

Lewis, Laura A. *Chocolate and Corn Flour: History, Race, and Place in the Making of "Black" Mexico*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2012. 370 pp.; \$26.95 paperback; ISBN: 978-0-8223-5132-0

Scholarly research on "black" Latin America has grown in the past decades through various disciplines. In this book anthropologist Laura E. Lewis subscribes to the view that ethnography can best help comprehend the formation and structural conditions that form black identities in the Americas. Her work combines historical documents with oral histories to understand identity formation in the village of San Nicolás Tolentino, located along la Costa Chica in the state of Guerrero. Interested in San Nicoladenses' self-identification as "morenos," a mestizaje of black-Indian, the author refutes labels such as "black," "afromexican" and "afromestizo." She argues such labels are imposed by scholars, activists and cultural workers that displace morenos as non Indian and non Mexican. Instead she shows how community, through memory, narratives, and traditions, constructs identity. In particular, she uses the notion of "home place" as a nexus between race and migration, arguing that San Nicoladenses define a moreno identity in terms of the physical locality of land and place of the ancestral past.

Lewis begins with a contextual overview of la Costa Chica to present a myriad of social relations, agricultural practices, and local histories. In her second chapter, she emphasizes the role of "mixture" between Indians and morenos, which she claims extends beyond racial terms and into linguistic and geographic mixture. However, she observes how spatial organization of San Nicolás still separates morenos and Indians as insiders and outsiders. She thus claims the existing tension between the two groups is spatial, though expressed racially, yet mediated through marital practices when morenos and Indians marry and follow social protocols of living arrangements.

Debates on who are truly native and foreign to San Nicolás, revolve around chronicles and traditions, undocumented and difficult to corroborate, but kept alive in the village through oral narratives. Lewis collects these personal memories to present a rich story of shipwrecks and escaped slaves, on how San Nicolás chose the village, and on the independence ritual performance known as La América. These three narratives equate slave freedom and Indian resistance with a nationalist Mexican identity, and a moreno saint with the validity of belonging and acceptance of Afro descendant peoples. Collectively they create a history of San Nicolás that ties spatial claims to a moreno identity. She thus shows in her third chapter how such oral and performative narratives offer a point of unity for morenos and Indians, which she uses to reinforce her argument of a mestizaje that embraces this amalgam while excluding whiteness.

The book then takes a slightly disruptive turn in the fourth chapter, where she presents a genealogy on the "African thesis." She especially criticizes Melville Herskovits' proposal of an African migration to Mexico, and his intellectual influences on Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán who pioneered ethnographic work on the Costa Chica, and Robert Harris Thompson for his claim that *redondos* evidence African ties. In particular, Lewis is critical of the Our Third Root project that aims to reclaim African cultural heritage as a third root in Mexico along with the Spanish and Indigenous. She claims this project "invented and valorized local traditions" (144) in order to proof pieces of African survival. The consequence, she believes, is a denial of local coast history and an imposed distinction between Mexicans and African descendants that "replicates the differences engendered by racism: blacks are not from Mexico, and neither are Africans" (152). She then extends this argument to contemporary cultural workers in Chapter 5, who she claims use a white discourse about race, and a top down approach, while unconcerned with local

understandings about racial formations. She argues this further with the Meetings of Black Villages, claiming these are well intentioned but use essentialist categories that generate dissimilarities between Indians and morenos, posing them as natural enemies.

Lewis then shifts her analysis in chapter six to the role of gender in the segregation of public and private space and behavior. Her various examples range from parenting children and levels of gendered freedom, adolescent dating, to women's fertility and the common role of *queridas* (mistresses) in marital relations. Addressing the acceptance of trans, homosexual and bisexual men and women, the author states that for San Nicoladenses gendered conduct is more crucial than anatomy or sexual orientation. She then returns to community practices in chapter seven, with special consideration of *coraje*, an anger accompanied by a physical manifestation of phlegm. Through various interviews Lewis shows how San Nicoladenses understand *coraje* as a social concern and proposes it as another cultural aspect that connects morenos and Indians in San Nicolás.

Lewis concludes the books with migration, particularly to Winston-Salem, North Carolina, which has in the last years attracted many San Nicoladenses who migrate towards family members and friends. Her analysis includes motives and how migrants maintain community practices and relations with San Nicoladenses through social media and remittances. She further extends the notion of "home place" to migrants, remarking on their commitment to the construction of houses they may never return to, but which nonetheless symbolize an identity anchor to San Nicolás.

While Lewis is right to be critical of the too often co-optation of activism and culture for academic self-interest, her criticisms at times appeared very one-sided. She constantly distinguished herself from that group by reiterating her acceptance by San Nicoladenses, both anecdotally and visually. Moreover, while she argues that moreno identity challenges nationalist discourse of mestizaje because it excludes whiteness, preferring a blending of black and Indian, she presented extensive examples of racist perceptions between the two groups. Yet rather than further analyzing such observations through a historical and theoretical framework that acknowledges the institutionalization and internalization of racism as a legacy of colonialism, they were often dismissed as class based issues, rather than racism, evoking a post-race perspective.

This book is a contribution to Latin American Studies and issues of race identity formation, nationalism and transnationalism in Mexico. Her use of oral histories creates a body of knowledge that fills voids in an area little documented, such as the local history of San Nicolás. Likewise, her inclusion of migration to Winston-Salem reveals a contemporary analysis of cultural transnationalism that contributes to the field of Latina/o Studies as well, especially concerning the current growing Latino migration to the South. Therefore the well-researched book would appeal to scholars and students of race, nationalism and immigration studies of both Mexico and the United States.

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