

Exploraciones/Explorations

Black Orpheus and the Merging of two Brazilian Nations

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Orfeu da Conceição

The second cinematic remake of the play 'Orfeu da Conceição' has sparked a new debate among filmmakers and social scientists, bringing out opposing views on major aspects of Brazilian nationhood, such as race relations, bodily practices and the meaning of Carnival. The Brazilian poet Vinícius de Moraes wrote the original play, which was presented for the first time in Rio de Janeiro in 1956. This play is about a tragic love affair between two black characters, Orpheus and Eurydice, posed against the background of carnival in the city of Rio de Janeiro. Orpheus is a gifted musician who meets Eurydice during carnival. It so happens that after falling in love with Orpheus, Eurydice is killed by a man who represents the devil. The desperate Orpheus descends into Hell to rescue her. When he comes back home with the corpse of Eurydice, Mira, who was his former lover, kills him. Central to the play is the defence of the eternity of art set against the tragic reality of life.

Two films were produced based on this same play, and both directors claim to reveal the universal meaning of art against the background of a carnival feast associated with the Brazilian black population. The films were produced in 1959 and 1998. The first, *Black Orpheus* (Orfeu Negro) was directed by the French filmmaker Marcel Camus. It is mainly recognised for its utopian view in which love and passion, race relations and carnival are represented. The second film, entitled *Orfeu*, was directed by the Brazilian filmmaker Cacá Diegues, and has been praised for its commitment to the description of reality. In it, Diegues explored the commodification of bodies, racial conflicts, and the commercialisation of the carnival feast. This director previously belonged to the important movement of Brazilian filmmakers known as *cinema novo*, which tried to transform cinematic industrial productions into critical and artistic productions. He is also the director of acclaimed Brazilian films such as *Bye Bye Brasil*, *Xica da Silva* and *Tieta*. In his Orpheus film, Diegues used a set of sophisticated cinematic techniques in order to give the illusion of reality. While making the screenplay, he worked with an excellent group of intellectuals and cast many well-known celebrities of Rio's cultural life rather than using professional actors.

As the latter production was not well received by international film critics, the Brazilian musician Caetano Veloso wrote a challenging article in the *New*

York Times defending the recent remake. Veloso criticised the former internationally acclaimed version of the play for depicting Brazilians as exotics using outrageously fanciful colours and the general ‘voodoo for tourists’ ambience (Veloso 2000). Indeed, the film directed by Marcel Camus did win the Oscar for the Best Foreign Film and the *Palme d’Or* at the Cannes Film Festival. It was considered the Best Foreign Film and the Best Film, respectively, by the New York Film Critics’ Circle and by the British Academy. In 1960 it received the Golden Globe Award. The acclaimed version of *Black Orpheus* attempted to produce an ageless representation of art and it fascinated foreign audiences. According to Veloso, however, the film was not well considered by Brazilians. Veloso happened not only to be the author of the soundtrack of the second film, but he also appeared in a short scene in this film, and his wife was one of the producers.

Despite his involvement with the production of the film, Veloso is absolutely right as he points out that although the first production is capable of completely engaging a foreign audience, the ambience of fun and happiness among all the characters is not attractive to most citizens of Rio. For them any possibility of self-recognition in the story diminishes from the earliest scenes. For most Brazilians, the first production seems to be one more in a long list of those commodities that were made *para inglês ver*, that is, produced according to a foreign idealization of Brazilian customs and dress. Therefore, the musician called attention not only to the diversity of interpretations, but also to the power associated with the different forums that appraise and legitimate the meaning of art. However, to what extent is it possible to affirm that whereas the first film is a mere fairy tale, the second fulfils the task of depicting reality? In addition, how are we to understand the influence of two different historical contexts upon these two films?

In this paper, I will investigate the two cinematic productions, considering them as part of processes that took place within different historical periods. In particular, I will be examining the issues of race relations and bodily pleasures within carnival, as they appear to be overriding in both versions of the play. I will consider that although each film can be seen as part of its respective time, they both represent two one-sided versions of the meaning of carnival practices in the city of Rio de Janeiro.

