles with urban and rural sectors of civil society to impose particular agendas through the “invention” of banditry. From this point of view, and without giving in uncritically to the much-reviled (and often misunderstood) postmodern “textualism,” I maintain that the representation of banditry is as important as banditry itself. Furthermore, the distinction between these two elements is frequently difficult to perceive. The dispute on meaning as being central to the definition of banditry appears even in Hobsbawm’s classic definition, in which the double perspective (the state’s view versus that of the peasantry) is what makes banditry relevant for social history.

We know that the lexical meaning of *bandido* implies a state performance: the calling by proclamation or edict. The dramatic (semiotic) element is not accidental, and, as Foucault (1975) illustrates, it is one trait that existed well before the penal reforms of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and it lasted long afterward. Imperial Rome offers an interesting example. One of the punishments reserved for bandits was to force them to take part in theatrical representations of a historic or mythological nature. The character played by the convicted bandit died at the end of the play. The twist in this case was that the death was not a special effect or a dramatization: the actor-executioner really executed the bandit on stage (by crucifixion or exposure to bears) when the plot so indicated (Harries 1999, 151). Today, the punishment of criminals is something shrouded in secrecy, at least in Western culture. Cheering, awe-stricken crowds no longer gather to witness executions. However, what if not theaters of law are the many *Cops*-like reality shows (including its Mexican counterpart, *Policías*) in which the drama of crime and punishment is reenacted time and again, for the thrill and education of an eager public?

Focusing on this dramatic metaphor is not arbitrary; it emphasizes the element of performance involved in any act of domination. Thus, by focusing on bandit narratives as performances of domination I connect this study with those on state formation, in which, as Philip Corrigan puts it, “Key questions then become not *who* rules but [also] *how* is rule accomplished. . . . No historical or contemporary form of ruling can be understood (1) as or in its own discursive regime or image repertoire terms; (2) without investigating the historical genealogy, archaeology, origination (and transmutation) of those terms as *forms*” (1994, xvii–xviii, emphasis in original).

This dramatic component was clearly present in Latin America. Although rarely reaching the extremes of punishments meted out in Spain, where bandits such as Jaime el Barbudo were quartered and fried, Latin American bandits were not simply executed: they were hanged from conspicuous trees, publicly shot, decapitated or quartered, exposed at crossroads, in markets, on pikes, on fences, in squares, and even photographed in order to obtain maximum publicity from the punishment. This very public form of execution can be called a “theater of law” (Blok 1998, following E. P. Thompson 1975, 105) through which dominant classes symbolically restore or confirm their dominance after it is called into question by the bandit. These dominant classes also establish a counterpoint between the body of the bandit and the body of the sovereign (under the species of his armed officials).²² The theater of law is what Alfredo Ebelot called a “good end” when referring to the death of a bandit of northeastern Argentina, “understanding by this word an ending that satisfactorily conciliates our hunger for adventure with our instincts of security” (1889–1890, 105).

Without overextending the application that Blok gave to the notion, I maintain that the theater of law comprised a continuum of symbolic practices that encompassed both scaffold and poem and that was clearly intended as a “pedagogy of terror” (Salvatore 2001, 310). The collusion of the theater of law and banditry has given the West its most important symbol and story. I am referring to the Cross of the Passion that joins the highest order—God—and the most abject—the robbers (*latrones*) through the infamous punishment that Roman law reserved for the worst class of criminal that the *Digesto* defined. Robbers were condemned to death by exposure as part of the theatrical version of state-sponsored terrorism of which Rome was so fond (Shaw 1984). The second major trope of Christian morality, the

martyr *ad maiorem gloria Dei*, originated in another of the punishments reserved for brigands: death in the circus arena, devoured by wild beasts.

Perico, the rogue protagonist of *El periquillo sarniento*, by José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi (1816), understands the inner workings of the theater of law very well. Perico redeems himself of his many vices and crimes when at a crossroads (literal and metaphorical) he sees the rotten corpse of Januario, an old friend and accomplice. Januario was executed as a brigand chief. Perico understands that this meeting has not occurred by chance but is a “lesson” (416) that “Januario, although lifeless, loudly announces from that tree trunk” (417). Fittingly, Perico reacts by composing a sonnet (417), thus showing the live link between legislating (*legislar*) and reading (*leer*) (González Echevarría 1990). This relationship between letrados and bandidos took an even stranger turn (because of its extreme literality) in 1910, when the poet Salvador Díaz Mirón (1853–1928) was commissioned by Porfirio Díaz to direct the persecution of Santana Rodríguez Palafox, a.k.a. “Santanón,” a bandit who roamed the sugar producing areas of Veracruz. *El imparcial*, the newspaper of porfirismo, instituted a column entitled “The Bard and the Bandit” (*El bardo y el bandolero*) devoted to these rocambolesque series of events, as part of the celebrations of the nation’s centennial (Barrera Bassols 1987).

