

ULRICH OSLENDER: *The Geographies of Social Movements: Afro-Colombian Mobilization and the Aquatic Space*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016

Oslender draws on two decades of research in the southern part of Colombia's Pacific littoral, an economic and political periphery largely settled by the descendants of African slaves who staked out communal livelihoods—usually after buying their own freedom—in the humid and densely forested riparian environment of the Pacific lowlands (see chapter 3). The purpose of the book is to contribute to a social movement theory of space. According to the author, even if the importance of geography has been demonstrated in studies of social movement multiscale strategies, networks, and mobility, the “on-the-ground realities” of “the far-flung places” that activists claim to represent has been largely neglected (pp. 14-15). This risks portraying a one-sided view of events and misunderstanding the complex ways in which geography shapes social movements. To overcome such shortcomings, Oslender proposes a “critical place perspective” that “co-implicates scales, territory, and networks [...] to account more fully for the multiple, multiscale, rooted and networked experience *within* social movements” (p. 18). Scholars must go beyond the “logic of political and economic processes operating in the particular region in which a movement operates” and examine in addition “the knowledge practices of place-based cultures and their environmental imaginaries” (p. 4). Using participatory-action-research, extensive interviews, and field work, Oslender attempts to do so.

Chapter two documents the everyday-reality of the Pacific coast, and draws on oral literature and non-verbal practices, such as dances, feelings, traditions, gestures or music in order to map “an elaborate geographical imagination that activists have evoked in the political mobilization of the lowlands” (pp. 47-48). He also fills the manuscript with field notes and thoughts on his own experience with place and environment. These observations offer a glimpse into people's *sentipensamientos* with respect to their aquatic space—a concept coined by the Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda that combines feeling and thinking as inseparable cognitive processes, something that positivist models of rationality fail to capture (p. 48-49). The *sentipensamientos* collected in this research contain hidden transcripts that reveal attitudes of resistance, expose the history of Colombia's most marginalized people, and “put flesh on the concept of cultural politics” (p. 74).

But how are these hidden transcripts mobilized? Oslender argues that this can be observed in the way that Community Councils, or the formal organizations created by Law 70, recognized Afro-Colombian riparian social relations, and how capital interests and the state have mediated political mobilization in the

region (p. 137). In the first case, he looks at the spur of activism motivated by the constitutional approval of collective rights legislation for black communities. Leaders quickly mobilized to get the mostly uninformed or apprehensive communities behind the new rights. In this section, I hoped the author had included more background analysis of the regional activism before the new constitution. In the 1980s, as extractive business interests encroached into the traditional lands of black peasants in the northern part of the Pacific coast, activists recognized that something more fundamental than the economic and property rights of black families was threatened: at stake was an Afro-Colombian territoriality. This also worried regional indigenous leaders, in particular activists in Chocó and in the Bajo San Juan River. Inter-ethnic regional alliances helped broker relations inside and outside the Pacific coast and showed acceptance for a particular Afro-Colombian vision of territory. Further evaluation of these events would have offered the reader a more nuanced understanding of the region's "networked experience" and the variations of black ethnic identity and activism along the Pacific coast.

The assembly that drafted the 1991 Constitution offered an unprecedented political opportunity to address ethnic identity claims as governing elites yielded to local demands for territorial autonomy as a strategy to address a crisis of state governance (see chapter 4). Oslender overlooks the important detail that it was the indigenous representatives to the national constitutional assembly—in particular Francisco Rojas Birry (from the Pacific coast) and his team of indigenous and non-indigenous advisors from the National Indigenous Organization [*Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia*, ONIC]—who voiced the claims of the Afro-Colombian social movements in the constitutional assembly. They helped pass Transitory Article 50 on the rights of the riparian black peasant communities. Because the constitution provided a short time-frame to formalize Transitory Article 50, black activists quickly moved to legislate Law 70. It is at this point that the Process of Black Communities [*Proceso de Comunidades Negras*, PCN] hurries local efforts to convince many people throughout the region, especially in the southern parts, to support Law 70 by showing how it was inspired by local customs and practices. In the end, the organization of black communities took "place within a field of shifting power relations" (p. 142). Once established, community councils benefitted business interests or government development plans in some cases, helped unify communities, and generated hostility from municipal authorities (pp. 142–152).

Chapter five presents the community councils created by Law 70, arguing that the law answered more clearly to state efforts of territorial ordering and discusses the political forces and development projects that prompted neoliberal elites to experiment with new institutional forms of interest intermediation to

accommodate global capital dynamics and growing calls for conservation. This section should clarify that Law 70 did not enable black community councils as decentralized administrative units with rights to fiscal resources (as the Constitution did with the indigenous councils), which in part explains why some municipal authorities were less interested in the councils or why some communities saw little benefit in the councils beyond their use to territorialize their space, make social or infrastructure investment claims to municipal or departmental governments, or raise consciousness about the rights of black people. Notwithstanding, Oslender convincingly argues that the community councils represented the first time that riparian black communities were given a political voice (p. 179).

Oslender concludes with a discussion of the humanitarian crisis threatening these communities since the middle of the 1990s as coca growers and illegally armed groups increased their presence in the region. The region is now subsumed in the de-territorializing logic of violence and displacement, and is forming a new generation of social organizations and leaders who at great risk to their lives, defend the rights of internal refugees. As the author notes, the survival of Afro-Colombian riparian communities now depends on the defense of the basic human rights of displaced populations and of Afro-Colombians to their titled lands.

In general, the book effectively describes the cultural, spiritual, biographic and mnemonic connections between people and place and how they shape the social movement politics effecting sociocultural change. In my view, however, the analysis warrants further discussion of local governance and the political alliances that supported Afro-Colombian rights, even if the communities should ultimately be placed at the center of this story.

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RAANAN REIN, STEFAN RINKE, AND NADIA ZYSMAN (EDS.): *The New Ethnic Studies in Latin America*. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2017

The book under review is a call for and an examination of the recognition of the complexity of ethnic identification in Latin America. People have multiple identities and these shift with time and place. The volume is the result of a research workshop in Tel Aviv in early 2015 sponsored by Tel Aviv University and the Free University of Berlin. It is a welcome addition to the studies of Arabs and Jews in Latin America but focuses almost entirely on Chile and Argentina. The book is intended to encourage a growing complexity of approaches. "This volume brings to the discussion of Jewish life in Latin America less heard voices of women, non-affiliated Jews and intellectuals. Community institutions are not