Whereas the first production was produced at the end of the 1950s when the Brazilian ideal of racial democracy was widely accepted, the second was produced at the end of the 1990s when mass media, violence and the rights of ethnic minorities constituted the political agenda of our times. In the second film, from the earliest scenes the focus is on poverty, shootings and injustice. The poor neighbourhood located on the hillsides of the city is continually invaded by brutal police forces, and Eurydice is senselessly killed by the leader of the drug trafficking gang. The decomposing corpses thrown at the edge of the hillside by drug dealers represented Hell.

Undoubtedly, much has been transformed in Rio’s urban life. The emergence of drug trafficking and other new forms of violence have completely changed the everyday life of the city dwellers. However, the differing portrayal of the city in these films is not merely the result of the progressive decadence of Rio’s urban life, since racial conflict, violence and corruption were also features strongly associated with Rio’s carnival in the 1950’s. Both films depict a one-

sided perspective of Rio's carnival practices, which are in fact much more diverse, ambivalent and boundless than they were shown to be here.

From Racial Democracy to Multiculturalism

On the subject of race relations in Brazil, the two cinematic productions of the Greek legend offer two dramatically different approaches. With its all-black cast, the first film brought about a remarkable revolution in the complex racial relations of Brazil. Even so, the cinematic images portray Rio's natural beauty, the mesmerising sound of drums, and the festive manifestations of life, romanticising the conflict present among the poor and black population that inhabits the hillsides of the city. The film was produced at a time when the myth of racial democracy in Brazil was held, and it reinforced the myth. The more recent production is also very much a product of its time. It portrays racial conflict through the medium of racially radical rap lyrics as well through the images of a white man being executed by a group of predominantly black drug traffickers.

A series of studies developed in the 1970s completely transformed the contemporary approaches to race relations in Brazil as they showed that despite widespread miscegenation, race remained an important indicator of privilege in Brazilian society. Furthermore, they showed that blacks continue to occupy the lower rungs of the socio-economic scale (Hasenbalg 1979). This is a social and political issue that confronts citizens to this day. Based on these studies, many analyses of race relations concluded that the image of Brazil as a racially democratic nation is a fantasy essentially constructed either by the dominant classes or by the Brazilian elite. Based on the assertion that the myth of racial democracy obscures discrimination, many authors maintain that black people need to build their own identities separate from white values and beliefs. According to their analyses there would be an evolving process of 'racialisation' whereby Brazilian race relations would become more transparent (Guimarães 2000).

Nevertheless, if it is true to say that, regardless of the social class to which black people belong, there is prejudice against them in Brazil, it is also true to say that to this day it is almost impossible to represent the majority of the Brazilian population in terms of a strict code of race. I would risk saying that, although the North-American dual model of race is beginning to be appropriated by some groups of the black movement in Brazil, the racial code, which would easily consider those to be of black or of African descent by either European or North American standards, is far from being recognised by the majority of the Brazilian population. Discrimination in Brazil does not occur according to the same mechanisms as it does in the United States. The idea of miscegenation is still widespread in Brazil. Although it involves exclusion of dark-skinned people and represents the mechanism by which racism operates, it also entails a wider acceptance of different cultures, values and beliefs. The Brazilian population defines itself according to more than three hundred terms that relate to race and colour. Although Brazilians are people who see themselves according to multiple definitions, including the opposition between blacks and whites, they are far from being limited to them.

It is also important to point out that the idea of miscegenation has been part

of the idea of the nation since the 1930s. It is widely recognised that a new national identity was formulated during Getúlio Vargas' populist government. This new identity promoted the image of a harmonious and homogeneous whole capable of including all citizens regardless of race, ethnic origins or colour. The imagery of the nation was constituted as the composite of diverse cultural elements such as samba, carnival, and *feijoada*, all of which are associated with the 'Brazilian' population. The Brazilian construction of nationalism conflated the ideas of miscegenation and nation, and this conflation can be considered as the result of a process of negotiation that has not yet been completely concluded.