Banditry and the State

A new ruler is always stern.

Prometheus, referring to Zeus, *Prometheus in Chains*

Banditry and its relation to the state constitute a topic that goes to the core of Latin American identity since it has been argued repeatedly that the Spanish *conquistadores*, the founders of one of the most formidable and enduring empires the world has ever witnessed (and of the social formation now called Latin America), were little more than bandits (Hobsbawm 2000, 42). In fact, nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature and historiography, perhaps picking up on the Lascasian theme in which conquerors are persistently deemed cannibals and impious plunderers, abundantly express this motif: from Félix Varela’s *Jicoténcal* (1826), the first Latin American historical novel, to romantic novels (Miguel Cané’s *Esther*, from 1858) to positivistic criminology (Julio Guerrero’s *La génesis del crimen en México*, from 1901) to modernist essays (Leopoldo Lugones’s *El imperio Jesuítico*,

from 1904), to indigenist novels (Mauricio Magdaleno's *El resplandor*, from 1937).

In any case, in nineteenth-century Latin America a central feature of the desire called modernity was the constitution of nation-states enjoying sovereignty and territoriality, instead of segmentarity (i.e., a low reach of the administrative political center, thus creating internal frontiers) and heteronomy (discontinuous control over the territory) (Giddens 1985, 16, 53, 65, 160). The successful constitution of the nation-state implied at least two conditions. In the first, there would exist a monopoly on both ownership and allocation of violence, resulting in control of populations and resources vis-à-vis multiple forms of private violence. The states that stemmed from the independence wars in Latin America did not meet this condition since they were, as Centeno puts it, “fragments of empire” and not unified states (2002, 25). This situation was not unique since traditional states—city-states, agrarian empires, feudal orders, absolutist states—or empires such as the Spanish empire did not have the capacity to hold a territorial monopoly over violence (Giddens 1985).²³ Perhaps most importantly, these political syntheses did not construe their relationship with violence in terms of a monopoly in a continuous and perfectly (or sufficiently) delimited territorial realm (Tilly 1975b, 27; Giddens 1985; Thomson 1994, 9). The elite intent on nation-state building, modernization, and social engineering agendas made monopoly of ownership and allocation of violence a priority against groups that either actively resisted that monopoly or that wanted to negotiate from a position of force. Thus, the expropriation of the means of coercion from individuals, groups, and organizations within the territory that the state claimed as its own was (and in some cases still is) a matter of contention.

The second implied condition consists of a social consensus on the legitimacy of the monopoly on ownership and allocation of violence. This consensus is reached through the imposition and validation of narratives that would make the expropriation of violence by the state “natural” and “necessary.” Social narratives are crossed by hegemonic practices in which it is possible to find a disciplinary/pedagogical impulse (Leps 1992). It is in this sense, as Dennis K. Mumby points out, that these narratives are forms of social control and spaces from which an image of the social takes shape and naturalizes itself. In this book, naturalization follows Stuart Hall's definition: “a representational strategy designed to *fix* difference, and thus *secure*

it forever. It is an attempt to halt the inevitable 'slide' of meaning and to secure discursive or ideological 'closure'" (1997, 245, emphasis in original).

Among these hegemonic practices, literature was one of the most important during the nineteenth century, at least from an axiological point of view. In general terms, this is the theoretical position from which I address literature: as a legitimating tool for the state monopoly of violence but, at the same time, as a place where inevitably the contradictions and impossibilities related to that monopoly surface now and again. (In this volume, "literature" is understood in the broad use of the term pertaining to the nineteenth century, which included criminological treatises, journalistic pieces, and doctrinaire essays as well as a novels, poetry, and drama.)

Throughout the long nineteenth century, bandits had a constantly changing role in the drama of the nation-states and the latter's struggle for the monopoly of violence. At times, bandits were able to place their significant means of violence at the disposal of the central government, as was the case of the Plateados of Salomé Plasencia, who sided and fought with the Liberal Party during the Mexican wars of reform. It was also the case of the bandits who became part of the rural police in porfirian Mexico and the core of the famous Rurales. This collusion prompted Vanderwood to coin the term *bandit-Rural* in his book *Disorder and Progress*. Conversely, bandits were a mighty force in containing efforts toward centralization. In some cases, banditry hindered and even prevented the functioning of state offices or the convening of legislative bodies (mid-nineteenth-century Mexico is the best example). It was in this role that bandits acquired their most popular image.

