

Letras Hispanas
Volume 11, 2015
Special Section

**On Masculinities, Latin America,
and the Global Age**

Guest Editor:
Vinodh Venkatesh

Letras Hispanas

Volume 11, 2015

SPECIAL SECTION: On Masculinities, Latin America, and the Global Age

TITLE: On Masculinities, Latin America, and the Global Age

EDITOR: Vinodh Venkatesh

E-MAIL: vinodhv@vt.edu

AFFILIATION: Virginia Tech; Foreign Languages & Literatures; Major Williams, 339; 220 Stanger-Street; Blacksburg, VA 24061

ABSTRACT: The study of masculinity in Latin America in the past fifteen years has largely centered gender in contraposition to the community, focusing on issues of essentialism, representation and the nation-state, and the roles of violence and power in the subjugation of feminine and/or Queer gender representations. While some critics have paid attention to national masculinities (both contemporary and historical) and others have moved into analyzing regional masculinities, there is a resounding need to examine what happens to the construct of masculinity in the global age. That is, how can we discuss localized gender expressions just as the boundaries or definitions of the local seemingly dissipate in light of a global(izing) culture? Is there then a global order of gender, as theorists such as Raewyn Connell would like us to believe? These questions, amongst others that materialize in the confluence of globalization and masculinity, are the principal interrogations undertaken by the authors of this special dossier of *Letras Hispanas*.

KEYWORDS: Masculinity, Globalization, Transnationalism, Gender Theory

RESUMEN: El estudio de la masculinidad en América Latina en los últimos quince años se ha centrado en cuestiones de comunidad, esencialismo, la representación y el Estado-nación, y el papel de la violencia y el poder en la subyugación de lo femenino y/o las representaciones Queer. Mientras que algunos críticos han prestado atención a las masculinidades nacionales (tanto contemporáneas como históricas) y otros han pasado a analizar masculinidades regionales, hay una necesidad rotunda para examinar la construcción de la masculinidad en la era global. Es decir, ¿cómo concebimos las expresiones localizadas de género dentro del contexto global? ¿Hay un orden global de género, como teóricos como Raewyn Connell quisieran hacernos creer? Estas preguntas, entre otros que se materializan en la confluencia de la globalización y la masculinidad, son las principales investigaciones realizadas por los autores de este dossier especial de *Letras Hispanas*.

PALABRAS CLAVE: masculinidad, globalización, transnacionalismo, teorías de género

BIOGRAPHY: Vinodh Venkatesh is an Associate Professor of Spanish at Virginia Tech. His research is primarily centered on issues of gender, subjectivity and the urban space in contemporary Hispanic narratives. A secondary area of research concerns the cinematic production of Spain and Latin America. His current work focuses on ethics, politics, and spectularity in Spanish cinema. In addition to several articles, he is the author of *The Body as Capital: Masculinities in Contemporary Latin American Fiction* (Arizona, 2015), and the forthcoming *New Maricón Cinema: Outing Latin American Film* (Texas, 2016).

On Masculinities, Latin America, and the Global Age

Vinodh Venkatesh, Virginia Tech

The study of masculinity in Latin America in the past fifteen years has largely centered gender in contraposition to the community, focusing on issues of essentialism, representation and the nation-state, and the roles of violence and power in the subjugation of feminine and/or Queer gender representations. While some critics have paid attention to national masculinities (both contemporary and historical) and others have moved into analyzing regional masculinities, there is a resounding need to examine what happens to the construct of masculinity in the global age. That is, how can we discuss localized gender expressions just as the boundaries or definitions of the local seemingly dissipate in light of a global(izing) culture? Is there then a global order of gender, as theorists such as Raewyn Connell would like us to believe? These questions, amongst others that materialize in the confluence of globalization and masculinity, are the principal interrogations undertaken by the author's of this special dossier of *Letras Hispanas*.

Herein lies the base drive in the following pages, as each essay attempts to situate and then problematize localized masculinities in the face of tensile forces from the outside (wherever this may be), in an attempt to understand and reconcile gender formation within a non-anchored episteme. By this I mean a period where the State as referent – as evidenced in regional and diachronic studies of the Masculine – no longer holds the once-afforded sovereignty over the individual. Instead, we are faced with gender constructs in relation to, and offsetting at times, fluid, dynamic, and conflicting states of community.

We must consider in any examination of contemporary gender practice the impact of recent economic and political shifts. In Latin America, in particular, the move towards a neoliberal paradigm has brought changes in the real and symbolic structures and positions of gender. In broad terms, and on a local level, changes in labor markets and strategies of production tie in directly to alterations in familial modes; genders deconstruct and reconfigure in reaction to sociocultural shifts. Moving away from the local, which is by necessity as these shifts are brought in through the guises of transnationalism and free trade/markets, these changes further a condition where now-reconfigured orders come into contact with global and foreign gender practices. All these changes bring about a series of crises, where the traditional position held by the Masculine in Latin America comes under question. By crisis, I am referring to a change in the order or roles, as women are increasingly permitted and encouraged to work and lead lives that were once accorded only to men. Economic autonomy, sexual liberation, and the right to an education are some of the changes that have affected gender politics in Latin America. Such socioeconomic shifts and their resultant gender reconfigurations are salient results of the broader macro openings of local markets to foreign economies and economic policies, as free trade agreements and foreign direct investment increase labor demands and supply. These measures, as can be expected, democratize societies to the extent that conventional structures and relations are no longer compatible with an open-framed notion of the market and, as

a result, of the social. These measures, furthermore, include the osmotic presence of non-Latin American gender expressions that, when entered into local circulations, leave immediate and permanent imprints.

