

Comparative Cultural Perspectives for the Study of the Americas: New Work by Imbert and McClennen and Fitz

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**Irune DEL RÍO GABIOLA**

**Comparative Cultural Perspectives for the Study of the Americas: New Work by Imbert and McClennen and Fitz**

This review article covers two new volumes of scholarship dedicated to the comparative study of the Americas: Patrick Imbert's *Trajectoires culturelles transaméricaines* (Ottawa: [Les Presses de l'Université d'Ottawa](#), 2004) and the edited volume by Sophia A. McClennen and Earl E. Fitz, *Comparative Cultural Studies and Latin America* (West Lafayette: [Purdue University Press](#), 2004). The latter volume is the revised and updated book form version of the thematic issue *Comparative Cultural Studies and Latin America*, edited by Sophia A. McClennen and Earl E. Fitz in *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 4.2 (2002): <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol4/iss2/>>. These books represent a new wave of innovative approaches to the study of the Americas, such as inter-American, postcolonial, and transatlantic studies, that are committed to moving beyond traditional scholarly paradigms and their implicit value systems and intellectual hierarchies. Both books understand the construction of culture as a set of multiple discourses and they (re)imagine the New World from trans-American and inter-American perspectives. They emphasize the relevance of minor cultures in the modification of European universal thinking, history, and literary discourses through a full reconsideration of the field of literature in the context of culture (thus, by extension, within the field of comparative cultural studies). In an effort to push the traditional boundaries of comparative approaches to the study of culture and literature, these books challenge Eurocentrism by arguing that the cultures of the Americas provide their own rich comparative context, one which, in many cases has later had a pivotal influence on European culture.

In *Trajectoires culturelles transaméricaines*, Imbert explores cultural transformations in the Americas via literature, media, and advertising that have taken place due to global processes and neo-liberalist economies. Influenced by postcolonial scholars such as Homi Bhabha and anthropologist Néstor García Canclini, Imbert reconceptualizes cultural identity through a discursive analysis that juxtaposes modernity and postmodernity in the interplay of free networking markets that dominate cultural parameters. The cornerstone of the book addresses culture in the new economy of postmodernism: "Our focus of analysis is on culture within the context of the new economy and of the postmodern/postcolonial age" (all translations are mine) ("c'est à la culture dans le contexte de la nouvelle économie et de l'ère postmoderne/postcoloniale que nous allons nous consacrer" 43). The first chapter, entitled "Discours et images de soi" points directly to the textualization of identity formation through the examination of culture shaped by discourses of modernity, postmodernity, and violence. Whereas modernity refers to identity as a static and stable unity that centralizes Western culture, postmodernity encounters the realignment of eccentric subjectivities that contest Eurocentric constructs and destabilize the static essence of identity. According to Imbert, modernity presupposes a hierarchical relation between a monolithic "self/other" described by mimesis and the illusion of the "other" to imitate the "center." Nevertheless, narratives on modernity have been rewritten and contested through the other's (re)appropriations of the self. Thus, syncretism and camaleonage become productive characteristics of identity formation, a point he explores in his analysis of *Self* by Yann Martel. In contrast, postmodernity does not imply a rupture with modern narratives but rather their constant (re)signification. Inhabiting the postmodern "means to belong simultaneously to the essentialist and to its displacement towards the non-essential by significations that are debated through their consequences" ("c'est se construire à la fois dans l'essentialiste et dans son déplacement vers le non-essentialiste par de significations qui se décident en fonction de leur conséquences" 40). As Imbert asserts, the relationship between the postmodern and the modern is more complementary than exclusive especially as a consequence of the global context of free market and geo-symbolic displacements.

