

## BOOK REVIEW

### *Wild Tongues: Transnational Mexican Popular Culture*

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*Wild Tongues: Transnational Mexican Popular Culture.* By Rita E. Urquijo-Ruiz. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012. Pp. 217. \$55 (cloth). \$25 (paper).

In an increasingly transborder world, Rita E. Urquijo-Ruiz's *Wild Tongues* identifies cultural expression—in the form of Mexican and Chicana/o literature, music, film, theater, and performance—as a site of critical intervention into the oppressive dynamics of globalization and transnational capitalism. Not just relevant to literary and cultural studies scholars, Urquijo-Ruiz's work offers insightful contributions to conversations about history, gender and sexuality, and popular culture.

The author focuses on four classic archetypal figures of Mexican origin culture: the peladito, peladita, pachuco, and pachuca. A key argument throughout *Wild Tongues* is that these traditional archetypes are far from monolithic, and her analyses of each delineates the distinctions of cultural representation across cultural, social, and geopolitical borders. The author's choice to provide separate analyses of the gendered version of each type allows for a nuanced study of transnational cultural expression through the lenses of gender and sexuality as well as race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic class status.

Urquijo-Ruiz opens her preface by establishing herself not only as critic but as a storyteller and actor within the cultural and political milieu that constitutes transborder experience around, along, and through the U.S.-México border. A true transnational subject herself, Urquijo-Ruiz begins by relating her own

story of migration and transformation across the U.S.-México border as a teenager. Throughout the book, she reflects critically on her love of Mexican and Chicana/o popular culture, literature, performance, and music through an analytical lens focused on the role of racism, sexism, and capitalism in the creation, transmission, and reception of these forms of cultural expression in both countries.

Beginning with the peladito figure, the author first takes on Daniel Venegas's *Las aventuras de Don Chipote, o Cuando los pericos mamen*. Venegas' protagonist Don Chipote possesses the ability to survive precarious circumstances along his immigrant journey by relying on his own wit, ingenuity, and determination. Urquijo-Ruiz elucidates the novel's critique of social and economic structures responsible for the abuse and erasure of immigrants and their ethnic and cultural identities. Employing Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of the carnivalesque, the author provides an analysis of Venegas' politicized immigrant bodies in a manner that will resonate with scholars of contemporary labor and immigration policy.

Throughout the work, Urquijo-Ruiz deliberately engages decolonial and feminist transnational cultural studies scholarship by critically coupling more patriarchal classic versions of el peladito (in Venegas' novel, Luis Valdez's *Zoot Suit*, or filmic work featuring Mexican performer Germán Valdés/Tin Tan) with works generated by women authors and artists both in the United States and México. For example, Urquijo-Ruiz traces the roots of the peladito figure, but then brings its transnational foundations to life with detailed analysis of the archetype at play in the work of two lesser-studied female performers, Amelia Wilhelmy (La Willy) in México and Beatriz Escalona (La Chata Noloesca) in the United States. Similarly, she engages a rich body of scholarship on Chicana feminist cultural expression in her analysis of performer María Elena

Gaitán's characters Chola con Cello and Connie Chancla. Doing so reveals the powerfully subversive and liberatory strategies of classic peladita/o and pachuca/o characterizations blended, reinscribed, and reclaimed.

In the closing chapters of her *Wild Tongues*, Urquijo-Ruiz's approach to queer consciousness and world-making contribute to ongoing conversations in Queer, Performance, and Gender Studies. Though she engages in most detail with queer performer Dan Guerrero, author and performer of the solo show *Gaytino!*, it is her analysis of the derogative "hocicona" (loud mouth) that is particularly intriguing. A dehumanizing term that is most frequently gendered feminine, Urquijo-Ruiz's invocation reinscribes the label to suggest empowered women who cross social boundaries with their "wild tongues." Equally noteworthy is her introduction of a "queer zone of comfort" when discussing queer subjectivity, self-worth, and the claiming of an empowered public presence and voice.

An engaging and compelling text, Urquijo-Ruiz's *Wild Tongues* represents an important voice in the growing and constantly evolving field of transnational/transborder studies. In particular, her focus on under-studied and unpublished texts and performances make this work a valuable resource for both students and scholars. *Wild Tongues* is an appropriate and accessible selection for undergraduate and graduate classrooms as well as a key resource for scholars of gender and sexuality studies, Latina/o and Latin American studies, border, theater, and performance studies.