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Book review*

Fernández L'Hoeste, Héctor and Juan Poblete (Eds.) (2024). *Internet, Humor, and Nation in Latin America*. University of Florida Press.

Héctor Fernández L'Hoeste and Juan Poblete's edited volume *Internet, Humor, and Nation in Latin America* is one of two currently available humour studies books in the series "Reframing Media, Technology, and Culture in Latin/o America" at University of Florida Press, that aims to "explore how Latin American and Latino […] cultural practices reframe and reconfigure social, economic, and political discourses at a local, national, and global level." Specifically, this book sets out to advance scholarship at the intersection between Internet, humour and nation in Latin America through an inclusive approach to Internet textual genres and media (p. 3). The prominence of the concept of nation in the title denotes the editors' clear identification of its relevance to understand "web-based discourses and narratives" in the region (p. 4). This emphasis on the idea of nation is shared by much Latin American Studies scholarship (e.g., Radcliffe & Westwood, 1996; Quijano, 2013) and acknowledges that secularisation in the eighteenth century entailed a shift where "'nation' replaced 'religion' to bring about a new kind of imagined community" (Mignolo, 1991, p. 16).

At the forefront of the individual arguments made by each of the contributors, the editors make an important statement: Latin American humour is characterised by its "deep roots in the colonial experience and the nation-forming processes of the nineteenth century, but its modern practice is directly connected to the arrival of modern forms of mass communication" (p. 9). This statement recognises the ongoing impact of colonisation in contemporary humour practices as inseparable from national projects while also underlying the idea of modernity. Among these three concepts, modernity becomes particularly relevant when considering that Latin America has been historically subject to the "denial of coevalness" (Grosfoguel, 2000, p. 347) and stereotypically portrayed as unmodern.

In my view, one of the most productive aspects of Latin American approaches to humour is the opportunity to bring visibility to scholars in the region, including those who produce knowledge in languages other than English. In this sense, non-Latin Americanist readers will find Chapter 1 "Introduction: Internet, humor, and nation in Latin America" particularly enlightening due to its overview of humour theorisations in the region, evoking authors such as Jorge Mañach (Cuba), Carlos Monsiváis (Mexico), María Alejandra Medina Cartagena and Jaqueline Benavides Delgado (Colombia), Isabela Gama Gandalini (Brazil), etc. As part of such overview, the editors present local humour phenomena characterising different national contexts, such as Mañach's (1969) notion of *choteo* defined as "the practice of not taking seriously anything that is usually taken seriously" that "evolves into disdain or lack of recognition for authority" or Monsiváis' (1997) manifestation of humour in *cantiflismo*, namely "the art of speaking without saying anything" (p. 11). Following their introduction in Chapter

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1, it would have been great to see these concepts further developed and exemplified across some of the case studies. Nonetheless, their invocation in Chapter 1 provides a very suitable entry point entry to the diverse genres, formats and national contexts encompassed by the book.

In Chapter 2 "Digital humor as cultural globalization in Latin America," Paul Alonso continues the cross-boundaries overview approach adopted in the first chapter by presenting online news shows from Mexico and Argentina with a focus on hybridity and cultural globalisation. This section of the book contains some information overlaps with Alonso's Chapter 2 of his own monograph *Digital Satire in Latin America*, titled "Pioneers of Latin American Digital Humour as Cultural Globalization. El Pulso de la República (Mexico) Malena Pichot (Argentina), Enchufe.tv (Ecuador)" (Alonso, 2024, p. 29). For readers who find this topic and localities interesting, they will find its scope more expanded in Alonso's monograph, which connects the Mexican and Argentinian examples to the Equatorian case of *Enchufe.tv*. Alonso's selection for this edited volume is coherent with the national contexts of the case studies in the first part of the book by focusing on Argentina (covered also in Chapters 3 and 4) and Mexico (covered in Chapter 5).

