Trans-Americanity: Subaltern Modernities, Global Coloniality, and the Cultures of Greater Mexico
José David Saldívar
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Confronting issues of representation and expression in a fascinating and diverse array of cultural media, art, and literature, Saldívar intellectually challenged traditional homogeneity of United States popular culture earlier in his career. Today, as scholars attempt to reframe theoretical scopes and rethink categorizations for the fast-paced, ever-growing literary reality of the Western hemisphere, Saldívar publishes *Trans-Americanity: Subaltern Modalities, Global Coloniality, and the Cultures of Greater Mexico* (2012). Rather than summarizing chapters, this analytical synthesis aims to address the most important premises of the recent work of prominent literary scholar José David Saldívar.

Anchored in José Martí's 1890 invention of South Western Hemispheric conglomeration in "Nuestra America" ("Our America") in *Trans-Americanity*, Saldívar links Martí's epistemological affirmation of a union to historical sociologists Aníbal Quijano and Immanuel Wallerstein's neologized term "Americanity." Borne from Slave Trade oppression, colonial racial classification, and industry's exploitative measures, the conception of "Americanity as a concept" (1992) emerged following that of "coloniality" in an age of globalization. As Saldívar explains in his book, categorizations of race and ethnicity were not the foundation of social constructions prior to American contact with Europe. Americanity is thus intimately connected to the colonial apparatus. If the colonial nexus has been enlarged and modernized, a materialized global world-system emerges. This result is observed in the expansion of global communication and incongruences between labor, capital, and state. The nature of this social concept of structure serves as the base for the analytical tool with which Saldívar masterfully weaves through generous examples of American letters that reflect a greater American hemispheric reality. Therefore, Americanity's literature from the Global South has taken a sudden turn.

Saldívar's reading approach to Latino and Latin American literature—the Global South—fits vertical and horizontal frameworks he terms "trans-Americanity." In this way he significantly takes off from *Border Matters: Remapping American Cultural Studies* (1997), expands his methods and observations, and foresees the collision between tri-dimensional worlds. "Americanity," in his own words, "re-organize[s] the roots and routes of modernity, globalization, and the capitalist world-system," (xii), and via trans-americanity, the north and south realms converge.

From language to vernacular ways of archiving postcolonial history, Saldívar reads how subalternity resists the "coloniality of power" emerging from "modern world-systems." If one form of resistance retrieves a history that has fallen between the gaps, Saldívar, while reading Sandra Cisneros, takes note of how translation has preserved the culture of the Global South. Noting Mexican Elena Poniatowska's translation of Chicana Cisneros' *A House on Mango Street* (1991), Saldívar argues that literary and archival efforts between the U.S. and Mexico converge to reflect on issues of *Mexicanidad*, in and out of the Mexican nation. From this point forward, however, Saldívar suggests that we read *Caramelo: Puro Cuento* (2003), the latest work of Cisneros, as an understanding of varying levels of narratology that speak to a relation between literature and history along the U.S.-Mexican border. In *Caramelo*, therefore, we can relate the main character's travel vignettes and the weaving of *rebozos* (shawls), to the indigenous archival knowledge found in the Inca *quippus*. These precious objects belonging to the main protagonist, along with the pre-Colombian artifacts, speak to unconventional forms of archival memory. While both are worlds apart they still join and remain in dialogue, rescuing historical evidence otherwise lost in the collective memory's *lacunae*.

The aspect of "relatability" is also conceived of in Saldívar's work through the lens of language. When interrelating Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/ La Frontera: the New Mestiza* (1999), Victor Martinez's *Parrot in the Oven: Mi Vida* (1998), and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997), Saldívar points to the case of the vernacular varieties of developing languages within the U.S., and centralizing kinships that emerge from subaltern relate-ability. He calls this kinship formation a "shareable knowledge about their social world" (6).

But if memory is a selective process, it is also a resource that hegemony has traditionally controlled in the face of democratization. Much to Martí's mischief, the 1898 war for Cuban freedom would end with the U.S. occupation of the island. This historical moment, like many similar to it, although traditionally neglected by U.S. history, is revisited in Chapter Three of Saldívar's book. In this chapter, Saldívar turns a comparative lens on the work of Miguel Barnet's interview of former slave Esteban Montejo and his interlocutor's participation in the third attempt for Cuban independence.

So far, we have gleaned from Saldívar's approaches cultural vertical alignments. However, he also consults readings in a horizontal scope. In Chapter Six, for instance, Saldívar informs us of two intriguing and major dis-orienting identity factors concerning Americo Paredes' Asian-Pacific ties and Rolando Hinojosa's Cuban connections. Paredes, who Saldívar claims "inaugurated not only the multicultural discipline of Mexican American studies…but also the proto-Chicano studies interest in border studies in general" (125), was apparently an intellectual of many *geographical* trades. Agreeing with his brother Ramón Saldívar in *The Borderlands of Culture* (2006), José David Saldívar contends that Paredes "brought back […] postwar ideas of other Asia(s)" following his journalistic career as a reporter for the

Pacific Stars and Stripes in Japan during the Second World War. As with Rúben Darío's European lyricism, which was transported to the Americas from Paris, Paredes brings transatlantic experiences to the Chicano realm. He thereby becomes all the more sensitized to varied forms of repression at the hands of imperialists. As a result, Paredes incorporates his sensibilities as witness to the Tokyo trials in his prose, alluded to in his poem "Westward the Course of Empire."

Hinojosa's case is less transatlantic than it is trans-national, due to his ties with Cuba's *Casa de las Americas*. In this section of Chapter Six, Saldívar recalls his experience as a jurist in *Casa de las Américas*, in which he joined figures such as Pablo Armando Fernández and Emilio Bejel to determine the winner of the 1997 U.S. Latino literature prize. Embellishing his account with illustrations of Cuba during the *Periodo Especial,* and musing on his almost "clandestine" travel to the embargoed island traveling there via Mexico, Saldívar explains how, like Anzaldúa, Hinojosa employs a "Cuban vernacular aesthetic." The aesthetic results in Caribbean-greater Mexico transcultural forms and is exemplified by the author's use of "choteo" (149). In *Klail City y sus alrededores*, Echevarría offers a lesson in Cuban-Chicano-Spanish, one that is imbued with great humor. But the transculturation that Saldívar points out in *Klail City* does not end there; it develops after his interview with *Casa de las Américas* director, essayist, and writer Roberto Fernández Retamar, who pointedly notes the planetary associations between Frantz Fanon and Ernesto "Che" Guevara's "tricontinentalist thinking" that allow for further bridges and mark nuanced frames of reference. While now enabling scholars to catalogue both authors in different geographical spheres, Saldívar's claims serve to interrogate the "narrow Anglo-American-centric concept of literary tradition" and re-situate authors in a "trans-American tradition" (137) that includes both vertical and horizontal purviews.

Saldívar correlates the literary and historical traditions of these varied authors and their works with Quijano and Wallerstein's conception of the world-system. Saldívar then successfully charts the way towards grasping (and mapping) a dramatically enlarged and intertwined planet, a move that is aligned with contemporary efforts to rationalize and codify what eventually becomes a new understanding of a trans-American reality.