Myths are not abstract constructions. They are continually manifested through the ways in which most Brazilians define themselves and interact with one another. Gilberto Freyre was one of the authors who first described in positive terms the process of widespread criss-crossing among different social and cultural populations. However, although Freyre has been praised for having pointed out that the blending process in Brazil was highly inclusive (Freyre 1930), he has not been sufficiently criticised for failing to call attention to the fact that the process of inclusion was often cynical and ambivalent. The process of inclusion did not include black people in the same way and in the same arenas as it did for white people. The recognition and positive values attributed to Brazilian miscegenation came with a series of other mythologies, such as the belief in the goodness of progressive whitening and the association between blacks and all sorts of hedonism. One should not overlook the resulting violence and inequalities that have occurred as a result of those contexts.

The consequence of the coexistence of a multitude of contradictory myths about race is that Brazilian people are blind to racial differences in some spheres and situations, while in others they deliberately emphasise these very differences. This happened in the 1950s and is still present within contemporary practices. Some authors have insightfully pointed out the ambivalence within these myths and stressed the impossibility of dealing with them as pure categories of thought and action (Fry 1982). If coherence is an integral part of grand narratives and theoretical analysis, it is certainly not a major characteristic of everyday practices. The point is that the Brazilian concept of miscegenation does not always exclude the categories of race. The accusation that the black population has been associated with carnival and football as opposed to the image of the enlightened and educated white population cannot be refuted. The inclusion of black people for their sensuality and physical strength in opposition to intellectualism and rationalism is corroborated by the hierarchical social structure in which white people fare better both in the educational and in the professional systems.

The struggle for the recognition of whether blackness or Africanism in Brazil is an ongoing process cannot ignore the steps that have already been taken (Stuart 1990, Gilroy 1993). The black population has suffered the experience of racist violation throughout centuries, for they have been denied the right to worship their deities, reproduce their rituals and choose their destinies. Afrocentric claims to authenticity are not forged by essential and authentic holistic constructions, but by the simultaneous belonging and engagement with different cultural and social-political movements in Brazil and around the world. This is a continuous process that has no rules or *a priores*. Like any others, this

process of identity formation is in itself ambivalent, since identities are constituted by different values and desires.

If one considers that there is a strong sense of belonging amongst old and mostly black *sambistas* towards carnival festivities, one has also to consider the possibility of politics associated with the issue of recognition. The carnival feast has given voice to many black people whose artistic productions were widely recognised as symbols of the nation. Participating in these public manifestations has contributed to the emergence of a positive representation of black culture. Although this representation is incomplete, one-sided and intersected by different values and judgements, it is not possible to completely dismiss them in the name of alienation and control (Santos 1999). Denying carnival as an inherent part of a struggle that black people have been involved in to achieve recognition represents the obliteration of the historical memory of black people who see themselves as the authors of the goods of those festivities. This certainly excludes them from the new concepts of blackness that are being created. The question, therefore, is not to evaluate the historical process in opposition to the notions of origin and heritage. On the contrary, tradition is the living memory which is present in the cultural process and which results from the political agency of those involved in it.

The two films about Black Orpheus depict either racial democracy or racial confrontation. While each emphasise two sorts of stereotypes about Brazilian nationhood, neither of them reflects the complex situation of the black population in Brazil. Although these are features that were emphasised in different historical periods, neither film exhausts the issues they intend to address. Both views are far from the complex questions associated with miscegenation, prejudice and discrimination. The first film was incapable of showing that white people in the 1950s were not only guaranteed the profits from the carnival spectacle, but also occupied the best places in the grandstands (Rodrigues 1984). Yet, if it is true that the carnival feast reaffirms the hierarchal relationships between affluent whites and underprivileged blacks, it is also true that the festivity is still an arena where a large part of the black population has participated and created one of the most outstanding expressions of Brazilian culture. The sense of self-confidence amongst black people and their awareness of being the major authors of the goods of the carnival feast are neither present nor convincing in the film directed by Cacá Diegues. This second film also exaggerates the sense of racial boundaries within a shantytown in Rio de Janeiro.