Turning to Chapter 3 "Hypermediatic humor: Some tools for its analysis," Damián Fraticelli focuses on a fake account titled Dra Alcira Pignata that illustrates the complexities of humorous fake accounts for the purposes of circulation and regulation in the Argentinian context. This chapter makes two fundamental theoretical contributions: (a) the notion of *hypermediatic humour*, understood as "the device instituted within media social networks that generates continuous interpretants that make any social phenomenon laughable" (p. 54) and (b) the proposal of a research model that creates "levels of observation" (p. 68). The case study is argued by the editors to stand out from US studies on communication due to the influence of European theories, arguing that it "denotes the difference between Latin American and US approaches when it comes to communication analysis" (p. 25). Unfortunately, this is true: the prominent influence of European frameworks is reflective of a history of Eurocentrism in academic thought that renders local Latin American influences invisible. One cannot but hope that the difference increasingly entails a further influence of local conceptualisations, such as those presented in Chapter 1.

As we move to Chapter 4 "Satire as the voice of resistance in Guillermo Aquino's *El Sketch*," Alberto Centeno-Pulido analyses an Argentinian series of satirical short videos by comedian Guillermo Aquino. For this case study, the author departs from a detailed explanation of the reasons behind the expression of rage in Argentinian society that may be of particular interest to readers specialising in emotions. Readers who would like to supplement the information on this case study should reach for Alonso's (2024, p, 92) chapter "Apocalyptic Satire in Argentina's Macri/Kirchner Polarized Society: Guille Aquino's *El Sketch*." Each of the two employ different frameworks: while the Centeno-Pulido's focuses on how *El Sketch* expresses rage and the breaks of the illusion of freedom among Argentinians, Alonso uses interviews with the comedian to explore interconnections with rock music and positionality. The Notes section includes important keys to interpret and contextualise the transcriptions of the sketches analysed as well as the original transcriptions in Spanish. These are particularly important to guide the close reading of *2018 en 3 minutos*.

Alejandra Collado draws a connection in Chapter 5 "Political cartoons and memes: Artifacts of discourse subversion through humor" between cartoons and memes in Mexico, arguing that memes are gradually carrying out functions formerly performed by cartoons earlier in the history of the country. The comparison between cartoons and memes is well synthetised in Table 5.1. with attention to ten traits: news feature, authorship, professionalisation, technique, credit, medium, public to which it is addressed, interaction with the public, type of work and type of humour. The information collected in this table serves as a background to understand

the aesthetics and sensibilities of the generations behind Internet memes and how they represent contemporary *mexicanidad*. Collado bases her study on Bakhtin's (1984) theory of carnival and McLuhan and Power's (2015) tetrad model (Law of expansion, Law of obsolescence, Law of Retrieval and Law of Reversal). It would be interesting to connect here the idea of contemporary *mexicanidad* with Monsiváis' theorisations, introduced in the first chapter.

Chapters 6, 7 and 8 focus on the Brazilian context, meaning that a substantial proportion of the book is dedicated to the country. Eva Paulino Bueno and Fábio Marques de Souza author Chapter 6 "Cutting through layers of Brazilian humor: Sampling the Past, Commenting on the Present, and Perhaps Creating the Future." This chapter becomes a platform to enhance visibility of non-Anglophone scholarship by echoing the work of Brazilian scholars such as Raquel Recuero (2024), who has written extensively in Portuguese and English about online discourse, disinformation and toxicity on social media. Like many other works in the reference list, Recuero's (2016) research referenced in this chapter is written in Portuguese and it is part of a volume on social media and language teaching edited by Julio Araújo and Vilson Leffa. Chapter 6 shares with Chapter 2 its use of the notion of hybridity. Specifically, hybridity is applied to analyse three characters: two goats (one cartoon-based and one meme-based) and a human YouTube persona called *Concessa*, all of them acting as a "cultural glue" (p. 137) that is claimed to assist Brazilians making sense of their culture and politics. In Chapter 7 "Humor and nationalism in Bolsonarist far-right WhatsApp memes in Brazil," Viktor Chagas examines the way Bolsonaro is represented in a dataset of memes distributed among the former president's supporters in WhatsApp groups, arguing "an intense correlation between the conversations held in these WhatsApp groups and the political situation in the country" (p. 145). This chapter will be valuable for readers seeking reference methodologies to analyse the complex ways in which representation operates across different contexts, including functions, semantic categories and values. In the last section on the Brazilian context, Chapter 8 "Barbie votes for Bolsonaro: How an Instagram account satirized the Brazilian middle and upper classes," Ulisses Sawczuk Da Silva and Mélodine Sommier use the case study of Barbie Fascionista (portmanteau of the terms "fascist" and "fashionista") to analyse how Brazilians use syncretic and creative practices to "satirize the high level of Americanization of the country's privileged classes" (p. 181) with a focus on three interconnected themes: privilege, prejudice and conservatism. The authors enhance cohesion in the volume by referencing the contributions of Chagas (2019) on meme functions. The subtitles to the Figures are extensive and may have benefited from alternative ways of presentation, such as a table.