Bearing in mind the paradigm modernity/postmodernity, in his chapter "Culture, territoire et propriété," Imbert traces the hermeneutics of cultures from a transatlantic viewpoint and investigates how European discourses have been continuously reinterpreted in the Americas. Imbert focuses on modern discourses of nation formation defined by territory, enraciment and geography

which originated in Europe during the nineteenth century and reinforced the binary center/margin. He details how nineteenth century intellectuals from the Americas such as Argentinean Domingo Faustino Sarmiento or Québécois-Canadian Etienne Parent (re)appropriated European discourses on nation formation by creating other cultural and geographical interpretations. They (re)semantized the logics of modernity by (re)contextualizing European discourses and therefore producing effective meanings: "Those who will progress in the twentieth century will know how to take advantage efficiently of the movement, that is, they will learn to contextualize and construct productive displacements; it is a dynamic much more valued within geographic and symbolic displacements" ("Ceux qui progresseront au XXe siècle seront ceux qui commenceront à savoir se servir efficacement du mouvement, c'est-à-dire à se contextualiser et à jouer de déplacements productifs, une dynamique qui s'accélère de nos jours dans la valorisation du déplacement géographique ou symbolique" 81). However, Imbert shows how the displacement of discourses on modernity created important paradoxes. If European discourses on nation formation are based on a Eurocentrism that expands capital, economics and political interests into the colonies, how can the colonies conceive of a new nationhood apart from Europe? If the literary canons of European nations envision an essentialist discourse by which only criticism forged on the local space and from a temporal distance is legitimate, how is this situation attainable for the colonies' literary canon?: "To be colonized implies an attachment to that which is far away within the temporal and spatial coordinates, that is, it means to appropriate the cultural reference of the colonizer" ("Être colonisé, c'est en partie devoir se consacrer à ce qui est loin dans le temps et loins dans l'espace, c'est-à-dire au champ de référence culturelle du colonisateur" 85). In his third chapter "Du monoculturel territorialisé aux discours doubles: l'accès au déplacement," Imbert engages with re-territorializations of geo-symbolic cultural identities in the postmodern era by focusing on narratives -- literary, media, advertising, etc. -- that destabilize monolithic conceptions of language through the interaction of multiple significations, sometimes contradictory, under new social paradigms. In this sense, Imbert demonstrates that language is reorganized in transitional processes from modernity to postmodernity through a diverse range of discourses. This (re)structuring of linguistic codes implies an overlapping of traditional and postmodern narratives as in the examples of marketable public discourses in Brazil or the United States -- or in the texts of writers such as Alejo Carpentier -- which mimic religious or leftist ideologies through irony: "On the one hand, we encounter a displacement of the canon by the availability of alternative readings and writings and, on the other hand, we envision the production to the vulgarization within literary, media, and advertising discourses that allow the production of individually diverse significations within a specific text" ("On assiste, d'une part, à un déplacement du canon par l'ouverture à d'autres lectures et écritures et, d'autre part, à l'incitation, vulgarisée dans les textes littéraires, médiatiques et dans les publicités, à produire individuellement plusieurs significations à partir d'un texte" 141). Imbert shows that the use of language in the contemporary Americas still stems from specialized and sophisticated narratives that are vulgarized in order to achieve accessibility. Interestingly, postmodern discourses in a global village re-localize national narratives thus reincorporating modernity. The most accurate example cited by Imbert is the Argentinean economic collapse and the corresponding need to retrieve the local: "Before the economic decline in Argentina by the end of 2001, we return to traditional nationalistic discourses whereas in the United States reigns the logic of the individual that needs a protection" ("En Argentine, avant l'effondrement économique et bancaire de la fin de 2001, on retourne au discours traditionnel valorisant le national, le 'entre nous,' tandis qu'aux États-Unis on pousse la logique de l'individuel qui nécessite une protection" 156). Although globalization appears to perpetuate homogenization, multinationals spread all over the world re-contextualize and re-localize their messages resulting in the interplay of apparently ambivalent but efficient discourses under global and neo-liberal economies.