Under other circumstances, the bandit gang could itself become a state-like organization or influence the state in a very definite way and thus become a model of political organization for later generations. A paramount example of this situation is Pancho Villa's governorship of Chihuahua, which Alan Knight described as "institutionalized social banditry" in his classic work, *The Mexican Revolution*. Another case is the agrarian legislation devised by José Gervasio de Artigas, the founding father of Uruguay who began his career as an outlaw and cattle smuggler in the northern frontier of the Banda Oriental (present-day Uruguay). Yet another is the popular revolution of José Tomás Boves, a royalist *caudillo* of the Venezuelan plains who recovered the Capitanía General de Venezuela territory for Fernando VII of Spain in 1814. The less illustrious cases of the Plateados of Morelos, of

Manuel Lozada in Tepic, or of Inés Chávez García in the Bajío (all of these in Mexico) could also be mentioned. Perhaps even more illustrative than these examples is that of Antônio Conselheiro and his jagunços. Conselheiro established a fully functioning, autonomous, and prosperous community (by northeastern Brazilian standards) in the remote Bahian *sertão*. The authorities of the fledgling Brazilian republic clearly understood the implications of the success of this “opting out,” and the consequence was a massacre that still haunts the Brazilian national imagination.

A brief discussion of the Argentine *gauchos* will give us a clear idea of how this “naturalization” of state violence functions. In narrative, essay, and journalistic works (mainly *La guerra gaucha* [1905] and *El payador* [1916]) Leopoldo Lugones (1874–1938), an organic intellectual of the Argentine oligarchy at the peak of its power, turned the gaucho, or vagrant Argentine outlaw, into “the prototype for the modern-day Argentine” (1916, 66), the only Argentine epic hero (1916, 170). Lugones regarded *El gaucho Martín Fierro* (1872) and *La vuelta de Martín Fierro* by José Hernández (1879)—the two-part poem that best told of the misfortunes of the gauchos at the hands of state (in)justice—as the Argentine equivalent of Homer’s *Iliad* in its role of expression and promotion of nationhood (Lugones 1916, 163–88). However, the epic interpretation of this bandit narrative is based upon two types of forgetting. First, the gauchos did not have a clear notion of nationhood in the modern (i.e., Lugonian) sense of the word that equated nation with nation-state. The fatherland (*patria*) was most commonly the *pago*, that is, the county, or the province at best, as many of these narratives show (Guerra 2003, 32; Salvatore 2003, 128; de la Fuente 2000), or it intersected with partisan identities in such a way as to make partisan affiliation more important than nationality (Halperin Donghi 2003; de la Fuente 2000). Also, the modes of political affiliation corresponded more closely (although not completely) with the patron-client model than with the republican model of the citizen in arms. In the second forgetting, the gaucho, as a challenge to the state’s monopoly of violence, was outlawed, dispossessed, jailed, used as cannon fodder, and forced into labor by the same landowning and commercial elite that would later elevate him to an heroic status. To place the *gaucho malo* as a prominent figure in the state pantheon is to build it upon paradoxical foundations: the state is paying eternal homage to those whom it purposefully eliminated in order to achieve its monopoly of violence, “founding the nationality with their blood” (Lugones 1916, 81) and

then expropriating the voices of these victims in order to sing the patriotic songs of the centennial of the May Revolution (the main thrust of *La guerra gaucha*). This forgetting, as Benedict Anderson points out (1983, 1992), is represented as a “reassuring fratricide,” crucial in the construction of the nation as imagined community. In Lugones’s case, then, the bandit was utilized as a *dramatis persona* in letrado fables of self-legitimation and the legitimation of his class against the “zoological tidal wave” (*aluvión zoológico*) of immigrants from Central Europe and the Mediterranean Basin, which had begun to threaten the hegemony of the landowning oligarchy. To oppose this new enemy, Lugones did not hesitate in calling to duty the old enemies who were now newly discovered brothers. He did this by inventing a selective tradition that allied the current masters and old subalterns (*gauchos*) against the new subalterns (the European immigrants).

Banditry developed another relationship to state-making when the threat of banditry was used as an excuse to increase state centralization (or to stage a coup within internecine elite struggles). The repression of banditry was used as an instrument of legitimation for the establishment of forces of direct control over regions and individuals. Several historical examples spring to mind: the “Santa Hermandad” in medieval Spain was created with the overt purpose of finishing off the bandit epidemic that was a collateral effect of civil war, but it was actually conceived by the Catholic kings primarily as part of an effort to create a centralized state, erect a royal monopoly of violence, and strip local lords of power (Lunenfeld 1970; Storni 1997, 75). In eighteenth-century rural Mexico the “Tribunal de la Acordada” and in the second half of the nineteenth century the Rurales were not only a police force but also tools used by the executive branch of government to bypass such institutions of control over the use of violence as the Audience, the courts of law, and the congress, and to balance the power of regional elites or disaffected corporations such as the army (MacLachlan 1974; Vanderwood 1992).²⁴

This paradox, in which banditry comfortably plays both sides of the law, appears time and again in Western political thought. Writing in *The City of God* in the fifth century, Saint Augustine of Hippo wonders,