A common stance identified across chapters is the focus on the complex cultural and social internal dynamics in each national context beyond colonialism. In Chapter 9 "'Whatever…It's only a joke!': Exploring memes, racialization, and discrimination in Puerto Rico during hurricanes, earthquakes and the COVID-19 pandemic," the reader turns to the Puerto Rican context by the hand of R. Sánchez-Rivera, who examines memes produced in the multiple crisis affecting the island (Hurricane María, earthquakes, COVID-19). The author contends that memes follow "paradoxical dynamics" in the island (p. 198) by both criticising the power and reproducing superiority discourses. While the double-edge function of humour regarding its subversion or reinforcing of power structures has been extensively studied in the scholarship of humour, the chapter presents an important reminder that it is necessary to go beyond the coloniser-colonised discourse and examine the inside of national discourses to avoid external homogenising views.

The last two chapters close the volume with the editors' case studies on vlog productions. In Chapter 10 "HolaSoyGerman: On global Latin American humor on Youtube," Juan Poblete presents the Chilean vlog *HolaSoyGermán*, selected for its "high quality everydayness" (p. 222): the combination of relatable experience displayed with a high level of media professional

production. These are characteristics that the author attributes to other media beyond his object of study: specifically, Poblete argues that film comedies, unlike other genres, can compete with Hollywood production due to their high-quality everydayness. Readers may find it useful to explore whether this concept applies beyond audiovisual culture to other types of media. Finally, the last chapter "*La Pulla*: Humor as an instrument of intranational hegemony," authored by Héctor Fernández L'Hoeste, analyses the Colombian vlog *La Pulla*. Like Sánchez-Rivera's study, this chapter contributes with a vision of the internal dynamics between the national capital and the regions, and their impact on Colombian identity. Readers interested in this study can supplement it with Alonso's (2024) chapter "How female YouTubers reshaped Journalism and gender discourse in post-conflict Colombia: *La Pulla* and *Las Igualadas*" (p. 63), which focuses on the aspects of satire, new generational sentiments and alternative media.

Stemming from the acknowledgement that no book can cover everything, limitations in *Internet, Humor, and Nation in Latin America* are here presented as areas that could be covered in a future volume. Some Latin American nations in the book receive more attention, as it is the case of Brazil, while other nations are not represented. Asking to feature all Latin American nations in a book like this would be an arduous labour and this is not certainly the point I intend to make here. However, it is undeniable that, in academic research, some Latin American nations recursively receive less visibility and future collaborative projects can attempt to fill in this gap. The same applies to increasing the visibility of Latin American frameworks in Anglophone publications. In this sense, Fernández L'Hoeste and Poblete's introductory chapter stands out for bringing into the conversation the seminal work of Latin Americanist scholars. Lastly, whereas there are some overlaps on the objects of study with Alonso's (2024) monograph *Digital Satire in Latin America*, the focus and approaches are sufficiently different to see the two works as complementing each other.

Overall, *Internet, Humor, and Nation in Latin America* performs the important role of reporting from an insider perspective how the three interconnected elements in its title are shaping social dynamics in each of the national contexts presented. The case studies push back homogenising views of Latin America by showing the complex and diverse humorous practices across regions, social classes, media outlets, etc. In addition, by showcasing Spanish-language and Portuguese-language humour, the book offers a window into the realities shaped by languages other than English in an increasingly Anglocentric panorama.

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