Bodily Pleasures

In the first production of the Greek legend we see the main paradigms of a great love story. A successful love story is one that can show that those involved in it are able to elude the order of public meaning. As passion builds up, one does not consider the differences of class, prestige or power. Moreover, the lovers must offer themselves to one another without any sort of control or intention of reciprocity. They must create a separate world capable of containing themselves regardless of the constraints of the social world. Even those who do not believe in passionate love affairs must be affected by these plot elements, for otherwise the story will not make any sense. By extension, the

tale of love is the template for carnival: a world with its own rules capable of transcending any sort of social constraint. The film draws the audience into a narrative in which romantic idealism unites the love and passion of the uniquely particular lovers amidst an ambience of carnivalesque festivity, which exudes enjoyment, gaiety and happiness everywhere. The lovers meet each other through the sensual rhythms of drums and dance movements.

By contrast, the second version of the play *Orfeu da Conceição* relates an implausible love story. Here love is equated with a naively romantic affair in opposition to lust and the carnival festivity. At the beginning of the film there are torrid sex scenes between Orpheus and Mira. The former girl friend is portrayed as the seductive *porta-bandeira* (standard-bearer), who earns money by posing nude for Playboy magazine. The subsequent love scenes between Orpheus and the virgin Eurydice differ sharply from the lust scenes of the beginning of the film. The lovers are chastely covered by the sheets. The film reaches a ridiculous climax when Eurydice requests Orpheus, on waking in the morning, that he put on his trousers. Eurydice is distant from the generalised folly of carnival. During carnival, she admires Orpheus, the leading persona of the festivity, through the images of a television screen. The plot is marked throughout by the contrast between Eurydice's chastity and Mira's blatant sexuality. Unlike Camus' version of the love story, there is no overlapping of the love affair and carnival. On the contrary, Diegues' film portrays carnival as a spectacle permeated by commercial and political interests and focuses on the commodification of the female body.

Whereas the first film seeks to convey a great love story, the second is ambiguous in its proposal and results in an unconvincingly tale of love. Does it mean to suggest that romantic affairs have no place in slums in the 1990s? What appears to be a homogeneous spectacle in contemporary Rio's carnival is, in reality, an encounter of different practices. As for sexuality, it is not possible to single out just one sort of sexual behaviour present in these manifestations either in the 1950s or in the 1990s. Besides, the criss-crossing between different sexual codes is present not only during carnival, but also during the whole year. Brazilian society, rather than having one universal sex language, is made up by a multitude of them (Parker 1991). In former Brazilian patriarchal and Catholic life, sexual interdictions were particularly restrictive for the white women of the families of the plantation owners, but were loose when applied to sexual intercourse between white men and black women. Rather than being associated with violence, intercourse between white men and black women raised the issue of the sexuality of mulatto women, who have been much admired and praised in verse and rhyme.

The process of urbanization and modernization brought a new set of values and behaviours in which sexual behaviour became influenced by the hygienic and medical discourses that were brought from industrial societies. The incorporation of new values did not obey a linear and encompassing process. Most of them continued to be ignored by the black and poor population who dealt with their bodies more freely. In addition, the advent of birth control as well as the belief in self-determination and responsibility, present in public institutions and the media, dispelled many taboos within the patriarchal systems, raising the issue of equal rights for any sexual gender. Rather than a mere evolution of all these beliefs and practices about sexuality, one being replaced

by another, we find a merging of many of these beliefs in different contexts. The intertwinement between modern and traditional sets of values about sexuality is present everywhere in a society that is still strongly marked by male dominance in which the restrictions against women and prejudices against homosexuals are responsible for a series of violent and unpunished behaviour. Sexual violence is reported across class boundaries, although those who have less access to education and judicial codes, which could be used in their defence, have been the main victims.