In chapter four, "Production de significations et images de soi résautées," Imbert presents a wide range of narrative examples of how the theoretical presumptions of nation formation and language analyzed in chapters two and three are put into practice from a trans-American perspective. In the previous chapters, Imbert diagnoses the problematic of traditional notions of nation construction, cultural identity, and language as unstable and questionable parameters that are con-

stantly (re)shaped and displaced within the dynamics of a modern-postmodern pattern. The discourse analyses of literary texts and multinationals' advertisings transform traditional epistemologies in assonance to new capital contexts and social changes. Imbert emphasizes the (re)articulation of space and thus the relation global/local. A pertinent instance is the propaganda of the Sheraton Hotel in Argentina that sells its product by referring to one of the most important notions -- in both public and political discourse -- of nation building and nation maintenance, namely the family: "Grandma, we miss you too. Staying at this hotel is as good as staying at your house" ("Sí abuela, nosotros también te extrañamos. Estar aquí es tan bueno como quedarse en tu casa" 213). Spaces are experienced differently in terms of local specificities since the North American (Canada and the US) promotion of consumption offers a disconcerting message: "Is it possible to be homesick for a hotel?" (212). Whereas markets and multinationals homogenize their product, it has to be diversified and contextualized culturally in order to be effective and, in this sense: "Discursive productions in North America -- in comparison with those from Latin America -- manifest different tendencies even if all of them show a certain conceptual logic that prioritizes rapidity, change and distance abolition" ("les productions discursives nord-américaines, par rapport à celles provenant de l'Amérique latine, manifestent des tendances différentes même si toutes tendent vers une certaine logique conceptuelle valorisant la rapidité, le changement et l'abolition des distances" 209). In any case, consumers are also asked to perform as producers of multiple textual significations in an era of paradox, free interpretation, openness, and inclusiveness as long as they consume in order to promote progress. In the realm of literature, authors such as Jorge Luis Borges, Augusto Roa Bastos, Laura Esquivel, or Jerzy Kosinski seek the participation of the reader in the deconstruction of monolithic identities such as those related to nationality, sexual orientation, or gender. This textual experimentation allows the emergence of a third element le tiers that represents alternative positionalities. By questioning hybridism -- as the mixture of pure referents -- camaleonage becomes that third element in identity formation that underscores the relevance of the being, the position: "'To be' is becoming more complex and problematic within a world of contextualizations where everything interacts very rapidly. 'To be' is called into question together with identity" ("Être est devenu encore plus difficile dans ce monde de contextualisations où tout et toutes interagissent de plus en plus rapidement. L'être est remis en question, et l'identité avec lui" 277). Echoing José Quiroga's assessment in his book *Tropics of Desire* where he claims that "ser implies a permanent essence, whereas estar is a verb of position. It is the verb of position that interests me here" (197), we face the usage of a metaphorical estar that summarizes contemporary projects to emphasize located and situated identities, bodies and knowledge which defy monolithic notions of identity formation. In his conclusion, "Les Migrations discursives," Imbert reconciles the self and the other through recognition, difference, and competitiveness in order to generate a more positive and horizontal dialogue. His overview of modernity and postmodernity offers crucial examples of how discourses -- literary, newspapers, advertisings, or economy -- intertwine sophistication and vulgarization in order to reach a wider audience. In my view -- although Imbert does not appear to be aware of the theoretical and methodological tenets of "comparative cultural studies" (see the monograph series Books in Comparative Cultural Studies <<http://www.thepress.purdue.edu/series/compstudies.asp>> & <<http://clcwebjournal.lib.purdue.edu/ccs-purdue.html>>; see also Tötösy) -- Imbert's study is representative of the new field in trans-American (comparative) cultural studies, an approach that transcends geographical limitations of traditional nation formations and presents cultural examples that travel beyond national borders to set out differences across the Americas without putting aside similarities. What is more, Imbert defies the modern/postmodern paradigm as it has lately been rethought by contemporary scholars on Latin American studies (I should like to add that the said theoretical approach can be found, in principle, in other recent studies, such as in Wladimir Krysinski in his introductory essay to the collected volume *Latin American Postmodernisms* where he problematizes the celebratory character of postmodernism in relation to Latin America). Imbert's project serves as a productive model for the analysis of comparative cultural studies in the Americas -- including Canada, the United States, and Latin America -- establishing an inclusive methodology that negotiates similarities and differences in the (re)articulation of cultural identi-

ty(ies) in the Americas.

