The European Journal of Humour Research 13 (4) 215–218
www.europeanjournalofhumour.org

Book review*

Alonso, Paul (2024). *Digital Satire in Latin America: Online Video Humor as Hybrid Alternative Media*. University of Florida Press.

Paul Alonso's *Digital Satire in Latin America* sets up to analyse the increasing influence of digital satire in the region with a keen interest in alternative media, defined "as much by its capacity to generate nonstandard, often violational methods of creation, production, and distribution as by its content" (p. 10). The book successfully creates a richly documented map of video satire examples from the 2010s onwards that will appeal to both Latin American Studies scholars aiming to gain deeper understanding of satire as a phenomenon, and media scholars who would like to expand their knowledge of satire beyond the Global North regions that have historically received more visibility. While examples composing this map are organised into chapters, giving an illusion of a lineal disposition, Alonso presents the cases to the reader in a glocal manner (Robertson, 1995) by constantly identifying interconnections between local themes and global audiences, local challenges and global formats. This cultural glocalisation is a common substrate feeding all video satire cases dissected in the book. Complementing glocalisation, Alonso labels this wave of satirists as critical *metatainment*: the use of parody to deconstruct news and entertainment genres in order to criticise social, political and media domains (see also p. 8 for a more detailed definition).

The initial chapter offers an introduction to the Latin American mediascape that underlines the role of young satirists in their transformation of traditional media and entertainment. Within this process of rearticulation of formats and discourse, young Latin American satirists stand out for their use of DIY (do-it-yourself) and hybridisation strategies. To that end, the author draws on the concepts of *mestizaje* and hybridity as developed by Latin American theorists Jesús Martín-Barbero (1993) and Néstor García Canclini (2005) respectively, whose presence the author identifies as inherent to post-colonial contexts. While hybridity is used here to label alternative media, *mestizaje* refers to the blending "of professional practices, languages, and cultures" in these alternative publications (p.11). The concept of *mestizaje* is particularly interesting for readers to expand on through Latin American research because of its complexities (De la Cadena, 2001). With its double edge, *mestizaje* can be used to describe blending processes, as it is the case of this book, but also, in some other cases, it has been used to deny racism under the logic of "racelessness": the "lack of public discourse on race and racism" (Moreno Figueroa & Saldívar Tanaka, 2016, p. 516).

Next to hybridity and *mestizaje*, the notion of border crossing, developed by thinkers such as Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) and García Canclini (1998), is also present in the book to define the phenomenon of infotainment, albeit in conversation with media research beyond the region. Alonso rightly observes that despite an increasing interest in recent years, Latin American

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* This book review was commissioned by the Book Review Editor of the Australasian Humour Studies Network (AHSN), in collaboration with The European Journal of Humour Research. For additional AHSN book reviews, please visit the Australasian Humour Studies Network webpage at https://ahsnhumourstudies.org.

satiric media remains "significantly underexplored" (p. 7). The same could be argued about the intersection between Humour Studies knowledge and Latin American Studies knowledge. In this sense, the theoretical contribution of the book is epistemologically enriched by incorporating concepts such as *mestizaje*, border crossing and hybridity and expanding their visibility beyond their usual audience of Spanish-speaking scholars to English-speaking humour and media scholars.

Chapter 2 analyses three instances of what is considered the first wave of Latin American YouTube: *El Pulso de la República* (Mexico), Malena Pichot's *La loca de mierda* and *Cualca* (Argentina) and *Enchufe.tv* (Ecuador). The range of examples and richness of information around each comedian allows the reader to situate their origins and impact. Thus, the reader starts a mapping exercise by pinpointing *El Pulso de la República* in Mexico, which emerges as a reaction to mainstream news as portrayed by the giant broadcasting company Televisa. *El Pulso de la República* demonstrates the use of glocalisation (Robertson, 1995) by adopting a global format for national and macroregional audiences as a reaction to mainstream news. Continuing the journey down South, *Enchufe.tv* in Ecuador displays a different type of reaction to a "heavily controlled media environment" by prioritising "aesthetic and commercial aspects" over explicit sociopolitical critique (p. 48). Despite their distance from sociopolitical critique, Alonso identifies a carnivalesque component in *Enchufe.tv* videos, illustrating the fallacy of neutral communication. Further South, Malena Pichot's work in Argentina is presented as "multilayered feminist comedy" that, once again, exemplifies glocalisation by making local Argentine women experiences relevant to global audiences (p. 44). The three cases share their success in attracting young audiences through independent media production in response to a disenchantment with mainstream media.