Justice removed, then, what are kingdoms but great bands of robbers? What are bands of robbers themselves but little kingdoms? The band itself is made up of men; it is governed by the authority of a ruler; it is bound together by a pact of association; and the loot is divided according to an agreed law. If, by the constant

addition of desperate men, this scourge grows to such a size that it acquires territory, establishes a seat of government, occupies cities and subjugates peoples, it assumes the name of kingdom more openly. For this name is now manifestly conferred upon it not by the removal of greed, but by the addition of impunity. It was a pertinent and true answer which was made to Alexander the Great by a pirate whom he had seized. When the king asked him what he meant by infesting the sea, the pirate defiantly replied: "The same as you do when you infest the whole world; but because I do it with a little ship I am called a robber, and because you do it with a great fleet, you are an emperor." (1998, 58)

In the Greek novel bandits are a staple of the narrative (much as in the later Gothic novel). In *The Adventures of Leucippe and Clitophon* by Achilles Tatius, the same word used for "king" is used for "bandit chief" (*βασιλέα*). Theory on the state, from so-called conflict sociology (proposed by Randall Collins) to contemporary philosophy (e.g., Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari) has picked up on this trope of the collusion between banditry and state-making. Charles Tilly, in his pathbreaking work "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime" (1985), considers the nation-state to be very similar to a protection racket. In this and other works, Tilly places banditry in a "continuum of state-making" whose "defining feature . . . is the extent to which control over the use of force is concentrated in a single organization." In his view, then, there is not a difference of quality but of degree between the rural Sicilian mafia, banditry, the nation-state, and empire (1975a, xx–xxiii).²⁵

The risk of this intertwining and eventual conflation of banditry and the state made it even more urgent for Latin American elites to impose a limit between these two forces, in order to create the conditions and scene for the foundation of a nation-state. If the nation is, as Anderson maintains, an imagined community, then "imagined" necessarily means "knowable"—stretching Williams's notion (1973)—and as such it asks for a strict demarcation of its symbolic limits. Much of the fictional literature written on the Mexican Revolution may be understood as an attempt to draw these limits, to draw distinctions between the bandit, the true revolutionary, and the corrupt representative of an oppressive state (who also calls himself a revolutionary), in order to understand the Revolution as either the inaugural event of Mexico as a modern nation or an opportunity forever lost. Some early works (e.g., *Los de abajo*, by Mariano Azuela, first published in 1915–16) as well as some later ones (e.g., *El corrido de Juan Saavedra*, by María

Luisa Ocampo, from 1929), show that these distinctions are difficult and at times even impossible to make.

Thus, the most dangerous challenge posed by banditry was not chaos or what passed for chaos in the eyes of the elites.²⁶ The most dangerous challenge was symbolic. In its most developed forms, banditry did not challenge a law or a right but rather the state as law-giver and ultimate source of legitimate violence (what Vanderwood called the “idea of banditry” as opposed to its reality). Using the distinction proposed by Walter Benjamin between law making violence and law maintaining violence (1921, 283), I am inclined to say that banditry presents the state with a form of violence that, just like that of the state, creates law, albeit of a different nature (that is, one that is local and oral). Its presence challenges not only the letter of the law but also the position of enunciation that supports it (i.e., the judge as origin of the sentence, the lawmaker as the origin of the law). This distinction has of course the ambiguous nature of any statement concerning banditry. The challenge that banditry poses, not necessarily in a self-aware fashion, and that may be (and usually is) only the perception of the state (unlike modern Marxist guerrilla warfare, where that challenge is deliberate) is a cause of deep uncertainty and repulsion by the lettered city. In fact, the scene of the personal encounter between the letrado and the bandit is a motif in and of itself in Western narratives. The tone of this encounter ranges from the warm brotherhood between bandit and lawyer in Alexandre Dumas’s *Les Frères corses* (1844) to the happy acquaintance in which bandits and letrados hit it off through mutual respect (as in Don Quijote’s encounter with Roque Guinart on the outskirts of Barcelona or Rob Roy’s enduring and efficacious protection of Francis Osbaldistone during his northern adventures in Walter Scott’s novel) to the somber destiny of the letrado in Antonio Di Benedetto’s *Zama* (1956), who has his hands cut off by a bandit.