With a similar commitment to invigorating a fresh approach to the ucomparative study of the Americas, McClennen and Fitz's collected volume *Comparative Cultural Studies and Latin America* calls for a reconsideration of the role of Latin American cultures in fields of comparative literature and (comparative) cultural studies. One central theme of the volume is that Latin American cultural identities, through their rich and varied complexity, belie their traditional marginal status in the literary canon and in academic inquiry. Thus, parallel to Imbert's book, they offer new, alternative and innovative approaches to comparative work in the humanities. In the introduction of the volume, McClennen and Fitz emphasize the need to undermine traditional views of Latin American culture in order to demand recognition of its inherent value and thereby establish more productive comparative possibilities by overturning the common practice of tracing European influences on Latin American letters. Above all, the editors call for such changes to take place at the level of curricula and graduate study as a means of fostering a new generation of comparative Latin Americanist scholars. Challenging the traditional Eurocentrism of the field of comparative literature, the contributors suggest that Latin American culture is able to suggest new avenues for comparative study that can make the field more relevant and more dynamic. The first three essays of the volume rethink the place of Latin American cultures in the field of comparative cultural studies and problematize the status of the Latin American literary canon. The authors of these three articles write from the perspective of scholars working in the U.S. academy which forces them to confront the historic dismissal and disdain for Latin American culture. For example Gene Bell-Villada affirms: "there is in this land a certain subtle condescension toward the people, products, and issues that are of Hispanic provenance" (2). In his essay "The Canon is el Boom, et al., or the Hispanic Difference," Bell-Villada calls for a necessary awareness of Hispanic cultures and points to their relevance for comparative studies. He refers to Jorge Luis Borges and authors of the boom such as Carlos Fuentes and Julio Córdazar and shows that the flow of literary influence is not unidirectional. Instead, he claims for multidirectional comparisons to appeal to "the formative influence that these authors have had on U.S. writing. For the first time in history, some of the key foreign influences on North American literature come not form England or France, but from Latin America" (5). He further suggests that Hispanic films and literary productions have participated in a cultural dialogue with other national products. Many of the articles in the volume emphasize that the strength of these comparative frameworks suggests that employing inter-American, transatlantic or even trans-American perspectives in graduate and undergraduate education could improve intellectual preparation by asking students to rethink cultural value claims. Added to the limited knowledge of Latin American cultures in the field of traditional comparative literature or in departments of English is the fact that those who do profess familiarity with Latin American letters are often only familiar with the works associated with the "boom." It represents the primary cohort of artistic works that have traveled internationally and have been translated into major languages. In an effort to breakdown the centrality of the boom, Gordon Brotherston, Lúcia de Sá, and Elizabeth Coonrod Martínez rescue earlier cultural works that deserve greater recognition and scholarly attention especially from comparatists. In "First Peoples of the Americas and Their Literature," Brotherston and de Sá rewrite the origins of Latin American cultures by recovering pre-Colombian documents that have been largely ignored. At the center of their analysis is the Popol Vuh -- the Bible of the Americas -- a Mayan text that relates the lives, costumes, and traditions of indigenous peoples prior to the arrival of the Europeans. The authors of the essay emphasize the impact that these pre-Colombian documents have had not only on contemporary Latin American literature but also on European culture: "Thanks chiefly to the Comentarios reales of El Inca Garcilaso, the Inca had an astounding impact -- still to be catalogued as such -- on Europe" (18). Throughout twentieth century Latin American literature -- from Arguedas and Carpentier to the Brazilian modernistas -- the presence of indigenous cultures is worth noticing and "only by acknowledging this shared precedent can there be adequate appreciation of the huge and ever-growing debt owed to the native literatures of the Americas by the widest variety of authors writing in the languages that Europe brought to America" (Brotherston and de Sá 25). Consequently, Brotherston and de Sá urge



a reexamination of Latin American cultural production through transcultural processes that include lesser known literary documents.

