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THE VOICED PUZZLE OF THE AMERICAS: A REVIEW OF *PLURIVOZES AMERICANAS / AMERICAN PLURAL VOICES / PLURIVOCES AMERICANAS*



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Plurivozes Americanas / American Plural Voices / Plurivoces Americanas is a collection of poems and also little pieces of prose in which different ways of perceiving the realities of the American continent are given a voice. All these varied perspectives converge in an academic effort that, on the one hand, reminds us once again about the importance of translation in our everyday more globalized world and, on the other hand, opens a path of communication between the three predominant languages of the Americas. That is precisely why the decisive threefold task of translation undertaken in the project is placed at the very heart of the collection. Translation is actually what makes the book come to existence; it is what makes us understand all the stories and, in a sense, what makes us *hear* their *voices*. 187

Underneath the numerous sections of the book – which are dedicated to each of the seventeen female and male authors included in it – lies a general transcultural essence that permeates the whole collection. To begin with, the very effect of translating these literary pieces into the three languages of the project, and putting them together throughout the collection, is already providing the book with a transcultural meaning. Here, the point of view of the *other* – i.e. the perspective that the voices discover with their stories – is first altered by merely translating it to a different language and it is further modified when the reader brings its own cultural background to it. The former perspective of the story is filtered through the “I” of the reader and the boundaries of the fictional entities of the *other* and the reader are

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overcome in the process. Therefore, the collection is ultimately approaching the *other* to the potential reader through a process of identification in which the original point of view is transcended.

Yet, despite experiencing this transition, each of the different *others* of the collection remains unique. Disclosing their purest form through translation may inevitably provoke the loss of a particular meaning, a word, a sensation, that could be only perceived through the eyes of the *other* – still, it would be impossible to disrupt the linguistic barriers for the greater public otherwise. We may inevitably lose something in the process, but we learn to see through other eyes overall. And, what is at stake here is that, anyway, all these stories keep standing as unique pieces within the huge puzzle of cultures that is the American continent.

The barriers between the three languages are thus blurred and the focus is shed on the world that the storytellers are opening to us, the readers. Being a Portuguese, Spanish, or English composition, what matters in *Plurivozes Americanas* lies beneath its linguistic form. The particularities of each of these languages undoubtedly play a part in the delivery of the message to the receiver, and they indeed enclose much of the essence of their own cultures. However, although this is of great relevance in the understanding of a given tradition, the voices of the collection may sacrifice this rather pure linguistic dimension so that their perspective of the world can be shared with as many ears as possible. And, besides, since each of the compositions are close to one another in the pages of the book, the reader may access the original version whenever they wish to plunge into a foreign linguistic pond.

Despite the cultural variety that I have been mentioning so far, it would be necessary to notice that the heart of *Plurivozes Americanas* is undoubtedly Brazilian. The majority of the compositions of the collection were conceived in this Latin American country, and the initiative of the project was also born in Brazil. Its cultural wealth could have been more than enough to hint at some of the varied *voices* of the American continent; the diversity of cultures found within the vast Brazilian territory is actually stunning. But the collection is right to include Hispanic and Anglo-American – as well as Anglo-Irish – perspectives to enrich the final transcultural puzzle that the book is offering to the reader. It is the sum of these efforts and illusions what renders the project a decisive introduction to – but nonetheless little taste to – the overwhelming plurality of the Americas.

The diverse group of authors included in *Plurivozes Americanas* is not less than a perfect example of the vast number of peoples and cultures which are part of what we

generally understand and perceive as a country. Within these political delimitations, the identity of so many different peoples and individuals remains invisible as well as forgotten most of the times, overshadowed by the predominant mass culture. Yet, all of them fight for their survival as nations – following the sociological interpretation of the term rather than the political one – each of them with their own history, culture, and heritage. As the editor of the collection Gisele Giandoni Wolkoff suggests in the preface, we should open our minds and see the world without these, to a certain extent, fictional barriers. The confines of a culture are limitless.

Poets, activists, actors, journalists, university professors, playwrights, etc., but, above all, individuals with unique perspectives of the world are gathered in this project to raise their voices and be eventually heard. Either by a poem, a short story of their lives, or an excerpt from a play, these authors portray their own perspectives of the Americas as well as, perhaps without our realization, making us participate from their own stories. The original poem, the heritage of the Kaingang, the passage of time through nature, the intricacies of homosexuality before the eyes of religion, the spell of wilderness, the lure of the unknown, the understanding of the figure of God and the concept of love, the uncertainties of love and the fugacity of life, land and social classes in the USA, the existential reflections of a female poet, the magical power of the Mexican nature, the inner conflicts of an aging homosexual, the war of the self, roots and life, the Indian ancestry and the disruption of borders, the homosexual awakening of a thirteen-year-old boy, and more are many of the situations depicted in *Plurivozes Americanas* which the reader is invited to experience through the eyes of the *other*.

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If the themes of the collection are diverse – as we may infer from what I have just noted above –, so is the variety of writers included in it. In this twofold plural context, the book can be divided into two main groups of authors with regard to the thematic aspects of their compositions.

On the one hand, the ghost of colonialism haunts the texts of a number of writers of the collection. Whether the colonial times are said to be part of the past, its traumatic footprint is still perceptible in the worlds that the female and male authors of *Plurivozes Americanas* are portraying in their stories. Thus, the postcolonial discourse imbues the majority of the compositions of the book. The questions of hybridity, nature, the past, the roots, and, among others, the identity conflicts caused by the colonial era are some of the most recurrent topics of this first group of authors in which we could include Jorge Fragoso, Álvaro Alves de Faria,

Azelene, César Eduardo Carrión, Cyril Dabydeen, Domingos Pellegrini, Juan Armando Rojas Joo, Marcos Hidemi de Lima, and Mary O'Donnell.

On the other hand, although it is true that the whole collection shares, to a greater or lesser extent, a postcolonial atmosphere, there seems to be another group of authors who is particularly concerned with somehow more universal aspects. The class struggle, existentialism, homosexuality, love, and travelling are themes dealt with great insight in the compositions written by Christopher Durang, Dolores Guadarramo, Eloésio Paulo, Gerald Locklin, Jacqueline Aisenman, Lanford Wilson, Luci Collin, and Will Scheffer.

Along these seventeen names of female and male authors of *Plurivozes Americanas*, the task of the translators and those people responsible for the organization of the project should be honored. Bringing together the efforts and the voices of individuals coming from so many different cultural backgrounds – as well as fitting them in the book so that they all make sense with each other – has eventually proven to be remarkably productive in the understanding of our current cultural relations. In a more individualistic level, the collection also demonstrates the importance of giving voice to those who want to be heard as well as the revealing and necessary outcome of such an original initiative. However, as the editor herself suggests, this project is just a tiny example of the immense puzzle of voices of the Americas since, in fact, there are much more buzzing out there within the lands of the continent. The collection provides a channel for a few of them, but its commendable endeavor should encourage the different academic agents of this literary field to continue and expand this work. There are many stories waiting for their opportunity to contribute to the cultural enrichment of the Americas and, in the end, the task may be simple; we only have to close our eyes and listen to this imposing puzzle of *American Plural Voices*.

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