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Mark Overmyer-VelÖÂ¡zquez. *Visions of the Emerald City: Modernity, Tradition, and the Formation of Porfirian Oaxaca, Mexico.* Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006. 248 pp. $79.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8223-3777-5.

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In this richly documented study, Mark Overmyer-Velázquez addresses a central question about the nature of modernity as envisioned by local elites and contested by commoners in Oaxaca City. Defying how the city appears to uninitiated visitors, the author unveils the neglected history behind the supposed Spanish colonial city, and recalls that most of it was built or rebuilt during the Porfirio Díaz regime (1876-1911), named for the Oaxacan native and Mexican president José de la Cruz Porfirio Díaz. Porfirio Díaz always had an intimate relationship with his native Oaxaca State, especially when he served as governor between 1880-1884, and cemented the city's commitment to the political leadership of his administration. The underlying story in Overmyer-Velázquez's book refers to the way in which Mexicans envisioned and interpreted modernizing processes at the turn of the twentieth century.

The historical period known as "Porfiriato" traditionally has been credited for staging and constructing a Mexican national modern identity. Overmyer-Velázquez illustrates the ways in which industrialization, printed media expansion, and international trade fostered urban transformation and became key instruments in achieving such modernization. For example, Díaz promoted the creation of the Mexican Southern Railroad connecting Mexico City and the states of Puebla and Oaxaca, which proved instrumental for the mining boom in the years to come. The railway served as a showcase of the "integration of Mexico into the world capitalist marketplace" (p. 12). The author argues that traditions and the cultural past also were reshaped to create and strengthen the national identity of the emerging nation through the transformation of the Porfirian city. He suggests that the myth of modernity was highlighted as a source of stability and cultural significance, legitimizing the capitalist narrative of class division.

Porfirio Díaz's regime was cemented by powerful elites who controlled politics and the economy. The elites did not hesitate to use force, the judicial system, as well as different forms of patronage, to maintain their long-held privileges. At the time, social control was epitomized by the "order and progress" slogan that guided the positivist

thinking of Porfirio Díaz's cabinet of "***científicos***" [scientific] administration. Overmyer-Velázquez suggests that Oaxaca City's ruling elites aimed to incorporate the city within the national project of economic development as a key instrument to support the formation of the Mexican State. The author breathes new life into a period already well analyzed in other academic works by examining the construction process of the elite's vision of modernity and the ways the population was segregated--by class and race--on the periphery.[1] The author notes that, according to the ruling elites, space was to be "hygienic, orderly, secularized, didactic and above all, rational" (p. 40). Therefore, regulations were developed as the means to materialize modernity, order activities, and control behaviors.

Overmyer-Velázquez questions Western notions of modernity as the sole frame of civilization and progress, and argues that Oaxaca's fragmented social nature was revealed by the fragility of the dominant discourse and practices. The book analyzes the different layers of Porfirian history within the city, first examining the rise of the capital's ruling elite, later analyzing the political discourse on "legibility" of the city through its many symbols. Later, the author examines the role of the Catholic Church in the creation of the modern state and then analyzes the double morality of the commercial sex trade in the formation of the emerging nation. The author claims that the instruments of public policy were aimed at rendering the city more "legible" through order and rationalization, morality, and sanitation, and were endorsed by the presence of the recovering Catholic Church.

Overmyer-Velázquez argues that the Church was instrumental in implementing the Porfirian modernization project and restraining social resistance when the new religious order was promoted by Pope Leo XIII with his ***Rerum Novarum: On the Condition of the Working Class*** (1891). In this new mandate, the Church promulgated a combination of capitalistic work ethic and Catholic morality in order to maintain their flock while simultaneously addressing the economic agenda of the Porfirian State. Since the Church had lost a great deal of property and wealth with the War of Reform (1858-1861), reconciliation with Porfirio Díaz occurred notwithstanding Díaz's alleged liberal ideology.