Therefore, as one arrives in Rio during carnival time, he or she will find multiple practices with multiple meanings. Even if one considers the samba school parades, one of the most industrialized segments of Rio's carnival, it is possible to observe a huge variety of practices performed by different actors according to different values and intentions. Carnival has been described as the exploration of sexuality; but there is no trace of either nude bodies or the hyper sexuality in traditional sectors such as the *bateria* (drum section), the *baiana* section, the *porta-bandeira* (flag-bearer) and the *mestre-sala* (master of ceremonies). The drummers are men completely focused on the beat of the drums. The *baianas* are older women clad in long, multi layered dresses who represent the typical African-styled women selling food and sweets in the streets of Salvador. The flag-bearer and master of ceremonies perform a special *pas-de-deux* in royal eighteenth-century attire. The couple reproduces the manners of the old Brazilian nobility in carefully controlled movements. We do not usually see a sensual *porta-bandeira* within samba schools. Mira, who appears in the film directed by Diegues as both a sensual mulatto woman and *porta-bandeira*, is yet another of the stereotypes of the film. As a matter of fact, women who usually pose for Playboy magazine are mainly famous white Brazilian models who are called the *bateria's* godmothers and who contend for a place in the special positions at the head of the *bateria* section.

Whereas the film directed by Camus is a fable of romantic love, the film directed by Diegues does no more than exaggerate the radical separation between love and lust. I have argued elsewhere that the features that characterise sexual freedom in samba schools and which have been responsible for mesmerizing a large public since the 1930s may be seen as the confrontation of different practices. The celebration of sexuality during carnival does not necessarily represent an inversion of forbidden feelings. For black communities, the samba school parades do not *a priori* constitute a practice based on the inversion of their social rules. The parades were used as a kind of identity formation. As a consequence, what is part of the sensuality of black communities often translates as a complete transgression of middle-class white audiences. It is enough to think of the free and seductive contact between individuals, of the rhythm of drums, and of the sensual movements of bodies (Santos 1999).

Finally it must be said that neither of the two films emphasises the existence of transvestism, sexual encounters in public spaces, homosexual relations and bodily contact between strangers. However, these are bodily practices that can be commonly observed during carnival. Rio's carnival feast makes plain the many discourses on sexuality that usually are restricted to forbidden areas of the city. These practices are readily visible during carnival, a time frame that can be considered a sphere of life that reveals the inconsistencies of 'good' society. Some of them are simultaneously capable of destabilizing the estab-

lished ideologies of sexual order and of reiterating consumer practices. I am not talking, therefore, about the anti-structural space of carnival, where the ordered world is turned upside down and where the fantastic is expressed, but about public spaces which not only give voice to those who usually occupy a silent position in society, but also allow them to get together and find their own narratives of belonging. During the carnival feast, it is not rare to see nude and festive bodies taking centre stage in street festivities. To many people, they represent not merely the rehabilitation of pleasures that are normally suppressed from their everyday lives, but mainly the unmasking of official rules about the normal content of sexuality.

Conclusion: Two Versions of the Same Nation

To some authors contemporary carnival feasts can be explained by their anti-structural features as they invert norms and rules (Turner 1967, DaMatta 1973, 1980, 1981a, 1981b). In a non-structural tradition, Mikhail Bakhtin emphasised the close links between sites of ribald discourses, obscene practices and women and men's liberation from their deepest inner fears. He attributed to carnival not only the inversion of norms and rules. Features of popular festivities, such as bodily excesses, laughter, and pleasurable feelings were described as practices capable of giving rise to an open and undetermined outcome as well as an egalitarian utopia in men's lives (Bakhtin 1968). Therefore, what is to be said about the liberating powers of carnival in Rio?