Aside from these trusting or anxious fantasies, the real and theoretical collusion between banditry and state formation during the nineteenth century called for the ferocious repression of banditry. The *Ley número 19 sobre jueces de camino y persecución de ladrones en despoblado*, passed in Mexico in 1852, established that the penalty for robbery with violence or the threat of violence was death, regardless of the amount stolen or whether violence was actually exerted. In the *Ley general para juzgar a los ladrones, homicidas, heridos y vagos*, also from Mexico (1857), a clear distinction is established between rural robbery (*robo en despoblado*), punished with the death penalty,

and urban robbery, punished with hard time. Banditry deprived the culprit of the rights and guarantees derived from citizenship. From the times of the *Acordada*, brigands were subjected to special tribunals that held summary trials without appeals, pardons, or amnesties, and the usual sentence was immediate execution (Vanderwood 1992, xxxiv–xxxv).²⁷

The forgoing of the rights entailed in citizenship in the case of bandits was even a matter of pride for state officials. Ernest William White, in *Cameos of the Silver-Land, or the Experiences of a Young Naturalist in the Argentine Republic* (1881), tells us the following about his experience in San Juan: “Until the present Governor assumed office, the city suburbs lay at the mercy of a gang of highwaymen. As lawless and daring, but not so merciful, as Dick Turpin: black-mail was levied and submitted to by all travelers, under pain of death, so that at last, locomotion beyond civic bounds became well-nigh impossible. . . . [T]he Governor issued the order to his soldiers. ‘Go out, capture and slay those ruffians without benefit of clergy!’ and forthwith ten of them slept and San Juan became as peaceful as quakerdom [Quakerdom]” (396).

For Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, an Argentine intellectual and father of the famous civilization versus barbarism binarism, bandits were “enemies of humankind” and to kill them on the spot, without due process, was a “natural right” previous to laws and constitutions:

A man, because of revenge, rage, or any other cause, kills another man, just like because of need or deprivation he steals something. This is a common crime, with a name, a place, and a jurisdiction. Banditry targets anybody outside cities and the protection of the law. Banditry victimizes not a particular individual, but everybody, society as a whole, the human race as a whole. The highway robber has as his backdrop the desert and the mountains, and in order for travelers to be safe it is imperative to declare that the robbery outside urban areas is a crime against humanity [*delito contra la humanidad*] and that the culprit is outside the common law. This is why nations are expected to turn over famous bandits, even though there may not be extradition treaties. A pirate on the sea and a bandit on land are outside the law and can be killed, *put to death*, by anybody, anytime. This is at the same time natural and public law, which supersedes any constitution, and therefore these constitutions cannot annul it. (1899, 206)

Sarmiento is following a well-established tradition, one that has been clearly stated in colonial legislation, as follows:

We order and command that any criminal or highway robber who roams the countryside as part of a gang, robbing highways or populated areas, and who hav-

ing been called by a proclamation . . . does not appear in front of the judges [be] declared an incorrigible and publicly condemned rebel, and we allow that any person . . . freely offend, kill or catch said criminal, without fear of any reprisal . . . bringing him in front of the court dead or alive [having either] dragged them, or hanged, or quartered and exhibited on the roads or places where he committed his crimes. (*Tomo tercero de autos acordados, que contiene nueve libros, por el orden de títulos de las Leyes de recopilación*, Madrid, A expensas de la Real Cía. de Impresores i libreros del Reino, 1775, 3:405, in Solares Robles 1999, 144–45)

Sarmiento suggests that banditry is not a problem to be solved within the institutions created and regulated by law because it touches on the problem of the origin of law itself. The distinction between bandit and lawful citizen is the primal scene where the distinction between human and nonhuman takes place. In this scene, defined by law making violence, the division that gives origin to the social takes place, thus defining the locus and possibility of legitimate (human) association. Literature repeatedly echoes this primal division. For example, Guillermo Prieto (1818–1897), a Mexican writer and liberal general, wrote a series of romances on Manuel Lozada, a bandit of Tepic. The most important is “Grande y chispeante romance de las dos furias (Rojas y Lozada).” In this poem Lozada is a Fury, a monster, a wild beast, a miasma bubbling up from the social mud, and a satyr, as well as the hallucination of a disturbed mind, a demon, and a natural wonder. For Prieto, Lozada is not a human product embedded in a specific social situation fighting a human fight. He is beyond (or before) the human and the social since he is alien and he preceded the social contract. In the case of Lozada, the state as the embodiment of the social contract is charged with the explicit task of erasing him. However, paradoxically enough, if the bandit is a monster, the most important metaphor of the state (that of the leviathan) also makes the state a biblical, inscrutable monster. This metaphorical contamination, in which monstrosity can be the interior or the exterior of the social, lies at the core of my investigation.

Bandit Narratives

The purpose of this book is to reflect upon a number of narratives produced throughout the nineteenth century following the numerous articulations (a term defined by Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 105) of the bandit trope as an arena of negotiation and conflict for the imagining of the nation-state and its “others” in Latin America. I am particularly interested in the representa-

tion of banditry (or any form of peasant insurgency called banditry) by the letrado elite as a decisive and urgent expression of the desires, contradictions, and conflicts that define the “heterogeneous Latin American modernity” (Herlinghaus 2000). We now recognize that banditry was key in the definition of some of the founding paradigms in Latin American national development (e.g., civilization versus barbarism, order versus chaos, modern liberalism versus colonial corporatism, city versus country capitalism versus pre-capitalism, free market versus socialism), and Sarmiento seems to give expression to this intuition in a particularly forceful way. While speaking of the decisive showdown that would embody (and resolve) the Argentine riddle, he says, “In my opinion, a war that is possible (and even desirable, if our fatherland cannot be spared that evil) is a war that would pit freedom against *caudillaje*, a war that would have strategy and military science on the one hand and banditry [*bandalaje*] and compulsive rural insurgency [*alzamiento compulsivo de campañas*] on the other; a regular army on the one hand and irregulars wearing the red *chiripá* on the other; civilization in the means on the one hand and barbarism in the ends on the other” (1852, 301).

