

Transatlantic Studies: Latin America, Iberia, and Africa

**Cecilia Enjuto-Rangel, Sebastiaan Faber,
Pedro García-Caro, and Robert Patrick Newcomb, eds.**

reseñado por

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Cecilia Enjuto-Rangel, Sebastiaan Faber, Pedro García-Caro, and Robert Patrick Newcomb, eds. *Transatlantic Studies: Latin America, Iberia, and Africa*. Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2019. 467 pp. ISBN 978-1-78962-025-2

More than two decades on, Transatlantic Studies continues to be a frame whose primary feature is its attempt to elude any one methodological, critical, or theoretical approach to studying literature, history, culture, or even geography. Seemingly about a certain geographical space, nevertheless it is constantly being rethought in terms of its edges, crossings, and coexistence with nations, local spaces, the Pacific, and other global and local geographies. These constant decenterings make the transatlantic frame both necessary and seemingly redundant, as some critics have claimed, a tension that is evident in the wide variety of essays included in *Transatlantic Studies: Latin America, Iberia, and Africa*.

As the editors explain in the introduction: “From our perspective, ... Transatlantic Studies is a critical academic space where the epistemic traps of *Hispanoamericanismo* and *Lusofonia* can be understood by looking at the interstice where the national and the transnational butt heads and operate as a form of tension or conflict....an epistemic proposition to re-evaluate the cultural histories of the Atlantic rim, moving beyond the north-south, east-west division of (academic/cultural) labor, and...challenging the implicitly nationalistic narratives of Hispanism” (7). Thus, the work is grounded in the specific debates around (post)colonialism, Hispanism, and Iberian Studies that have accompanied the question of how to do the kind of cultural and historical work the theory envisions, within a contemporary Hispanic (or Iberian, or Ibero-American) Atlantic geography. A volume that includes both established texts and ideas already circulated within the Hispanic Studies field and new case studies that draw attention to the materiality of the Hispanic Atlantic world from approximately 1810 on, the book is a solid summary of the last twenty years of thinking on the transatlantic approach.

In 2009, Eyda Meredíz and Nina Gervassi-Navarro laid out the stakes of the transatlantic for the Luso-Hispanic field in a seminal edited number of the *Revista Iberoamericana*. But as this volume shows, attempts to define Transatlantic Studies as a field and a methodology persist. Resorting to the linguistic to understand this critical academic space, Joan Ramon Resina describes “Transatlantic Studies” as a conceptual space that “shifts the cognitive object to an adjectival, subordinate position, turning it into a modulation of the self-founding and self-maintaining academic enterprise” (30-31). Other essays provide more direct, at times opposing, definitions: Fran de Alba opens with the strong assertion that “Transatlantic Studies is fundamentally a postcolonial, conceptual, and disciplinary relocation of the way we study the history and culture of the Americas and Spain” (21), while Beatriz Sampedra Vizcaya suggests that thinking the space through islands “is to engage with the very opposite of a totalizing oceanic version of space and place, empire and hegemony” (101). For his part, moving slightly into the theoretical, or at least the temporal, here Julio Ortega cites Transatlantic Studies as both “nomadic” and “always in the process of rearticulation” (144, 145), while Zeb Tortorici asserts that one way to decenter the rural margin/urban center binary that has defined the Atlantic space is precisely to “avoid temporalizing narratives” and focus on thematic connections across time and space instead (87). As in previous discourses, Abril Trigo roundly rejects the field *as a field*: “To conclude, Transatlantic Studies (and even more so Hispanic Transatlantic Studies) does not constitute a new critical paradigm or another discipline, since it does not have a particular object of inquiry, nor propose any specific methodology, nor pinpoint a set of specific theoretical problems, all of which it shares with different disciplines and current theories in the academic market” (73).

The volume openly embraces these contradictions as part of its metadisciplinary attempt to “stake out” the field (1). Yet the many possible paths to engaging with a transatlantic approach come most convincingly through the critical praxis that sustains many of the chapters: close readings of cultural events, journalism, musical performances, and political discourses that make up the everyday experience of transatlanticity. In the comparison of those details, the expansiveness of the Atlantic as a fractal experience and academic discourse becomes concrete. Moreover, as the epilogue recognizes, in these kinds of readings, the archive becomes the center of the transatlanticist’s concerns.

Within the constraints of this review, a few examples may suffice to illustrate the richness of the archive the volume explores. Lanie Millar aims to complicate received notions of negritude, Afro-Cubanismo and ideas of diaspora, as well as Portuguese corporatism or lusotropicalism, by reading the inclusion of Nicolás Guillén’s “Son Número 6” in the 1956 notebook, *Poesia negra de expressão portuguesa*, edited by Mário Pinto de Andrade and Francisco Tenreiro, who were from Angola and São Tomé, respectively. Comparing Guillén’s poem to one by Angola’s first president, Agostinho Neto, she is able to distinguish “Guillén’s outward [movement] from the ‘I’ to the multitude” from Neto’s “notion of a cross-communal body as a gesture of transatlantic inclusion” (393). For his part, Luis Fernández Cifuentes carefully examines how the global capitalist frame of Empire outlined by Hardt and Negri intersects with Franco’s understanding of *Imperio* as a spiritual, Hispanist construct of “civilization” by attending to the materials surrounding the III Bial art exhibit held in Barcelona in 1955. Bringing together catalogues around the exhibit, as

well as North American and Spanish magazines of the time, he demonstrates how the modernization associated with abstract art was rejected by the Franco regime for its lack of spirituality, such that artists like the Ecuadorian Oswaldo Guayasamín were privileged as a middle ground that embraced both traditional themes and a somewhat watered-down version of the new abstract aesthetic. Conveniently, these decisions supported the regime's ability to elide growing Catalanist sentiment and maintain a cultural claim to the Americas. Marco Antonio Landavazo's careful untangling of several popular discourses implicated in Miguel de Hidalgo's uprising in 1810, meanwhile, illustrate effectively how a transatlantic political thought rooted in the concept of "the good monarch" during Fernando VII's reign transitions into a defense of the *pueblo* through subtle changes in a theological throughline that sustains both independentist and monarchist positions on both sides of the Atlantic, Hispanic and otherwise.

Indeed, if there is one aspect of the Hispanist approach to transatlantic studies that has yet to be resolved, it is the claim—also made in the Introduction—that this kind of work "[voices] a southern transatlantic perspective" that can be contrasted to Anglo-American conceptions of the field because it recognizes the underside of modernity (8). In such a claim, the limits of Hispanism, (post)colonialism, and empire/*Imperio*/imperialism rear their heads again, throwing us back into the loop of discussion about what makes the Hispanic Atlantic Hispanic in the first place—and, specifically, Transatlantic Studies' general tendency to start from the peninsular rather than the Latin American point of view. The best analyses in this work show, instead, that the archive is replete with what Sara Castro-Klarén once called diagonal readings: examples produced in, by, and for the geographical, non-European south that are also implicated, and imbricated, in the north at the same time.

As a compendium of the many debates that have accompanied transatlantic studies since their inception, this text is a useful one. If the future is transatlantic, as Cecilia Enjuto-Rangel concludes in her epilogue, I agree that it must be based in an openness to different methodologies and theoretical approaches that are fundamentally grounded in the archival work that shows the messiness and overlap of cultures, languages, and experiences that cannot be easily inscribed into any one trajectory or perspective. In that sense, this book may be read as an invitation to future transatlantic thinking and, above all, to a consideration of the everyday minutiae of cultural production that illustrate how the transatlantic is more a critical methodology and way of thinking than a field of study *per se*.