

Translational Resistance and Southern Cone Memory: Re-Reading Anglophone Postcolonial Theory from the Margins of Montevideo

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Abstract

This study investigates the intersections between Anglophone postcolonial literary theory and the memory politics of the Southern Cone, with a focus on post-dictatorship Uruguayan cultural studies. Positioned within the University of the Republic (UDELAR), the paper argues that applying Anglophone postcolonial frameworks (Spivak, Bhabha, Said) to Southern Cone texts requires a process of translational resistance. Rather than adopting Western paradigms as universal templates, Uruguayan scholars must re-contextualize subaltern agency, state trauma, and testimony through the historical conditions of dictatorial censorship and democratic transition in the Río de la Plata region. Through bilingual narrative strategies, testimonial fragments, and spatial representations of marginality, this paper establishes a localized theoretical framework for reading Southern Cone resistance literature within global English literary studies.

Keywords: Southern Cone Literature, Translational Resistance, Uruguayan Memory Politics, Anglophone Postcolonial Theory, Subaltern Agency, Testimonial Narratives, Counter-Archive Formation, Comparative World Literature, Dictatorship and Trauma, Rioplatense Cultural Studies

1. Introduction: The Geopolitics of Knowledge in Anglophone Literary Studies

The institutionalization of English Literature in South America—particularly at UDELAR—presents an epistemological paradox. While Anglophone studies traditionally center British and North American canons, shifts toward postcolonialism and world literature have opened spaces for transcultural dialogue. Yet mainstream postcolonial theory remains anchored in the historical realities of the former British Empire (Said, 1993).

For Southern Cone scholars, applying concepts such as hybridity, mimicry, and subalternity requires critical re-evaluation. Uruguay's socio-political trajectory is shaped not by British rule but by Spanish colonial legacies, foreign economic hegemonies, and the state violence of the 1973–1985 dictatorship. These conditions cannot be decoded through uncritical application of South Asian or African postcolonial models.

Thus, reading English literature and theory from Montevideo necessitates translational resistance: Anglophone concepts are translated, re-routed, and challenged to illuminate local trauma, archival gaps, and narrative agency. This approach positions Montevideo as an active center of theoretical production rather than a passive recipient of Anglo-American scholarship.

2. Theorizing the Rioplatense Margin: Beyond Standard Postcolonialism

Bhabha's (1994) notion of the "third space" conceptualizes cultural translation as a site of ambivalence, while Spivak (1988) interrogates the structural barriers preventing marginalized subjects from achieving epistemic legibility. In the Southern Cone, these frameworks must engage with the mechanics of dictatorial repression and democratic transition.

The subaltern in Rioplatense literature often appears as the political prisoner, the exile, the silenced dissident, or the disenfranchised worker. Rama's (1984) *La ciudad letrada*

demonstrates how Latin American elites historically wielded literacy as an instrument of state control, marginalizing oral and subversive discourses.

Resistance in modern Uruguayan prose emerges through:

- Elliptical storytelling that replicates the psychological condition of surveillance.
- Testimonial fragments that rupture fictional frameworks and foreground lived experience (Beverley, 2004).
- Spatial mapping of Montevideo as a traumatized landscape of clandestine detention and memory reclamation.

These strategies, when translated into Anglophone postcolonial vocabulary, reveal that Southern Cone marginality produces its own theoretical register.

3. Pedagogical and Methodological Implications for Comparative Literature

Teaching English Literature at UDELAR requires evaluating English as both a global academic lingua franca and a historical instrument of imperial power (Said, 1993). Engaging Anglophone postcolonial literature through a Rioplatense lens generates a productive dialogue between the Global South and the Anglophone sphere.

This approach yields three methodological interventions:

1. De-centering the Anglo-American canon by comparing imperial resistance in English-language texts with Latin American strategies against authoritarianism.
2. Ethics of testimonial translation, highlighting what is preserved or lost when Southern Cone trauma enters Anglophone circulation (Beverley, 2004).
3. Archival reclamation, resonating with Spivak's (1988) question of subaltern speech, and uncovering parallels with Irish, South African, and Caribbean resistance writing.

This pedagogical framework transforms the classroom into a space of critical resistance, where students evaluate foreign canons against their own cultural and political history.

4. Translational Resistance in Action: Re-Reading the Archive

Spivak's (1988) question—Can the subaltern speak? —takes on new meaning in Uruguay, where the subaltern speaks through fractures of state silence, exile correspondence, prison graffiti, and collective oral performance.

The post-dictatorship archive is contested: state institutions attempted to erase evidence of human rights abuses, producing archival voids. Literature thus assumes an archival function, weaving oral history, song lyrics, and clandestine journals into counter-archives that resist state-enforced oblivion.

Hybrid forms—poetry, testimony, manifesto—echo Bhabha's (1994) hybridity but emerge from historical necessity rather than aesthetic choice. When brought into conversation with Anglophone postcolonial theory, these forms demonstrate that Southern Cone resistance literature expands the conceptual boundaries of global postcolonial studies.

5. Conclusion

Scholars at UDELAR work at a critical intersection between Southern Cone memory politics and global postcolonial theory. Their practice of translational resistance demonstrates that Uruguay is not a peripheral site but an active producer of theoretical innovation. By reinterpreting Anglophone concepts through the lived realities of dictatorship, censorship, and democratic reconstruction, UDELAR researchers highlight how Southern Cone literature complicates conventional ideas of subalternity, hybridity, and voice. From Montevideo's margins, comparative world literature can be re-imagined through a polycentric lens that recognizes multiple geopolitical sources of theoretical insight. In this way, Southern Cone experiences of trauma and resistance continue to shape and expand the future of postcolonial thought.

6. Findings

- Southern Cone literary production reveals distinct modes of resistance—testimonial fragments, hybrid forms, and counter-archives—that challenge the universality of Anglophone postcolonial theory.
- Translational resistance practiced at UDELAR shows that global theoretical frameworks require local adaptation, especially when addressing histories of dictatorship and enforced silence.
- The Rioplatense archive demonstrates that the subaltern speaks through fractured, clandestine, and collective memory practices, demanding new interpretive vocabularies.
- Montevideo emerges as a productive intellectual center, contributing original perspectives to comparative world literature rather than merely receiving external theory.

7. Suggestions

- Comparative literature programs should adopt a polycentric model, recognizing theoretical innovation emerging from regions like the Southern Cone.
- Scholars should continue developing localized postcolonial frameworks that foreground regional histories of repression, exile, and memory reconstruction.
- Future research should explore cross-regional dialogues between Southern Cone resistance literature and other global traditions (Irish, Caribbean, South African).
- Translational resistance should be integrated as a core methodological tool for analyzing how global theories shift when applied to local archives shaped by trauma.

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