As Hall points out, “The nation state was never simply a political entity. It was always also a symbolic formation—a ‘system of representation’” (2000, 38). Thus, we must pay attention to the ways in which the European-minded, lettered, Creole, male, urban elite depicted, through literature, a form of nonstate rural violence in societies that were at that moment overwhelmingly rural, illiterate, and nonwhite and followed rules of life that differed markedly from those of the dominant culture. By maintaining this focus, we can reconstruct a crucial segment of that “system of representation” and of the conflicting conditions under which modernity took hold in Latin America.

The term “bandit narratives,” which I use throughout the book, refers to the vast corpus of writing that deals with bandits or with forms of peasant violence called banditry. This corpus comprises novels, short stories, criminological treatises, essays, poems, and film. Beyond specific differences concerning each format, the narrative form is common to them all, and they share a paradigm of representation that I attempt to outline. Bandit narratives are, to my mind, an essential part of the theater of law, and they take the form of an allegory of the violent constitution of the nation-state. I follow Fredric Jameson’s proposal in the opening pages of *The Political Uncon-*

scious when he disavows the distinction between cultural texts having a political resonance and those devoid of it. For Jameson, this false distinction is “a symptom and a reinforcement of the reification and privatization of contemporary life” (1981, 20), a political fact itself. Angus Fletcher maintains that there is an inherently political character in all literary allegories, since they enact “a conflict of authorities” (1964, 22), while Gordon Teskey shows the nexus between allegory and state violence in the cultural history of the West (1996, 137–38).

The relationship between allegory and theater of law is captured with eerie precision in the anecdote of Remirro de Orco in *The Prince* (1513) by Niccolò Machiavelli. (I am following, to a certain extent, Teskey’s superb account and interpretation of the scene.) Cesar Borgia had commissioned Remirro to pacify the Romagna, which he did at the price of extreme cruelty and the loss of Borgia’s popularity and prestige. In order to regain the goodwill of the citizenry and to placate any discontent, Borgia ordered Remirro to be secretly abducted. One fine morning, Remirro’s body appeared at Cesena Square chopped in half, a bloody knife by his side. “The ferocity of this scene left the people at once stunned and satisfied,” Machiavelli recounts (22). This ferocity did not reside exactly in the quartered body but rather in the bloody knife. The knife was not (and could not have been) the murder weapon, since a knife does not easily cut a human torso in half, bone and all. Soaking the knife in blood and setting it by the corpse was an intentional plus of meaning, an indication that in that death there was a message and that the message went beyond treason and punishment: it was an allegoric staging of the power and the violence of the sovereign (Teskey 1996, 137–38). Bandit narratives are like that bloody knife: they are at the same time traces and signifiers of state violence, documents of culture as well as of barbarism, similar to the “cultural treasures” of which Walter Benjamin speaks in “Thesis on the Philosophy of History” (2006).

Doris Sommer (1991) proposes allegory as the privileged signifying mode of nineteenth-century Latin American writing (or at least of narrative). Sommer’s central thesis is that love that crosses racial, class, linguistic, or legal boundaries was a metaphor with which the lettered city depicted its utopia of national integration, or conversely, its malaise regarding the lack thereof. Jameson, in his article “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism” (1986), argues that the national allegory does not belong to a differentiated fictional corpus of a specific period but that it is a

feature pertaining to literature of the so-called third world (69). This idea has triggered numerous criticisms and revisions, some of which are quite powerful.²⁸

At the same time, Sommer's approach can be criticized on several grounds, in particular because there is no theoretical attention paid to violence being as important a signifier as romance (even when violence is occurring within romances). It may be argued that romance was her focus, but then we would be forgetting that many (perhaps most) foundational romances are to some degree mixed with violence, and that violence is therefore the other side—an inseparable element—of the national romance.