Camus' version of *Black Orpheus* attempts to show a sense of freedom that intertwines blacks and whites by means of a love affair capable of transcending social rules. Music is not central to Orpheus' way of life. It is art for art's sake. Orpheus is a streetcar conductor by profession. By contrast, the recent remake of the play presents Orpheus as a musician by profession. He earns money from the songs he composes, and he uses information and technical instruments, such as the mobile phone and laptop computer. In this film carnival is portrayed as a television spectacle, distant from the love affair as well as from the other encounters that pervade everyday life in the neighbourhood. Although the director tried to salvage the message about the eternity of art, the characters lacked density and emotional strength. Whereas the first film presents a tale about the eternity of art and love, the second tells an unconvincing love story. It seems that we moderns have lost paradise, since art and love can no longer be thought of as liberating aspects of social rules.

Bakhtin himself wrote that the grotesque realism in contemporary times was devoid of the essentials, that is, of the all-human and collective character, utopian meaning and philosophical depth (Bakhtin 1968: 16). Stallybrass and White, who have written extensively about society's former utopian potential, also denied the presence of the carnivalesque within contemporary societies. Yet these latter authors acknowledged the possibility of the emergence of fragments of the carnivalesque in literary texts, advertisements, popular concerts, and in other settings of the contemporary world (Stallybrass & White 1986, 1993). I would like to point out that although it is not the rule, it is not impossible to consider that fragments of the carnivalesque are still present within Rio's carnival feast, since there are some practices that are capable of provok-

ing the suspension of ordinary conventions, and of bringing private life into conflict with public norms.

Therefore, if it was outrageous to describe the city of Rio de Janeiro by images of festivity, happiness, sensual dancing and singing people in the 1950s, so is it equally offensive to characterize modern Rio by images of urban poverty and violence devoid of human beings. The first version shows romanticised characters. The second version shows caricatures of drug dealers, gang members, Africans, Protestant religious followers, and promiscuous women. Even the main protagonists are prisoners behind their masks: the artistic genius and the virgin deity. The difference portrayed by these two films cannot be merely deduced from the social changes that have occurred in the last four decades. An intensification of the process of industrialisation of carnival has certainly occurred, but political and commercial interests have been present since the very beginning of the popular carnival festivities in Rio. It follows that the two films can be better understood if we see them as partial and complementary presentations of the carnival feast in the city of Rio de Janeiro.

There is within Rio's carnival feast an immense diversity of carnival manifestations, from the organised samba schools to the folly of spontaneous street revellers. It is well known that the samba school parades were spawned by the political interests of Vargas' dictatorship and that they are to this day Rio's greatest tourist spectacle. Even so, they are not a homogeneously frozen and controlled spectacle. The majority of carnival manifestations cannot be seen in the utopian powers described by Bakhtin, since, rather than representing the inversion of deepest fears and their liberation, they merely represent the exaggeration of everyday practices. There are liberating powers that may be associated with bodies and pleasures. Liberating bodily practices coexist with the cultural industry, the state power, the country's corruption, the state-sponsored violence and the process through which bodies become commodities.

My intent here was to raise some specific issues in order to direct us away from the simplifications and dichotomies about sexuality, race relations or aesthetic values during Rio's carnival. Brazilian carnival feast involves commodities, entertainment, and the reproduction of political and economic structures. However, even considering that those who were involved in power struggles do not have the same chances in the negotiations, many conflicting situations must be observed (Augras 1993, Chinelli 1993, Santos 1998). The lack of awareness of the double or multiple meanings and outcomes within some of these practices entails reducing carnival either to the liberating powers of bodily practices or to the images broadcast on television in the service of the tourist industry. It is this dichotomy that is present in the two films. The aim of this exploration was to reveal that there is no 'either/or' in carnival practices. Even when related to apparently established order and structures that relate to a certain period in time, carnival practices may raise new orders of values and intentions. This is the starting point that allows us to understand the conflicting and disjunctive situations that result from warring interest groups.