The reader continues tracing the feminist line of satire traveling back North to Colombia in Chapter 3, which focuses on female YouTubers reshaping of media and gender discourse in a post-conflict context through the video-column examples of *La Pulla* and *Las Igualadas*. Alonso could have amalgamated all cases of feminist satire, including those in Chapter 2 and 3, under a common umbrella, but instead chooses to dedicate the cohesive space of a chapter to situate *La Pulla* and *Las Igualadas* in the climate of gender and political violence in Colombia. In doing so, the author allows for an in-depth contextualisation of the particular challenges affecting Colombian audiences. This backdrop allows the reader to understand why the two satirical infotainment shows aimed to represent new generational sentiments and to adopt a nonpartisan information gap. As a common thread, Alonso continues to identify glocalisation in the combination of US influences with a local tradition influenced by irreverent humourists. In addition, this chapter shows the central role of feminist satirists in advancing alternative media through subverting traditional gender roles and creating original business models that do not rely on the control of advertising.

In Chapter 4, the reader returns to Argentina to indulge in a detailed promenade across its historical and social context. With comedian Guille Aquino as a guide, readers delve into the short videos of *El Sketch,* which he created to address local challenges (such as sociopolitical polarisation) and global alike (including the climate crisis, gentrification and discrimination). Key to this promenade is the cultural parallel established between rock music and humour due to their strong influence in public discourse and their subversive potential to tackle glocal issues. In the words of Alonso, Argentinian humour "has frequently been referred to as the 'new rock' in terms of its capacity to challenge the status quo and to question power" (p. 103). The notion of positionality, central to the Latin American decolonial turn, is also discussed in this chapter to describe how cisgender white male comedians acknowledge their privilege by engaging in self-reflective humour. Because of the link drawn between rock music and

humour, this chapter may also be of interest to musicology scholars with a focus on discourse and power relations.

Heading North-West, the next stop is Peru in Chapter 5, a stage of the journey where the reader gets close insights from Alonso, who was also one of the creators of the satiric interview show *Gente Como Uno*. The project is presented as an experimental response to an audience prone to literal interpretation, due to a history of comedy monopolised by slapstick and prejudiced humour. As a result, *Gente Como Uno* attempts to shock audiences through a parody of prevalent attitudes in Peruvian society. Based on this experience, Alonso reflects on the concept of satirical literacy: the skill set for accessing, analysing and interpreting "polysemous, ironic, and metareferential satiric texts" (p. 130). Nested as a part of the broader concept of media literacy, satirical literacy emphasizes the importance of assessing it in audiences prior to producing a satirical show to ensure familiarity with the genre and its conventions. Although the reader could have expected to see a development of the concept of satirical literacy much earlier in the book, the definition of this notion in Chapter 5 makes sense against the context provided, with an identified lack of this type of literacy in the target audience for *Gente Como Uno*. As part of the Peruvian digital satire, readers also meet *El Cacash,* a separate Peruvian show that uses the tradition of marginal comedy to parody those in power. What is interesting about this character is its interpellation of audiences to develop their satiric literacy skills. Within this chapter, the definition of parody (p. 125) drawing on Bakhtinian approaches (Bakhtin, 1984) could be complemented with contributions from linguistics for an all-round description of the phenomenon (see Rossen-Knill & Henry, 1997; Ruiz Gurillo, 2013).

For the final stop in this mapping exercise, the reader heads North to the United States, where the American Venezuelan comedian Joanna Hausmann speaks to a Latinx generation composed of bilingual and English speakers who align with diversity as a core value. Through her show *Joanna Rants,* the comedian responds to a context of homogeneous and stereotypical representations of Latinx identity. Alonso uses this chapter to illustrate the powerful role of humour in the ongoing construction of social identities as well as its pedagogic potential; thus, humour appears as an entry point to gain deeper understanding of sociocultural, political and historical information: "an education tool to combat ignorance and disinformation beyond partisanship" (p. 168).

A recurrent pattern that the reader gets insight into through the book is the strong influence of comedians, genres and formats from the United States in this wave Latin American satirists. For instance, Alonso quotes Argentinian comedian Malena Pichot stating that "[i]n Latin America, comedy is very underdeveloped" due to a history of "misogynistic and simplistic" (p. 42) humour in the region, adding that "most of her comedic referents are American" (p. 43). Similarly, comedian Guille Aquino states that "[o]ur generation mainly watched foreign television. My main influences were *The Simpsons, Seinfeld*, American and British" humorous referents in most cases, with "[v]ery little Latin American or Hispanic" referents (p. 104). In the context of the Latin American decolonial turn (Maldonado-Torres, 2017), it would be relevant to see future scholarship of humour to expand on the insightful and comprehensive overview offered in *Digital Satire in Latin America* by engaging with the question of whether new generations of comedians in the region are being influenced by this critical approach and, if so, in which ways. Similarly, it would be interesting for future research to examine what glocalisation processes in digital satire would look like with a conscious search and engagement with Global South referents. This would align with and advance what Alonso defines as alternative media.

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