I agree with Fletcher when he indicates that beyond allegory as a specific literary genre, all fictions have an allegorical component to a certain extent. He distinguishes between allegory and allegoresis, the latter partially independent from the author's intentions and based upon the act of reading (1964, 4, 12). I offer several arguments in favor of the notion that "national allegory" is continually productive. In Latin America a certain brand of literature finds its political dimension in the erasure of the distinction between public and private, or the symbolization of the former in the terms of the latter. (Nineteenth-century literature is exemplary of this fact.) In addition, the literary allegory does not necessarily imply a closure of meaning in favor of a pre-existent ideology. Quite to the contrary, allegory can question that ideology, thus distinguishing allegory from pedagogy. This is the meaning of allegory as it is put forth by Marthe Robert in her reading of *Kafka*, or by Benjamin in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. Also, the national allegory has a self-referential dimension that has to be read as an interrogation on its instance of enunciation—a questioning of the role of the "national letrado." Finally, many of the cases I analyze locate the problem of rural violence in a specific region (e.g., the northeastern Brazilian sertão, Morelos or Jalisco in Mexico, the pampas in the Río de la Plata region, or the Venezuelan plains). However, as Gerald Martin points out (1989), the region in Latin American literature does not function as a strictly subnational unit but rather as a national or supernational trope. Thus, the pampas in *Facundo o civilización y barbarie* by Sarmiento (Argentina, 1845) or the Arauca Valley in *Doña Bárbara* by Gallegos (Venezuela, 1929) are metaphors of Argentina or Venezuela as well as of a Latin America torn apart by the conflict between civilization versus barbarism. This link is created by means of the national allegory.

Time Frame

This book analyzes representations of banditry during the long Latin American nineteenth century, running roughly from late colonial times to the late 1920s. This period marks the incorporation of Latin America into global markets based upon an export-led growth model (Bulmer-Thomas 1994). This model, which had a clear colonial precedent, was imposed toward the middle of the nineteenth century and secured the hegemony of a commercial and/or landowning class that obtained maximum political and economic benefits from it. This so-called neocolonial pact (Halperín Donghi 1997) implied a peculiar model of capitalism focused on the production of agrarian commodities for global consumption (e.g., sugar, wheat, coffee, cocoa, beef, and bananas), highly concentrated landownership, and a modestly centralized state. Such an arrangement progressively expanded legal and judicial systems, economic and administrative infrastructures, national armed forces, and police that coexisted easily with less prestigious institutions: debt peonage, the company store (*tienda de raya*), restrictions on peasant mobility, forced military service, and out-and-out genocide. It also coexisted with precapitalist modes of production such as the Indian community in its role as a provider of cheap labor (Mallon 1983). The dual process of state building and establishing a particularly ruthless mode of agrarian capitalism implied struggles and negotiations between local, regional, and national elites. It also implied pitched struggles between elites and popular sectors intent upon preserving landownership or autonomy (Joseph and Nugent 1994, 3). It is rather easy to see how the bandit trope acquires particular relevance during a period focused on land and population control.

The Great Depression marked the end of this period as well as the beginning of the so-called crisis of the neocolonial pact as a model of growth. Even when banditry and rural unrest persisted well after this period (up to today, as Sendero Luminoso in Peru, the endless Colombian civil war, and the zapatism of the Chiapas region exemplify), all of these expressions are qualitatively different from the phenomenon that I examine in this volume. From the mid-1920s on (or later, depending on the case), most expressions of peasant unrest and its representation were inspired (or were charged with being inspired) by Marxism, which determined to varying degrees the self-perception of the participants, the relations between rural and urban

insurgency, and the cultural character that the whole process acquired. This political movement adds a whole new dimension to the “bandit problem,” and therefore any analysis of post-1920s banditry should form part of a different project. Also, from the 1920s onward, the social landscape in rural Latin America (particularly, the presence of the state) was more or less established along lines fashioned by the elite, dramatically changing the ways in which agrarian struggles were fought. Banditry thus changed its place in the political and cultural arenas.

The reader will note that I devote little attention to the Mexican *corrido*, the Brazilian *literatura de cordel*, the Río de la Plata *payada*, or the Argentine *folletín criollista*, which are the cultural expressions that first come to mind (in part, due to media popularity) when one thinks about Latin American banditry. My decision to focus on the elite perspective of banditry was based upon both methodological and theoretical motives. This perspective of banditry in cultural discourse (as different from police and court reports) has received scant attention, although there is a well-established body of scholarship on the elite perspective on urban criminality. Moreover, to analyze corridos or folletines from a purely textual perspective (the only one available to those with professional training as literary/cultural critics) would betray their political-cultural specificity, thus creating a mere spectral counterpoint between popular and lettered culture. The political dimension in these art forms is lost in formal textual analysis, since they exceed the protocols that characterize literature (and upon which literary criticism methodologies are built). In some cases, the political dimension is distorted in a mere folklorization. (There are, however, brilliant works, such as Daus 1982, that engage in textual analysis of popular culture.) Corridos, *cantigas*, and popular songs require specific multidisciplinary analyses that take into account highly local contexts (e.g., communities of production and interpretation, migration patterns of styles and motifs, complex interactions between popular, high, and mass culture). An additional difficulty is that many of these expressions deal with transient entities that are sometimes not even well defined—an advancing army, a famous trial or execution, an election, an assassination—thus making the need for a grounded and detailed analysis even greater. A classic example of this approach is found in Américo Paredes’s *With His Pistol in His Hand: A Border Ballad and Its Hero* (1958). Paredes

