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## Book Review: *Beyond the Pink Tide*

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*Beyond the Pink Tide: Art and Political Undercurrents in the Americas*, by Macarena Gómez-Barris. Oakland: University of California Press, 2018. 160 pages. Hardcover \$85.00, paperback \$18.95. Reviewed by Florencia San Martín.

In *Beyond the Pink Tide: Art and Political Undercurrents in the Americas*, Macarena Gómez-Barris offers a dynamic and refreshing understanding of art and social movements in the Americas as alternative modes of embracing the political that go beyond the confining paradigm of liberal democracy. Drawn from theories of transnational American Studies and decolonial methodologies that celebrate submerged perspectives and pluriversal relationality, the book's origin was the author's own disappointment with the turn to the Left in Latin American politics that arose in the 1990s and began to decline in the mid 2010s. Living in Quito in 2015 as a Fulbright Fellow at FLACSO, she witnessed, as she writes in the preface, how such post-neoliberal governments as that of President Rafael Correa in Ecuador had "turned against . . . social movements that had first brought them to power," leading "on the ground, eco-feminist, transgender, artist, youth, and Indigenous activists [to] work collaboratively to denounce [the continuity of] state violence" (xi–xii). Therein lie the title and the main aim of the book: to acknowledge the presence of dissident artistic practices and social movements across the Americas embracing radical and progressive political forms beyond the electoral victory of Pink Tide, the term coined by the US media to describe the turn to left-wing governments in the region in the last thirty years.

Equally important for the book is the location of said alternative artistic and social politics beyond the limits of the nation-state, "showing how other worlds are indeed possible and interlinked in vital ways" (xiii). And these worlds, as the author tells us in the subtitle of the book through the metaphor of the "undercurrents," embrace "watery dissolution of nation-state boundaries and principles in acts of solidarity . . . allow[ing] us to think, feel, desire, and enact politics together, beyond the Pink Tide" (xiv). At stake is thus not only a critique of the centrality

of the nation-state within modernity's capitalist economy in the temporal context of the Pink Tide, but also the recognition of nonlinear artistic practices embracing what Brazilian educator Paulo Freire called "critical hope" (1).

The focus on "critical hope" and its allegorical location within fluid waters is, in my opinion, what makes this book, published by UC Press in its series American Studies Now: Critical Histories of the Present, so timely and urgent in an ongoing present dominated by traditional politics. The recent rise of the conservative and austere Right in the Americas and globally has, although in this case more obviously, not changed the authoritarian outlook that defines the modern constitution of nation-states, leaving social promises at the surface of electoral campaigns regardless of who wins or loses. The task thus, as Gómez-Barris argues, is to "move beyond the ebbs and flows of [both] conservative and progressive governments" (7), acknowledging the political capacity of existing artistic forms to move "toward sustainable and equitable futures" (2). Looking at these existing forms from a decolonial feminist lens, she adds: "Creating non-normative worlds of political being, these efforts queer (*cuir*) the nation," (2) that is, dismantle the traditional shift between Left and Right and the "Eurocentrism . . . of liberal democracy" (7) through feminist and queer artistic practices developed within a nonbilateral political sense.

Written fluidly and dynamically in keeping with the theoretical methodology and transdisciplinarity of the book, Gómez-Barris, a trained sociologist and a visual theorist who is currently chairperson of the Department of Social Science and Cultural Studies at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York, divides her study into four chapters.

Examining sonic, bodily, spatial, and documentary forms, chapter 1 centers on the work of Chilean-French mestiza singer and rapper Anita Tijoux, who was born in 1997 in France to Chilean parents living in political exile

during the United States–backed dictatorship in Chile led by Augusto Pinochet (1973–1990). Like Tijoux, the author was born and raised in exile to Chilean parents. Analyzing lyrics to songs such as “Somos Sur” (2014), made in collaboration with Palestinian DJ Shadia Mansour and diasporic circuits of Black musical dissidence, she brings to the foreground the political potential of sonic examples to think together and transnationally about both the 2011 student protest in Chile, in which the authoritarian legacies of the dictatorship were central, and the networks across South-South solidarities that critique the coloniality of power in the capitalist world.

In chapter 2 Gómez-Barris looks again at the Chilean case vis-à-vis the longer and larger project of coloniality to note, from three case studies encompassing bodily transgressive forms, “how sex politics and queer/trans perspectives and experiences challenge the politics of normalcy [, providing us with] clues for how to think about the future of queerness beyond the politics of recognition” (48–49).