Overmyer-Velázquez suggests that commercial sex trade reproduced the modernizing discourses and definitions of tradition, introducing photographic technology as a regular tool but also as a symbol of modernity. He addresses the "State's attempts to regulate and control the sex trade in the city by defining the limits of morality and public space" (p. 99). While the sex trade was debated by those concerned about public morality, it was also a lucrative source of income for the city through a sophisticated scheme of fines and taxes. Sometimes prostitution represented not the destruction of the family structures but rather its restoration and re-enactment according to the author, because a member of a family would join the activity in order to support the family financially. Moreover, the author refers to the empowering techniques that sex-workers used from time to time to upset the status quo. Such actions to confront social respectability consisted in the open display of their activities such as parading in front of the main newspaper's headquarters. Yet, "in the long run, these incidents of moral transgression and fugitive conduct served only to reinforce dominant codes of behavior" (p. 132).

In the last chapters, Overmyer-Velázquez suggests that photographic technology helped the city's administration to rationalize and organize its subjects into discernible categories as part of a larger system of surveillance. Recording popular classes and codifying them into statistically manageable units proved to be very useful to tax, inspect, and discipline the underclass population. Modernity brought new forms of social control that allowed public officials to "recast the State's

capital and its inhabitants as 'legible' subjects of a modern era" (p. 154). Finally, the author explains the rapid industrial decline of the city was due to the revolutionary civil war that ended the Porfirian era.

Throughout the book, Overmyer-Velázquez aims to identify the ways in which elites reshaped the city according to their "biased visions and practices of modernity to fortify their dominant status" (p. 18). In this sense, the author accurately points to the fact that Porfirism praised liberal values of autonomy and representation while supporting power structures of corporatism and patronage inherited from the Spanish colonial times. The city of Oaxaca takes a central role in Overmyer-Velázquez's work as he points out that Oaxacan elites undertook the urban modernization of the capital by restructuring places and constructing new buildings in central areas. City officials, many of whom lived within a few blocks of the central plaza, owned nearly half of the residential stock of this valued area.

Overmyer-Velázquez argues that the flourishing print media allowed the wealthy elites to reinvent and assert themselves as modern citizens. He claims that the "legibility" of the city allowed the elites to be understood as part of a coherent entity belonging to a broader world. (Paradoxically, Oaxaca held the lowest literacy levels of the whole country.) To this end, Overmyer-Velázquez claims that periodicals and other printed media were instrumental to blending the notions of nationalism and progress since consumers were encouraged to purchase local goods by appealing to their patriotic sentiments.

A central point of Overmyer-Velázquez's is the role of planning in furthering differences: "[T]he organization of space by Elites and city planners in Oaxaca City was a deliberate political act designed to reinforce their dominance in society" (p. 43). This deterministic vision of the planning realm portrays a passive and receptive society with no possibility to contest the established order. The schemes that planners imposed on the capital through their implicit designs of power and progress (translated into maps and signs), accordingly, ignored oppositional the contesting actions, ones that other authors argue to be always present.[2]

Overmyer-Velázquez states that Oaxaca City's development was closely linked to the formation of the nation-state, evident in the transformation of public places such as gardens and plazas into "arenas of civic culture" (p. 54). Following Mexico City's urban policies based on arguments regarding sanitation, public health, and hygiene, the city of Oaxaca undertook major renovations in order to show the "capital's level of civilization" (p. 47). However, Overmyer-Velázquez claims that the city's government converted the once diversely populated plazas and gardens into elitist places for display and leisure. Moreover, he argues that while fostering hygiene and sanitary conditions, social cleansing was undertaken by regulating the city's sex trade.

Real estate flourished by the end of the Porfiriato. All of the city's properties had already been assessed, demonstrating the administration's success in rationalizing the city's spaces and integrating the city into the national narrative of progress. However, these urban transformations were achieved only through "deliberately ignoring the capital's growing underclass" (p. 69) and also imposing a dominant conception of social hygiene through social cleansing.

Notes

[1]. John H. Coatsworth, ***Growth Against Development: The Economic Impact of Railroads in Porfirian Mexico*** (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1981); Guerra Françoise-Xavier, ***México, del Antiguo Regimen a la Revolución***(México City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1991); William D. Raat, ***El Positivismo durante el Porfiriato*** (México City: SepSetentas, 1975).

[2]. See for example Kristin Norget, ***Days of Death, Days of Life: Ritual in the Popular Culture***

of Oaxaca (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

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