Similarly, in her paper "The Latin American Innovative Novel of the 1920s: A Comparative Re-assessment," Elizabeth Coonrod Martínez focuses on the experimental Latin American novel of the 1920s and reveals it to be a literary trend initiated in Latin America independently from other European vanguards. Authors such as Mexican Arqueles Velas, Ecuadorian Pablo Palacio, Peruvian Martín Adán, or Argentinean Roberto Arlt developed a type of literature that responded to the social changes, technologies, and industrialization associated with modernity. They reacted against traditional tendencies and transformed literary aesthetics through a rupture of style, irony or parody. Although the vanguardias are largely known only as European cultural artifacts, the Latin American authors analyzed were already producing innovative work without any awareness of their European literary counterparts. Coonrod Martínez goes so far as to insinuate that Vela's work may have influenced Ernest Hemingway. Unfortunately, not only are these Latin American authors denied underappreciated as literary revolutionaries but their work is excluded from the canon: "While the avant-garde novels are forgotten, fiction of this period is remembered mainly for its realism focused on specific regions for purposes of their development or civilizing process: Ricardo Güiraldes' *Don Segundo Sombra* (1926), Rómulo Gallegos' *Doña Bárbara* (1929), and the novels of the Mexican Revolution such as Martín Luis Guzmán's *El águila y la serpiente* (1928)" (37). Apart from providing a comparative method that is transnational and transatlantic, Coonrod Martínez questions the validity of the Latin American literary canon as it has been constructed in the U.S.: how and which works are considered to be better than others? These first chapters offer new perspectives for reexamining Latin American cultural studies especially with regard to reassessing the literary canon. In his essay entitled "Comparative Latin American Studies: Literary and Cultural Theory" Román de la Campa analyzes the role of theory in the field of comparative Latin American cultural studies. He focuses on the conceptual risks caused by applying universalizing and homogenizing poststructuralist theories indifferently to cultural productions. He calls for a balanced consideration of national contexts from a transnational perspective thereby contextualizing cultural texts within their regional specificities in order to get "a deeper understanding of the relationship between literatures and cultures" (67). He suggests that the corpus of theoretical frameworks needs to be reconsidered in terms of "difference," thus his theory aims at cultural relocation. As he states, "Latin American literary and cultural studies would be well-served by conceiving comparative frameworks able to approach the differential application of literary studies, postmodernity, feminism and cultural studies, as well as the growing disconnect between the humanities and social sciences" (67). The example he offers to scrutinize this critical situation is the genre of testimonials (*testimonio*) which when read through subaltern studies loses its aesthetic and artistic aspects. Nelly Richard's reflections on the role of *testimonio* would be more accurate according to de la Campa since it "suggests a different understanding of cultural studies, something closer to cultural critique, which involves theory but remains close to artistic forms, rather than reducing art to just theory, or submitting it to a cultural studies domain indistinguishable from the logic of mass culture" (65). His conclusion hopes for a (re)evaluation of theoretical frameworks asks how poststructuralism, postmodernism, postcolonialism, and subaltern studies practiced in Latin American cultural production have exhausted differences into an homogenizing project that renders the aesthetic qualities of literature secondary.