These shifts, circulations, and reconfigurations, pose a crisis in masculinity, triggering a critical interest in the strategies of change and coping that the masculine must undertake as a result. The changes in personal, intimate constructions of masculinity affect the formulations of the masculine in cultural production, as representation is cross-examined and extant symbols of patriarchy are renegotiated in the light of global gendered bodies. This gesture lies at the heart of the following essays, where what is studied under the acute lens of literary and critical theory is how masculinities may adapt to a new global telos.

We begin our route through this dossier with a stop in the Southern Cone, where Wesley Costa de Moraes tackles three recent films by Chilean filmmaker Pablo Larraín. Probing the construct and deconstruction of historical patriarchy, that is, the position of the dictator or *caudillo* figure of Pinochet, Costa de Moraes studies the imaging of hegemony and its possible challengers. Focusing on the aesthetics of masculinities, the author offers readings of each individual film – *Tony Manero* (2008), *Post Mortem* (2010) and *No* (2012) – in addition to identifying points of contact that provide the reader with a judicious outlining of how the masculine is negotiated in the director's oeuvre. Costa de Moraes furthers in his analysis that the expression of masculinities in the three films cannot be understood without a dialogue with the socioeconomic shifts that impacted real life in the Chile of the period, and thus poses that any analysis of gender in the trilogy must be situated along the macro-economic neoliberal shifts instituted by the regime at the time; shifts that today still impact the country's modern economy and its cultural production. Keeping with a focus on historical

masculinities and their contact with global subjectivities, Ben Sifuentes-Jáuregui examines what he calls melodramatic masculinity in two films starring the Mexican icon Pedro Infante, *Nosotros los pobres* (1947) and *Angelitos Negros* (1948). The author guides the reader through the ontology of melodrama, examining it both in the Hollywood tradition and within the Latin American cultural-cape. Importantly, Sifuentes-Jáuregui notes that melodrama in the latter context is not a simple, superfluous mode but, rather, integral in subject formation due to its very excess. Aside from synthesizing the role of melodrama in Latin American cultural production – and the implications this may have on gender subjectivity – the essay delves further into key tangents such as race, femininity, queer studies, and the very centrality of the body to thus pose a nuanced reading delinked from Hollywood and/or global understanding of the narrative mode.

Working with an altogether different aesthetic and theoretical code, Nicolas Poppe correlates the filming of masculinities, Argentine youth culture of the 1990s, and the geographic space of Ituzaingó to seek linkages in Raúl Perrone's trilogy of *Labios de churrasco* (1994), *Graciadió* (1997), and *5 pal' peso* (1998). Like Costa de Moraes, Poppe is not only interested in teasing out the relationships between the (masculine) local and global within each film, but to also pose a holistic framing by which the director's body of work may be read. He suggests that each film is not a variant or repetition of the cultural and interpersonal human geographies of Ituzaingó, but instead a series of iterations wherein the viewer observes how individual characters are constantly linked and delinked from the global. Importantly, Poppe underlines that the trilogy is an important coda for understanding the affective links between youth culture and a transnational media ecosystem. In the subsequent essay, Vinodh Venkatesh delves further into the points of contact between space, globalization, and gender

formation through an analysis of Ana Clavel's *Los deseos y su sombra* (2000). Venkatesh situates the issue of masculinity in relation to critical theories of urbanization and the global city, affirming that our experience of the city is by nature a gendered phenomenology. Posing that the city is the masculine geography par excellence, the essay probes the symbolic spaces that genderize and are genderizing in the novel, and reflects on how masculinities regiment the public and symbolic within the increasingly global and diffused urban space.

This global space (of production and reception) in the modern age is the point of departure for Assen Kokalov's meditation on masculinities in Lucía Puenzo's three notable films, *XXY* (2007), *El niño pez* (2009), and *Wakolda* (2013). Unlike Costa de Moraes and Poppe, Kokalov does not situate these films as a narrative trilogy, or as films sharing a particular leitmotiv. Instead, he delves into each feature as a tableau vivant of masculinities that, he argues, is central to all of Puenzo's films. The essay sheds light on the masculine, noting that criticism to date has tended to focus less on this facet of the gender spectrum, congregating instead on the queer potentials of each film. As such, Kokalov's essay provides a valuable resource for future research into the body of work of an increasingly important director in the Latin American and

Spanish-speaking cineverse. Speaking of universes, the concluding essay by Rebecca Biron investigates the representation of narco-masculinities in recent Mexican cultural production. Working with several films, soap operas, music, blogs, and journalistic pieces, Biron underscores the importance of melodramatic narco-masculinity as a contemporary litmus of national gender hegemony. Her aim in the essay, however, is not to simply go over the basics of this trope but, instead, to elucidate how comedic representation may negotiate new ways of situating narco-masculinity in a contemporary, globalized crime stage. Importantly, Biron asks: how does refusing to take narco-masculinity seriously complicate debates regarding Mexican masculinities, violence, and the role of the local in the global circulation of goods and images?

In conclusion, the essays in this dossier provide a stepping-stone for scholarship on the relationship between masculinities and the global. Through calculated collations of masculinity studies and other critical theoretical angles, the dossier allows for an interdisciplinary and transnational interrogation of the masculine. This, it is hoped, will be of use not only to scholars within the field of Latin American studies, but also to all investigations into how masculinities interact across global spectrums.