

J. Lat. Amer. Stud. 49 (2017). doi:10.1017/S0022216X17000529

Tianna S. Paschel, *Becoming Black Political Subjects: Movements and Ethno-Racial Rights in Colombia and Brazil* (Princeton, NJ, and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2016), pp. ix + 311, £29.95, hb.

This is going to be a very successful book: it is scholarly but readable, and deals with an important topic, here approached analytically for the first time in English. The book provides a framework to explain the movements that are moulding the political subjects of which the title speaks. The abundant and well-organised information demonstrates the author's painstaking pursuit of data in print, online and in interviews with numerous key figures. No course on race in Latin America will be complete without this book.

Tianna Paschel explains how, in the 1990s and early 2000s, the movements for ethno-racial rights, as she prudently calls them (setting aside sensitivities about the difference between race and ethnicity), took advantage of a favourable domestic conjuncture and a supportive international context to push for recognition of land rights (in Colombia's Chocó region and for Brazil's *quilombolas*) and for quota places in public universities in Brazil. The interviews and well-informed background give the reader a multi-levelled insight into all these campaigns.

The first chapter does what the author of every book on this subject considers their duty: to review the history of national ideas about race and denounce racial democracy and mestizaje. Paschel restates the view that most Brazilians believe they are living in a racial democracy (the very curious phrase coined by Gilberto Freyre) – a view whose popularity is equalled only by the lack of evidence to support it. She also takes it for granted that the military regime (1964–85) 'had the distinction of institutionalizing racial democracy' (p. 40), for which there is even less evidence, save what their diplomats proclaimed to the outside world. In Colombia, as elsewhere in Hispanic America, the culprit is mestizaje, though I was struck by the strong regional emphasis in the country's dominant 'language for understanding blackness' (p. 43). Paschel's complaint about Colombian ideologies of mestizaje is, however, guarded: it is on the one hand 'an important framework' but it is also 'far from institutionalized' (p. 43). Peter Wade does indeed, as she says, agree with this, but in the much-referenced but little-read article ('Rethinking Mestizaje: Ideology and Lived Experience', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, vol. 37, 2005, pp. 239–57) that Paschel herself cites he also makes it clear that it is a mistake to treat mestizaje as a manipulative mask which 'marginalises blackness and indigeness'. Like many others, Paschel still projects ill-fitting US-derived concepts of racial polarization, even though in her conclusion she pleads for a 'provincialization' of the US case, by which she must mean that (to use a contestable expression) her own country should be compared on the same plane as others – something which is an analytical and perhaps psychological challenge for all of us, whatever our place of birth, citizenship or background.

The treatment of *quilombos* in Brazil suffers similarly from an over-racialised approach. The political story of how the issue of land for these supposed descendants of runaway slave communities flowered into a full-blown though hard-to-implement policy of land restitution is well told and the role of anthropologists and of NGOs is properly described. But the underlying notion that the *quilombos* present a case of racial exclusion and repressed identity (as distinct from abusive land tenure systems) is too easily taken for granted. Even their defenders (like José Arruti, the anthropologist advocate of 'ethnogenesis') readily admit that these are constructed identities which have evolved in response to institutional opportunities, while others (Jan French, Véronique Boyer) have made quite clear the choreography surrounding that

construction. The problem for outside observers is that, as Paschel and so many others recognise, in a context where the claims of universal social justice and land reform have lost their appeal, invented or at least newly fashioned identities, and the rough justice they promise, offer as good a chance as the disinherited can hope for.

Thus we see in Colombia that an apparatus of recognition has been developed by the state in the wake of its liberal 1991 Constitution and the decisions of a liberal Constitutional Court – worthy of a country of whose 1851 Constitution Victor Hugo is reputed to have said that it was made for angels but not for men. But the path to recognition is through hurdle after hurdle of patronage politics. The occupants of the special Congressional seats reserved for ‘black communities’ had ‘shady ties to illegal groups’ and, in the eyes of activists, did not ‘look particularly black’ (p. 164).

Paschel shows that the creation of racial quotas in Brazil’s public universities was achieved through much bureaucratic and some street politics, with strong international NGO backing and, crucially, unanimous support from the Supreme Court. Indeed in both Brazil and Colombia she observes the ritualised character of the process whereby black social movement organisations are absorbed into the state bureaucracy. Movement leaders went in and out of public office, and events with a ‘civil society’ complexion were openly funded by the state. On account of their limited resources and narrow public support, the movements were ‘not exactly poster children of an effective movement’ (p. 221). And, as she notes, the quota system for blacks in public universities which eventually emerged in Brazil was a compromise: the law as passed in 2012, which generously sets aside half of the places in public federal universities, allocates them according to mixed racial and socio-economic criteria. Interview-based research on why, after so much polemics, it was approved unanimously by the Senate would make very interesting reading.

In the end Paschel seems to resist the full implications of her analysis: she does not recognise the possibility that in Latin American political culture dissidence is dealt with in a different way from in the United States, sometimes by repression, of course, but also and often at the same time by co-optation into a longstanding corporatist state. It may not be very heroic, but it does dampen the bitterness which still, decades after the epic struggles for civil rights, infects the US body politic.

This indifference to the distinctive features of Latin American states may explain the author’s dismissive response to the arguments against quotas which raged among the Brazilian intelligentsia in the first decade of the century. Those arguments were derived from a liberal democratic or social democratic ethos which is inimical to Brazilian or Colombian corporatism, but she has little time for them, so that the serious questions of political philosophy which arise, especially those which reject the identification of the politics of recognition with the politics of social justice, do not receive much attention. Maybe now she will turn her discerning eye to those normative issues, which have received such cursory treatment from students of these themes in Latin America.

University of Cambridge

DAVID LEHMANN

J. Lat. Amer. Stud. 49 (2017). doi:10.1017/S0022216X17000530

Erik Ching, *Stories of Civil War in El Salvador: A Battle over Memory* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), pp. xiv + 345, \$32.00, pb.

Some have talked of a ‘memory turn’ in the study of history, in which historians debate the challenge of ‘memory’ as a source of *historical* knowledge and often the