The next two essays emphasize the urgent need to redefine comparative studies. Facing the "new" and perpetual crisis that comparative literature is presently undergoing, Fitz argues in his article "Spanish American and Brazilian Literature in an Inter-American Perspective: The Comparative Approach" for the need to introduce Latin American literatures and languages within the study of the discipline of comparative literature. Traditionally speaking, as both Fitz and McClennen affirm in the introduction, comparative literature has marginalized cultures from Latin American as a secondary or unnecessary focus of analysis. However, Fitz argues that in order to enrich and invigorate this discipline, an inter-American perspective "in terms of courses and critical studies that compare and contrast the literatures of North, Central, and South America" (76) is necessary. Fitz points to the need to train Latinamericanists in other languages beyond Spanish, thus the use of

Portuguese and the knowledge of Brazilian literature should be required to improve the intellectual preparation of future generations of scholars. Ideally he hopes that students would have some familiarity with indigenous languages as well. Such preparation would allow students to work in more than one language, a practice typically associated with traditional comparative literature. He also calls for greater attention to the flow of cultural influence from Latin America to Europe. As an example he refers to the case of French feminist Hélène Cixous and Brazilian feminist Clarice Lispector suggesting to scholars "how reading Clarice Lispector can teach us more about Cixous's concept of *écriture féminine* than we can glean from reading the French women's texts alone" (86). Fitz also promotes the interaction between comparative literature and cultural studies as in "comparative cultural studies" by adding the insights found in the field of "border studies" and the experiences of a diverse use of languages and cultures many professional Latinamericanists possess.

Roberto González Echevarría also calls for a reconsideration of canon formation and the location of Latin American cultures within the landscape(s) of theoretical frameworks. In his "Latin America and Comparative Literatures" González Echevarría problematizes the categories of canon and theory and questions why the latter has been historically applied to Western or "superior" works. He cites as examples Edward Said, who excludes the presence of Latin America in his study *Orientalism*, and Frederic Jameson, who in his introduction to the English translation of "Calibán" fails to mention that Roberto Fernández Retamar's purpose was to respond to Rodó's *Ariel*. As a consequence of such practices, Latin American literatures and cultures have been misread or marginalized whereas they should have been understood as foundational literatures as well as constant rewritings in dialogue with their influences. Co-editor of the volume, McClennen's "Comparative Literature and Latin American Studies: From Disarticulation to Dialogue" stresses the need to assess the intersections of the fields of cultural studies, comparative literature and Latin American studies. That these fields are intersecting, she claims, is evidenced by the emerging fields of inter-American, transatlantic and inter-Latin American studies. Without attention to the implications of these new fields, though, the traditions and value systems that they seek to undermine may be replicated. McClennen argues that keeping in mind the conservative history of comparative literature's Eurocentrism and the cultural colonization of Latin America scholars have to undo these binaries and remap the way that Latin American cultural cartographies are understood with, among other possibilities, and within the framework of comparative cultural studies. Even in academic journals the study of Latin America has been widely marginalized. After an analysis of the status of Latin American Studies and comparative literature, McClennen identifies five research areas that would be strengthened by greater dialogue between Latin American studies and comparative cultural studies. Her article provides the reader with an extensive overview of the contemporary state of comparative literature departments and Latin American studies and points to a number of central issues that will affect scholars working across these fields. Performing an example of comparative Latin American studies, Alberto Moreiras's article provides a specific analysis of the figure of Jorge Luis Borges, perhaps one of the most oft-studied Latin American writers by comparatists. In his paper "The Villain at the Center: Infrapolitical Borges," Moreiras offers an alternative consideration of Borges's influences and importance on literature, criticism, and by large, on culture. Julio Ortega centers in his paper "Towards a Map of the Current Critical Debate" on the topic of Latin American studies and the need to chart transatlantic cultural interactions in order to grasp new positionings of the Latin American subject: "Our Subject is, therefore, constructed through the intense hermeneutics of exchange: European definitions are followed by American redefinitions" (156). By comparing Reinaldo Arenas and Oscar Hijuelos's literary production in exile, Christina Marie Tourino examines how "despite transformations due to radical departures, dislocations, languages, and differing constructions of race, gender, sexuality, and class" (161) commonalities still persist among Latin American texts that go beyond geopolitical territories. In her "Anxieties of Impotence: Cubans in New York City" Tourino provides a trans-American perspective that deterritorializes traditional notions on nation formation based on geographical delimitations. Mario Valdés, in his "Historical Account of Difference: A Comparative History of the Latin Cultures of Latin America," attempts to look for a Foucauldian model of literary history inclusive enough to pro-