analyzes the “Corrido de Gregorio Cortés,” exploring its deep connections with the struggles on Texas’ southern border during the first half of the twentieth century. Other examples are Adolfo Prieto’s examination of Argentine *folletín criollista* in *El discurso criollista en la formación de la Argentina moderna* (1988), Candace Slater’s study of the *literatura de cordel* in *Stories on a String* (1989), or Elijah Wald’s *Narcocorrido* (2001).

Furthermore, even though “popular” and “elite” are entirely relative terms and are constituted through mutually modifying conflicts and negotiations (and I am aware of the fact that this important factor in the cultural dynamics will not be part of the analysis), they do not always have the same periodizations, they do not operate within the same units, they do not follow the same protocols of representation, and they are not inhabited by the same narratives. (For example, Villa and Artigas were suppressed or distanced from elite discourse for decades, which allowed for their flourishing in popular and mass culture.) In any case, an analysis of popular depictions of bandits would require not only another book to consider the large number of examples but also to cover the method, theory, chronology, and the political and cultural conflicts involved. I am confident, though, that what I have lost by denying each of my analyses a more grounded examination I have gained by providing insight, for the first time, into a cultural phenomenon encompassing the entire continent.

My focus is bandit narratives from Argentina, Mexico, Venezuela, and Brazil. Of course, epidemic banditry was not restricted to these countries; Cuba during the wars of independence, the Andean region during the post-independence period, and twentieth-century Colombia had more than their fair share of large-scale banditry. However, in the four previously mentioned countries, a tradition of bandit literature had a prominent place in the national literary canon and in the larger national imagination. This is not as apparent—so far—in the other countries of Latin America.

The texts considered in the following pages will not be organized chronologically or by national traditions. Rather, each part groups a number of case studies according to their different takes on banditry vis-à-vis the national projects: the bandit as Other, the bandit as instrument of critique, and the bandit as devious brother and as suppressed origin.

Part I examines cases in which banditry is addressed as the unequivocal demon of national, modernizing projects and the suppression of the bandit is a paramount (and essential) moment in the narrative. I devote this part to

analyzing foundational texts of Latin American culture such as the picaresque novel *El periquillo sarniento* (1816), by José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi (1776–1827); the essay *Facundo* (1845); the doctrinarian piece *El Chacho: último caudillo de la montonera de los Llanos* (1867), by Domingo Faustino Sarmiento (1810–1888); the novel *El Zarco* (1885–1888), by Ignacio Manuel Altamirano (1834–1893), as well as criminological works by Raimundo Nina Rodrigues and Julio Guerrero's *La génesis del crimen en México* (1901).

Part II examines cases in which banditry is mobilized as part of variously oriented critiques of the modernizing path that Latin American countries were following toward the second half of the nineteenth century. This part is devoted to the novel *Astucia: el jefe de los Hermanos de la Hoja o los charros contrabandistas de la Rama* (1865) by Luis Inclán (1816–1875); the Venezuelan novel *Zárate* (1882) by Eduardo Blanco (1839–1912); the celebrated poem *Martín Fierro* (1872/1879), by José Hernández (1834–1886); as well as *Juan Moreira* (1879), the hugely popular serial novel by Eduardo Gutiérrez (1851–1889); and *Alma gaucha* (1906), the play by Alberto Ghirardo (1874–1946), who rewrites *Martín Fierro* by fashioning his main character as an anarchist *avant la lettre*. The last chapter of this part deals with the novel *Los bandidos de Río Frío* (1891) by Manuel Payno (1810–1894).

Part III examines the role of banditry as the suppressed origin of the national community, a tropic use that takes the ambiguity that characterized the bandit figure to an extreme, since it includes and puts tension on the two previous uses of the bandit figure. Because of this, the first chapter of Part III is devoted to perhaps the most complex work of the corpus, *Os sertões* (1902), by Euclides da Cunha (1866–1909). In addition, this part examines *La guerra gaucha* (1905) and *El payador* (1916), both by Leopoldo Lugones (1874–1938), the novel *Los de abajo* (1915) by Mariano Azuela (1873–1952), the essay *Cesarismo democrático* (1919) by the Venezuelan Laureano Vallenilla Lanz (1870–936), and finally *Doña Bárbara* (1927), the novel by Rómulo Gallegos (1884–1969).

The conclusion of the book summarizes some of the main topics visited throughout these pages and establishes a number of categories that I consider useful for further analysis.

Part I

The Foundation of National Identities

The Bandit as Other

