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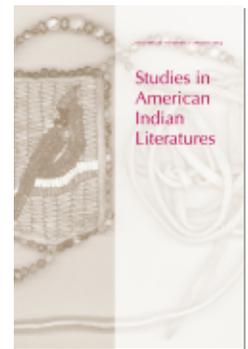
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*Comparative Indigeneities of the Américas: Toward a Hemispheric Approach* edited by M. Bianet Castellanos, Lourdes Gutiérrez Nájera, and Arturo J. Aldama (review)

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contemporary life, link Native people to their ancestral past, and enable them to imagine historical ways of Native life.

“Conversations with Filmmakers” is the third and final section in the anthology. Here, “the theoretical and analytical are reframed by the practical and personal” through interviews with Sterlin Harjo, Blackhorse Lowe, Shelley Niro, Sandy Osasa, Randy Redroad, and Mono Smith (261). Through discussions of their methods, personal interests, and goals as filmmakers, the conversations present in the rest of the anthology come together to sketch the dynamic and multifaceted reality of Native film and filmmaking. In particular, many filmmakers in this section debate use of the term *Native filmmaker* itself and whether the term empowers or disenfranchises Native film at a universal level. In the first interview Randy Redroad likens Native filmmaking to a “greased pig” whose meaning remains slippery and evasive, and the ensuing interviews expound upon the slipperiness of the term (298).

M. Elise Marubbio and Eric L. Buffalohead have succeeded in depicting the complexities in studying, teaching, and creating Native film. The anthology’s organization and content are accessible for neophytes to Native cinema while still proving useful for more seasoned veterans. Due to the extensive and informative notes at the end of each article, interested readers can easily further their knowledge of a particular topic of interest. Within the eclectic range of materials in the contributors’ essays, several themes emerge as key to Native film: sovereignty, the ever-evolving meaning of Native film itself, and what qualifies as Native film. Regardless of an individual’s level of knowledge and expertise in Native film, *Native Americans on Film* is a valuable read for anyone interested in this topic.

M. Bianet Castellanos, Lourdes Gutiérrez Nájera, and Arturo J. Aldama, eds. *Comparative Indigeneities of the Américas: Toward a Hemispheric Approach*. Tucson: U of Arizona P, 2012. ISBN: 978-0816521012. 376 pp.

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What are the challenges for the field of ethnic studies? The antagonistic discourse of conservative groups in the United States against minority groups only marks the urgency of ethnic studies as a field of political

and racial debate. When I discuss the future or possible directions of the field with other scholars and students, the word *transnationalism* often emerges. Although Mexican American and African American scholars have always dealt with issues of transnationalism (diaspora) and border crossing (immigration), it is not until very recently that these fields attempted to include the views of Indigenous and American Indian communities beyond the questionable frameworks of *indigenismo* or cultural *mestizaje*.

A recent and noteworthy attempt at filling these gaps is the publication of *Comparative Indigeneities of the Américas: Toward a Hemispheric Approach*, a collection of essays edited by M. Bianet Castellanos, Lourdes Gutiérrez Nájera, and Arturo J. Aldama. As the title implies, the twenty-one essays that form the book attempt to be the first steps into building a “hemispheric” approach to Indigenous studies. Indeed, as stated in the introduction to the collection, titled “Hemispheric *Encuentros* and Remembering,” the editors “hope to provide scholars with new tools and alternative frameworks” to analyze contemporary struggles of Indigenous peoples and how their experiences and communities are affected by “broader forces of neocolonialism, globalization, neoliberalism, and violence” (3). In this sense the collection attempts to disrupt traditional Western epistemologies by means of Indigenous conceptualizations of autonomy, self-determination, sovereignty, and human rights that shape identity and community, in multiple forms, throughout the hemisphere. Whether the book achieves these ambitious and broad goals is open to debate. As with any other collection of essays, the strength of the book rests on the fact that each essay must stand on its own, while at the same time functioning as part of a cohesive whole.

In the case of *Comparative Indigeneities* the essays are separated into four different sections, which each cover different forms of sociopolitical struggles. Although the essays are widely different in their methodologies, perspectives, and political approaches, they can be roughly divided into historical, ethnographic, and literary (or film) criticism, with a clear aim at comparative research between different cultural contexts.

The first section of the anthology, titled “Re-envisioning Indigenisms, Decolonizing *Mestizaje*,” attempts to bridge the political and identity struggles of American and Canadian Indians with the problematic effects of *mestizaje* in Latin America, but in particular with theories of Chicana Indigeneity. The section opens with Penelope Kelsey’s analysis

of American Indian Literary Nationalism (AILN), a political and literary movement that gained attention thanks to the recent work of Indian scholars Robert Warrior, Jace Weaver, and Craig Womack. The group of Indian scholars attempted to reconfigure nationalism as a form of resistance and as a political critique of federal policies. Kelsey links these issues with specific debates of *mestizaje* in Bolivia, Brazil, and México, revealing how kinship, orality, family, and self-making serve as “lived nationalisms” that resist colonialist discourses of blood purity and racial erasure. However, subsequent chapters explore the historical and socio-political obstacles of this, perhaps, utopian project of pan-tribal Indigeneity. For example, chapter 2 by Lourdes Alberto focuses on some of the most problematic implications of the work of Chicana scholar Gloria Anzaldúa. Through her analysis of Ana Castillo’s *Mixquiahuala Letters*, Alberto delves into the impossibilities of transferring a Chicana border identity (and the return to erased Indigenous roots) into the realities of racial oppression in contemporary Mexico. In a similar vein chapter 5, Jasmine Mitchell’s essay on Brazilian cinema, discloses the close interconnections of *mestizaje* with nationalistic discourses of class and race.