mote "a literary history worthy of being considered history" (196). Rejecting the closure of historical narrative, this model focuses on diversity, inclusiveness, and a plurality of voices in the reconstitution of events. Valdés suggests that literary documents also produce social changes and cultural transformations. In this sense, "the idea is to construct a history without closure, one that can be entered through many points and can unfold through many coherent, informed and focused narrative lines" (195). Therefore, Latin American literary cultures need to present history as multiple, plural, and ever-changing in order to contest the traditional, static construct of Latin America. In her essay "Comparative Literature in an Age of 'Globalization'," Lois Parkinson Zamora makes a similar claim. She reiterates the presence of cultural particularities that should be addressed when considering the relationship between literature and globalization. Although there is a tendency to think of globalization as a process of cultural homogenization, scholars and comparatists in particular face an appealing challenge through which a comparative methodology of differences and specificities allows students to approach literary discourses from a multiplicity of perspectives. The last section of the book is a detailed bibliography of works in comparative Latin American culture and literature studies compiled by McClennen. It is a necessary and useful tool that provides a rich resource of material for comparative studies of Latin America (the bibliography is also available online McClennen

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol4/iss2/13/>>). In my view, although it is the last section of the volume, the bibliography represents a beginning. It points to the body of knowledge that Latinamericanists, comparatists, and, indeed, scholars in the humanities will have to recognize in order to devote ourselves to a long lasting journey of tolerance, solidarity, cultural welcoming, and institutional renovation. 9. Imbert's and McClennen and Fitz's volumes propose paths to reconcile literature with the social sciences, history, politics, and economy through discourse analysis and a sensitive criticism that moves beyond modern/postmodern dualisms. Imbert introduces a trans-American cultural project that succeeds in becoming a methodology for comparative cultural studies in a new era of globalization. Meanwhile, the contributors to the book edited by McClennen and Fitz present inter-American and transatlantic instances of criticism on Latin America cultural legacies through the innovative framework of comparative cultural studies. In bringing together these two projects, comparative cultural studies of Latin America should also offer trans-American insights that transcend geopolitical borders by pointing out differences and similarities that could deterritorialize traditional notions of nation formation. From critical perspectives on theoretical frameworks and traditional readings of cultural identities in the Americas to concrete reinterpretations of the value of Latin American figures or (comparative) cultural studies, the work of the scholars discussed here challenges our understanding of the Americas, Latin America, and their place in departments of comparative literature as well as Latin American studies. However, in my mind there remain still some relevant presences in the reconstitution of the conservative literary canon and its study which ought be addressed. These include the emergence of the Afro-Hispanic literatures in Pacific Colombia, Ecuador, or the Caribbean whose voices require the prominence of other transatlantic insights that include literatures of the African continent. In so doing, the Euro-American binary would be avoided and we would welcome a more enriched remapping of cross-cultural encounters. Thus, I propose that the works of Marvin Lewis, Norman Whitten, or Alain Lawo-Sukam should be taken into account for further explorations of academic curricula, comparative (cultural) studies, and Latin American studies. The presence of African descendants in Colombia, Ecuador, or the Caribbean have made important contributions to the literary production of those nations. All in all, *Trajectoires culturelles transaméricaines* and *Comparative Cultural Studies and Latin America* are obligatory, exceptional, and essential scholarly works that offer models for more integrative and inclusive approaches to literature, theory, cultural identity, and universal history.

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