Chapter 3 turns to the US-Mexico border as the “archetypal space of colonial and military violence in the hemisphere” (68). Analyzing installations and performances by artists Teresa Margolles, Regina José Galindo, and the indigenous collective Post-Commodity, she reflects on the effects of drug and social wars, a shared history of imperialism and death, and global spaces of complicity and occupation, respectively.

Finally, in chapter 4 Gómez-Barris returns to the Southern Cone to offer a luminous analysis of Chilean filmmaker Patricio Guzmán’s documentary film *The Pearl Button* (2015), in which Guzmán focuses on the ocean and the impetus of the stars to narrate the secrets of a longer history of English coloniality in Patagonia, that shared area between Chile and Argentina. With the nations’ limits literally and metaphorically blurring into the sea, in this chapter Gómez-Barris explains how, from the case of visual representations such as *The Pearl Button*, “hemispheric indigenous practices of spatially and embodied perspectives, in this case from a sea-oriented and fragmentary territory, change our understanding of the modern nation” (89).

While three of the four chapters embrace cases from Chile, they all encompass submerged narratives and theories beyond that country’s national histories or state-centered politics. In so doing, the book achieves its main purpose of showing existing and interlinked transnational worlds, bringing to the fore a timely and dynamic call for a decolonial, transnational American Studies.

My only concern, however, involves a few conceptual problems that are important to note, especially in a book that recurrently analyzes contemporary art and culture developed from Chile vis-à-vis the Americas. In chapter 2, for instance, Gómez-Barris examines the famous 1986 poem manifesto “Hablo por mi diferencia” by transvestite writer and performance artist Pedro Lemebel, as well as Lemebel’s performances made in collaboration with poet and artist Francisco Casas between the late 1980s and early 1990s with the duo Yeguas del Apocalipsis. Elaborating on their “powerful critique both of leftist concepts of revolutionary masculinity and right-wing ideas that place the autocrat in the primary role as father of the nation” (50) in the historical context anticipating the Pink Tide, she problematically associates their work with the Escena de Avanzada (55), which in the book is incorrectly called *escena avanzada* (53–54). A well-known conceptual art scene in Latin America that emerged in the 1980s in Santiago in the context of the United States–backed military dictatorships, the Escena de Avanzada’s rather authoritarian discourses have been acknowledged for decades not only by art historians, scholars, and writers such as Roberto Bolaño, but also by its own “leader,” the cultural critic Nelly Richard, as well as members of the Yeguas such as Casas. Another missed opportunity occurs in chapter 1, when the author states that “If Víctor Jara’s songs are often associated with protest movements of the 1970s . . . then Tijoux would influence and respond to the next generation through her word flow” (30). However, in a book that so compellingly extends the notion of disappearance within civic-military dictatorships toward transgendered women, the significance in the present of songs from the 1970s, especially by Víctor Jara, could have been addressed. Examples she gives of disappearance include the Academy Awarded film *A Fantastic Woman* (2018), discussed in chapter 2, and Indigenous peoples such as the nineteenth-century native Fuegian Jemmy Button, discussed in chapter 4. Indeed, the ongoing reference to Víctor Jara within Chile’s current protests led by youth, feminist, anticapitalist, and Indigenous peoples denouncing the continuity of the neoliberal model in and beyond the nation’s borders certainly proves this point.

Another problem in the book is the many typos in Spanish quotations and names. The Salvadorian feminist movement Libertad para las 17, for instance, appears also as “Libertad para los 17” (11), with the masculine *los* confusing the reader about the feminist struggle that

motivates this movement, which, as the author notes, has been denouncing “criminaliz[ation of] Black, Indigenous, mestiza, and female bodies” (10). Another example regards the term “the Americas.” Appearing many times throughout the book, sometimes with and sometimes without an accent on the *e*, this typo confuses the reader regarding a consistent linguistic critique of the appropriation of the word *América* in Spanish by the United States.

Despite these few specific points, the book overall successfully provides a fresh methodological approach that blurs the limits of nation-states, expanding as well on the field of Memory Studies in a way that I believe may largely

benefit current and futures studies in art history and visual culture in the Americas drawn from decolonial, transnational, and transdisciplinary approaches. In this short but in-depth study, Gómez-Barris invites us to think within critical hopes about the Americas and South-to-South undercurrents, and about renewed and dynamic ways to think about art and culture as alternatives to existing modes of creating and thinking the political.

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