

Book Review

Tosta, Antonio Luciano de Andrade. *Confluence Narratives: Ethnicity, History, and Nation-Making in the Americas*. Bucknell UP, 2016.

In 1991, Earl Fitz published *Rediscovering the New World: Inter-American Literature in a Comparative Context* (U of Iowa P). Fitz presented this work as a necessarily partial foray into the emerging field of inter-American literature, calling it “an invitation to further study” (xiii). Antonio Luciano de Andrade Tosta’s *Confluence Narratives: Ethnicity, History, and Nation-Making in the Americas* represents a response to this invitation and offers another approach to this field of study. Whereas Fitz provides a survey of literature of the Americas over the centuries, Tosta uses contemporary fiction to show how the present can challenge past narratives. He calls these kinds of texts *confluence narratives*—historical novels that “are always suspicious of history, pointing out its omissions” while simultaneously underscoring the contributions of marginalized groups (such as indigenous peoples and Afro-descendants) to the formation of nations in the Americas (3). He analyzes eight novels—four from Brazil and four from elsewhere—to demonstrate that colonialism, slavery, and wars are among the elements that have inextricably bound together the apparently disparate countries of the Americas. In doing so, he contends that a hemispheric approach to history and literary studies is therefore essential to understanding these questions fully.

Tosta, who earned his PhD in comparative literature at Brown University, is an associate professor of Brazilian literature and culture at the University of Kansas. His training and personal experience reinforce his research, contributing to previous publications such as *Luso-American Literature* (Rutgers UP, 2011) and a series of articles on immigration, transnational identities, and nationhood. These themes are all present in *Confluence Narratives*, the focus of which can be roughly divided into three areas: histories of the Americas, analyses of Brazilian texts, and analyses of other American texts (the author uses the term *American* in its broadest sense throughout the book).

Confluence Narratives comprises four chapters, each of which pairs a Brazilian work with one from elsewhere. Chapter 1 discusses indigenous identity and contributions during and after the colonial period, using Luiz Antonio de Assis Brasil's *Breviário das terras do Brasil* (1997) and Mexican author Laura Esquivel's *Malinche* (2006). In Chapter 2 the author discusses slavery and the undervalued presence of African cultures and peoples, using Luís Fulano de Tal's *A noite dos cristais* (1996) and US author Ishmael Reed's *Flight to Canada* (1976). Chapter 3 compares Moacyr Scliar's *A estranha nação de Rafael Mendes* (1987) and Ricardo Feierstein's *Mestizo* (1994) to broach Jewish immigration to Brazil and Argentina, respectively. In Chapter 4, the author compares Jorge Okubaro's *O súdito: (Banzai, Massateru!)* (2006) and Canadian author Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* (1981) to reassess Japanese immigration and citizenship. In each chapter, the structure is consistent: after providing relevant historical context, Tosta analyzes first the Brazilian novel and then its counterpart to argue that dominant historical narratives have marginalized—or entirely omitted—the presence and contributions of the groups in question. These confluence narratives are proof of how fiction can intervene in history, reshaping and diversifying narratives and concepts of nationhood.

Tosta's work is effective in many respects, including its structure and abundance of historical sources, but its greatest strength is that it models how to undertake an inter-American project: it traces the common threads binding American nations together without flattening their specificity. The author carefully navigates expansive topics, providing just enough context to orient readers without overwhelming them. His decision to include one Brazilian text per chapter bolsters hemispheric dialogue while simultaneously increasing the visibility of Brazilian works. In this way, Tosta reproduces the effects of confluence narratives—he showcases the heterogeneity of the Americas and foregrounds the contributions of marginalized groups that have shaped its history.

Though no book of this nature could possibly include every significant writer or work, readers may wonder why Tosta includes no indigenous authors in his first chapter. While in the rest of the book he includes authors who identify ethnically and culturally with their characters, in this chapter he argues that the non-indigenous authors selected engage in a "politics of solidarity," successfully challenging official narratives from the outside (3). There is certainly value in

creating space for solidary authors and readers, but as the book's stated goal is to highlight the overlooked contributions of minority groups it seems important to include at least one representative author in each chapter. Bringing in authentic indigenous voices (even if their work does not align perfectly with the project) would avoid the impression that there are no indigenous authors challenging historical American narratives today.

Overall, Tosta's work represents a valuable contribution to the field of inter-American and interdisciplinary studies, smoothly blending history and literary analysis. The epilogue ends with an open call for more democratic inter-American scholarship by researchers from all over the Americas (including the Caribbean). This is a welcome gesture signaling openness to other views and interpretations of confluence (and other) narratives and is reflective of Tosta's general approach to these topics. Finally, the bibliography included at the end of the book is a valuable resource for those wishing to begin or further their own inter-American studies. Just as confluence narratives help reshape the history of the Americas, by analyzing important minority groups and identifying others whose contributions need to be studied further (e.g. those of Arab Americans), Tosta's book expands and reshapes the field of inter-American studies to be increasingly inclusive and reflective of the heterogeneity found throughout the Americas.

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