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Ensayos de Reseña/Review Essays

Improving the Odds:

Institutional Innovation and Governance Reform in Latin America

Carlos Santiso

- *Audacious Reforms: Institutional Invention and Democracy in Latin America*, by Merilee Grindle. Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 2000.
- *Reforming the State: Managerial Public Administration in Latin America*, edited by Luiz Carlos Bresser Pereira and Peter Spink. Lynne Rienner, Boulder, 1999.
- *The Self-Restraining State: Power and Accountability in New Democracies*, edited by Andreas Schedler, Larry Diamond, and Marc Plattner. Lynne Rienner, Boulder, 1999.

Things have to change to remain the same.
Tommasi di Lampedusa, *Il Gattopardo*

After almost two decades of reform, Latin America faces the tremendous challenge of consolidating democratic governance and deepening market reform *simultaneously*. The permanence of poverty, inequality and social exclusion has prompted a reconsideration of the neo-liberal prescriptions of the Washington Consensus. Latin American countries have thus embarked in a sinuous second phase of reform to improve the effectiveness of democracy and the efficiency of the market economy, centring on social policies and institutional reform. The emerging post-Washington consensus, while not refuting its predecessor, does amend it in a number of significant ways (Burki and Perry 1998). However, the contours of the new development agenda remain blurred and its boundaries uncertain, generating what Naím (2000) terms the ‘Washington confusion’.

At this critical juncture, the reform of the institutions of governance becomes critical both for sustaining market reform and consolidating democracy. However, reconciling democratic governance and market reform remains an elusive quest in particularly inauspicious circumstances. Concerns have gradually shifted from the relation between regime type and economic performance, to the intricate links between regime quality and economic performance, and in particular between the depth of democracy and the sustainability of market reform. However, while the importance of governance institutions for consoli-

dating democracy and the market economy is now widely recognized, definite approaches on how to engineer and implement institutional reform are sorely lacking.

Washington consensus policies often disregarded the question of how state institutions can effectively be reformed in order to make public policies more responsive to the needs of the population and more effective in assuming their core responsibilities. Indeed, institutional reform is the black hole of first-generation market reforms. How do institutions emerge, develop and consolidate? How do they change? What explains the successes and failures of institutional reform? What works, what does not and why? Consensus on this subject remains elusive when the discussion moves from general goals to the specific means to achieve them.

The three studies under review assess recent efforts by Latin American emerging democracies to improve the quality of democratic governance. They share the same concern for the intricate backward and forward linkages between economic and political reform and investigate political economy of institutional innovation and governance reform. They describe recent attempts at 'improving the odds' (Graham et al. 1999) by reforming the state and strengthening the institutions of governance in critical areas such political accountability, administrative reform and decentralization.

A fundamental tension between democratic governance and economic reform concerns the styles of policy-making. It is increasingly evident that the modes of governance and the methods of government that characterized the initiation of first-generation market reforms are no longer adequate to sustain them and launch second-generation institutional reforms. In the mid-1980s and early 1990s, sweeping market reforms were introduced by most Latin American restored democracies as a consequence of the failure of previous state-centred development strategies and heterodox economic reform packages. The new orientations in economic policy and development strategies reflected a greater convergence of the views regarding what constitutes sound economic management.

These market-oriented reforms have been implemented by insulated technocratic elites in the economic ministries and autonomous institutions shielded from political pressures (Haggard and Kaufman 1995). While the concentration of executive power has enabled it to circumvent institutional constraints and overcome collective action dilemmas and has allowed the kind of decisive decision-making required to implement radical reforms and respond rapidly to acute economic crises, government by decree in presidential systems has implied the concentration of power in the presidency and the seizure of legislative authority by a largely unaccountable executive. The intrinsic weaknesses of the legislatures, the politicization of judiciaries, and the instability of political party systems have also contributed to this trend. As such, the delegative nature of policy-making has significantly altered executive-legislative relations and the traditional separation of powers (Carey and Shugart, 1998).

The problem with Latin American emerging market economies is that these styles of government have tended to endure beyond crisis management and have become the standard method for governing. Government by decree in non-crisis situations tends, however, to strain democratic governance and un-