“Displaced Peoples, Reterritorializing Space,” the second section of *Comparative Indigeneities*, shows how Indigenous migrants’ identities are shaped in urban spaces by nationalistic narratives of poverty and racial inferiority. However, these studies also disclose how spirituality and religion, both Indigenous and *mestizo*, can reshape colonial spaces into new forms of community and belonging. Chapter 7, Bianet Castellanos’s essay, focuses on female Mayan immigrants in the tourist area of Cancún, showing how Mayan immigrants seemingly re-appropriate popular *telenovelas* and the figure of the Virgen de Guadalupe to construct spaces of female empowerment. Similarly, chapter 9, Diana Negrín da Silva’s essay, chronicles the social and political activism of Wixárika college students and their use of the Internet and social networks as virtual spaces of resistance that serve to counterattack neoliberal representations of Indigenous peoples. Through the reconfiguration of spaces online and in public higher education, these students aim to change the “racial imaginary” of Mexico. In this sense Da Silva’s essay represents an innovating perspective on Indigenous research.

The third section of the collection, “Practicing Autonomy, Autonomy as Practice,” includes a strong series of essays on Latin American models of democracy, nationalism, sovereignty, ethnopitics, natural resources

and land rights, autonomy, legal representation, and self-subsistence. Unfortunately, this section also reveals the limitations of the book's format. Since the selection of the anthology privileges quantity, the direct consequence is that the essays are short (all of them below the twenty-page mark). In fact, according to many of the authors' notes, most of the essays are either drafts or condensed versions of much larger articles or past publications. This is painfully evident in chapter 10 by Natividad Gutiérrez Chong, who attempts to create a historical evolutionary model of Latin American nationalism by analyzing the history and Indigenous politics of Mexico, Ecuador, and Bolivia. Perhaps intended as a general introduction to the rest of the pieces in part 3 (Chong's essay is the first one in this section), the piece offers only a superficial summary (barely a page to cover each of the countries) of ethnopolitics and the effects of the democratic apparatus in three different countries. Chong's general thesis is that the struggles of Indigenous people are forcing "the modern-state [to give] room to a new politicized ethnicity" (174). The validity of this argument notwithstanding, the essay fails at giving a comprehensive overview of the recent history of these three nations, leaving out many political contradictions and recent institutional abuses of Latin American nation states.

Part 4, "Seductive Alliances, Healing Stories," is by far the most uneven section of the entire book. A mixture of queer and gender cross-border theory, transnational coalitions, and activism, the essays work as individual projects, but they do not function as a coherent whole. At the same time, this section has the dubious honor of having the weakest piece in the whole book: Gabriel S. Estrada's essay, chapter 16, exemplifies this lack of focus. Covering two novels (including Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*, a seven-hundred-page novel), a collection of poetry, and four films, the essay offers some interesting transnational readings on a diverse selection of texts, but it ultimately lacks a proper focal point and feels overly ambitious for such a limited number of pages. The last essay in this section, Luis Urrieta Jr.'s "Las Identidades También Lloran, Identities Also Cry: Exploring the Human Side of Indigenous Latina/o Identities," functions as an outstanding closure to this daunting book. In this personal confession Urrieta recalls the violent beating of his P'urhépecha grandmother by a mob of Indigenous women. The historical and transnational reconstruction of race and identity that Urrieta produces is clearly undertaken as a way to understand and come

to grips with his “multiple identities” as Mexican, Xicano, P’urhépecha, Latino, and Chicano. Urrieta exhibits the contradictions of identity and the barriers that stand in the claiming or creation of pan-Indian coalitions. Bitterly he asserts, “Despite the anger and confusion, I still don’t understand the meaning of all this in my own context, in my own life, and in my role as scholar” (326).

Most collections of essays and articles leave the conclusions to the end. They serve as summaries and afterthoughts directed at the reader or scholar. However, the last essay of *Comparative Indigeneities* presents no definitive conclusions, only open questions and ongoing challenges to framing and integrating a “hemispheric” approach in Indigenous studies. Even with its limitations in format, the book is without a doubt one of the most important publications of the last five years. *Comparative Indigeneities*’ surprising content will become a turning point in the academic fields of Mexican American, Native American, and transnational American studies. Nevertheless, it is important to point out that the book represents only the very first steps in reformulating decolonization and Indigenous transnationalism as the new center of academic research.