

Wilfried Raussert, Brian Rozema,
Yolanda Campos, Marius Littschwager (Eds.)

Key Tropes in Inter-American Studies

Perspectives from the *forum for inter-american research (fiar)*

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Preface

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Contents

Wilfried Raussert

Selected Key Tropes in Inter-American Studies: Ways of Looking at Entangled Americas	1
Selección de tropos claves en los Estudios Interamericanos: Formas de mirar a las Américas entrelazadas	12

COLONIAL/NEOCOLONIAL

Jonathan Hart

Haunted by Spain: The Past and Identities in English and French America	27
---	----

Alejandra Bottinelli-Wolleter

Letrados: Poder fundacional, escritura y política en el sur americano	53
---	----

INDEPENDENCE

David Ryan

Re-enacting Independence through Nostalgia—The 1976 U.S. Bicentennial after the Vietnam War.....	75
---	----

Stefan Rinke

La independencia de Brasil: Movimientos entre espacios y el contexto de las revoluciones atlánticas, 1808-1831.....	91
--	----

RELIGION

Rüdiger Kunow

Going Native with God on the Side: Mission as Traveling Culture.....	121
--	-----

Heinrich Schäfer

Pombagira y el obispo: Sobre identidades religiosas transnacionales.....	133
--	-----

BORDER

Claudia Sadowski-Smith

The Centrality of the Canada-U.S. Border for Hemispheric Studies of the Americas	161
---	-----

Norma Iglesias-Prieto

Trascendiendo límites: La frontera México-Estados Unidos en el cine	179
---	-----

MOBILITY

Dorothea Gail

Identity and In-Betweenness: Hybridity as Transcultural Mobility
in the Music of Native American R. Carlos Nakai and His Band Jackalope.....213

Yaatsil Guevara

Migración de tránsito y ayuda humanitaria: Apuntes sobre las casas de
migrantes en la *ruta migratoria* del pacífico sur en México231

RACE/INDIGENEITY

Giorgio Mariani

Negotiating Violence and Identity in Sherman Alexie’s *Indian Killer*251

Astrid Haas

Un Continente “de color”: Langston Hughes y América Latina265

GENDER

Tabea Huth

Becoming ‘La Chiquilla de Tijuana’ and ‘Staging Contradiction’:
Ruby Gardenia’s *Lucha Libre Exótica* in a Mexican Border City283

Margarita Ramos Godínez y Sara Quintero Ramírez

Deterritorializadas y deslenguadas, pero heroizadas: Concepción Benavídez,
Juana García y Celaya Reyes309

DECOLONIAL REFLECTIONS

Gonzalo Portocarrero

La ética andino-cristiana de los relatos de condenados329

Walter Dignolo

Decolonial Reflections on Hemispheric Partitions: The “Western Hemisphere”
in the Colonial Horizon of Modernity and the Irreversible Historical Shift
to the “Eastern Hemisphere”343

Notes on Contributors359

Selected Key Tropes in Inter-American Studies: Ways of Looking at Entangled Americas

WILFRIED RAUSSERT

What is termed globalization is the cultural process that began with the constitution of America and colonial/modern Eurocentered capitalism as a new global power.

Anibal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America" (2000)

A look at the present and the past reveals that Inter-American Studies today is a booming field with important predecessors in the 20th century. The field with its focus on hemispheric Americas has gained new prominence, as global studies and transnational studies have moved to the forefront of academic endeavor. Inter-American Studies have challenged the ways we think about the Americas. It is a fast developing academic venture visible in the growth of academic centers, graduate and postgraduate programs as well as associations. In sum, Inter-American Studies conceptualize the Americas as hemispheric, connected, historically, and culturally entangled, and mutually dependent. More explicitly, it explores the ways in which places, regions, communities, and nations in the Americas are embedded in a larger picture of global (Transpacific and Transatlantic) processes of trade, exchange, and politics through an inter-American lens that highlights itineraries, flows, practices, productions, and hierarchies, as they emerge within the Americas. The ways in which societies develop, *pueblos*, cities change and cultural productions take new turns, depend on the exchange between North and South, between the different Caribbean islands and their links to the rest of the Americas, and on relations and differences along the South-South and North-North divisions in the hemisphere. In its spatial orientation, Inter-American Studies envision a post-territorial understanding of area(s) and share what John Carlos Rowe points out in reference to the inherent problem with 'area' as a structural, geographical, or conceptual unit:

We must begin to think less in terms of the pertinent "rims"—Pacific, North Atlantic, mid-Atlantic, Caribbean—and more in terms of certain 'flows' describing the terrestrial, maritime, modern avian, and postmodern transits of outer (military and communication satellites) and inner (bodily prostheses and virtual realities) spaces. (Rowe 327)

The flows that Rowe refers to are bound to be explored in a diachronic and synchronic fashion. With an intensified focus on the 'inter' within the Americas, more dialogical paradigms are bound to emerge to add 'optional' narratives to Atlantic as well as Pacific studies approaches to the Americas. One may add here that the focus on 'inter' within the Americas also provides a positive response to Winfried Fluck's concern,

that we should be careful not to risk “dissolving America” as emptied signifier in global studies approaches (Fluck 30). On the contrary, inter-American paradigms help reveal the plurality and complexity within “America” and pushes America in its plural version at the forefront of scholarly investigation.

With its critical positioning at the crossroads of cultural studies and area studies, the field directs further the postcolonial, postnational, and cross-border turns in studies of the Americas toward a model of horizontal dialogue between area studies, their related cultures as well as disciplines such as Latin American Studies, Caribbean Studies, American Studies, and the Study of Canada through which they are studied. In the process of unfolding a matrix for a critical epistemology of Inter-American Studies, metaphors such as flows, itineraries, border, and entanglement move to the foreground. Inter-American scholarship directs its focus to multi-layered connections, multidirectional flows, conflicted and overlapping geopolitical imaginaries and complex entanglements within the Americas. It rethinks spatial configurations that have functioned as basis for framing areas studies in earlier decades also along temporal paradigms. This includes the acknowledgement of simultaneity as well as the conflictive presence of linear versus non-linear time concepts as part of colonial and neo-colonial encounters. Likewise, it aims at a critical knowledge production that revises master narratives, canon-making, museolog(ies) from the vista of inter-American relations. In a broader sense the project inscribes itself in a larger endeavor to decolonize concepts, perspectives on, and approaches to the Americas. A focus on inter-American connectedness opens venues to look anew at the related histories, cultural productions, and thought systems of indigenous, Afro Caribbean, African American, and Afro Latina and diaspora cultures. This critical gaze looks beyond the Global North-Global South divide and the Old World-New World axis and, thus, provides alternative and additional insights into the Americas as to regionally and nationally framed, or globally oriented transatlantic and transpacific studies of the Americas.

The dialogical paradigm that underlies any sincere inter-American scholarship makes clear that no single scholarly positioning can capture the complexity of inter-American connectivity. This is what Inter-American Studies share with Global Studies: A necessity to negotiate multiple and at times conflictive paradigms to tackle its objects of investigation. In a by now famous quote, Fredric Jameson has called globalization an “untotalizable totality” (Jameson xii). Similarly, the interconnectedness of the Americas in its totality escapes our comprehension. At the same time it helps us focus on what connects and what divides outside closed concepts of place, city, territory, reservation, and nation. Let us presume that the prefix ‘inter’ refers to an undefined relationship to America/América and between the Americas. As Ana Luz explains:

[Inter- is] a prefix that means overlapping, concurrence, layers of interaction, juxtapositions, connectivity. It is not synthesizing two or more into one and it is not simply mixing approaches or terminologies between areas studies and disciplines ... It is to cross lines between, it is to express the lines of transition, it is to express multidimensional connectedness and multidirectional flows. (Luz 146)