

RESEÑA

MARA Loveman. National Colors. Racial Classification and the State in Latin America. Oxford University Press, 2014 400 p.

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Mara Loveman's *National Colors* is a history of Latin America through a specific lens; the lens of the 'minorities' as portrayed by the states' national censuses. The book puts in historical perspective the conventional wisdom regarding certain characteristics of these nations. Despite arriving at the well-known conclusion that official ethno-racial classification is driven by politics, Loveman introduces several new aspects. These new dimensions provide a thorough, long-term analysis of the region's history of this census category.

The book's motivation relates to the contrasting answers Latin Americans and US citizens give when asked about their ethnicity. In the US, the answer is straightforward, as ethno-racial classification has been historically omnipresent. In Latin America, individuals respond with their nationality. The discrepancy relates to how race was historically constructed: as time passed, there was a mixture of races and a dissolution of racial differences, rendering colour-blind populations. This book is an in-depth, historical study of Latin Americans' reply to this question. Despite this long-standing discourse, the region's societies are strongly segmented along socioeconomic and ethno-racial traits. As a result of her research, Loveman arrives at two main conclusions. The historical trajectory of ethno-racial classification in Latin America offers general, regional trends. Moreover, this common evolution has been shaped by international political and scientific developments. Both conclusions are novel contributions to the literature, which generally centres on the domestic determinants of one-country studies.

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To develop the history of ethno-racial classification in Latin America from colonial times to present day, the book is based on several premises. First, social meanings of race in the region were tied to narrative constructions of nationhood, which bolstered mythologies of racially egalitarian nations. Moreover, modern states routinely classify their populations to establish policies. Thus, statistics have an underlying purpose, they are not neutral; censuses and official ethno-racial classifications are driven and influenced by politics. Also, since the 1850s, national statistical agencies have contributed to modernisation through: a) the political project of developing the administrative base and authority of a modern state; b) the cultural programme of constructing the communal bonds of a nation; c) the scientific project of generating demographic data to enlighten progress. As such, nation states have had a role in the naturalisation of ethno-racial divides.

Based on these premises and through the study of the censuses carried out in nineteen Latin American countries, Loveman brings new dimensions to the analysis. She considers the region as a whole, which renders regional conclusions, and brings new knowledge of less-frequently studied cases. Throughout her research, Loveman introduces the international political and scientific dimensions. Despite believing that domestic politics are pivotal to account for peculiarities, she argues that they cannot explain regional trends. Moreover, she discovers that ethno-racial classification can be carried out for inclusionary (to combat inequality and discrimination) and exclusionary (for social stigmatisation and economic exploitation, etc) purposes, even simultaneously. Lastly, her consideration of several Latin American countries demonstrates that the legal institutionalisation of ethno-racial classification is not needed to generate racial-ethnic boundaries, as states make race indirectly, through strategies of governance.

Loveman's conclusions are based on her ample use of primary sources from the whole period considered as well as secondary literature. Census reports, a very rich piece of information, are her main primary references, but she also analyses other official publications that draw upon the ideas of census officials or the relevant statistical agencies. Regarding these national enquiries, it is worth acknowledging their judicious use to exemplify each and every one of her arguments. Generally, the employment of pertinent, updated secondary literature from a wide range of disciplines² was used to make her cases even stronger.

The book is structured as follows. Chapter 1 outlines the main arguments and conclusions when trying to explain the on-and-off trend of ethno-racial classification in Latin

² For example anthropology, history and sociology.

American national censuses. The chapter also sets the general theoretical framework in which the book is based. She grounds her research on the works of Alain Desrosières, Ian Hacking, Pierre Bourdieu, for example, as well as other authors that engage in the history of statistics perspective or analyse aspects of nation-making. It is worth highlighting that Loveman acknowledges the potential pitfalls of her work. For example, she stresses that certain particularities of each country are put aside in the sake of the wider, regional picture.

The history of ethno-racial classification in Latin America begins in chapter 2 with the analysis of how individuals were counted and classified in colonial times. The Spanish and Portuguese empires conceived population as resource that had to be counted to establish and maintain colonial militias and to manage systems of coerced labour. Official ethno-racial classification determined if individuals were liable to pay debts or had certain duties. The categorisation helped establish a hierarchical order, determined the legal and administrative relationship between the ruler and the ruled. It was functional to a system that aimed to capture resources from the colonial domains. Ethno-racial classification made some distinctions socially and legally relevant and others insignificant. Local authorities had a fair amount of independence to determine when and how to classify colonial subjects. Loveman argues that the different categories institutionalised by the Spanish and the Portuguese empires depict the way the administrative use of ethno-racial categories naturalise and instantiate social divisions within populations.

Loveman stresses that the new republican nations became colour-blind. However, in most countries, censuses incorporated a question about race in the years between independence and the first half of the twentieth century. The paradox is explained in chapters 3, 4 and 5. Chapter 3 begins with the analysis of the international developments in statistics and shows how they influenced the form and content of the region's early national enquiries. Around 1850, a set of standardised guidelines for how modern states should conduct censuses and fostered by the International Statistical Congress and the International Statistical Institute was determined. Regional census officials selectively adapted the international model to accomplish their own aims. The most important example of this related to ethno-racial

classifications. The international instructions did not recommend including questions about race on the censuses, but as mentioned, most countries included such query on their enquiries. Why? Loveman's answer to this question relates to the census officials' needs to document and account for national progress, national distinctiveness, and the region's authorities aim to join the community of civilised nations, by demonstrating and documenting modern nation-

statehood. Across the region, there was a shift in the purpose of censuses, towards getting a snapshot of the population as a whole. This implied a change in content and coverage, towards generic information gathering about everyone, instead of tailored counts of specific parts of the population. After a census was taken, carefully-selected statistics were published. This allowed for the region's countries to be easily-compared with others.

As Loveman explains in chapter 4, documenting race had the objective to show the regenerative potential of Latin American populations. Census officials' aims were to reject the conventional wisdom, fostered by the notion of racial determinism, that non-white nations were doomed to backwardness. To show the 'whitening' or racial improvement, a race question was needed, which tried to capture race mixture or *mestizaje* to show how racial distinctiveness was the originating source of national particularity. Thus, the production of ethno-racial statistics focused on grounding claims of national distinctiveness as well as providing evidence of national progress, defined in racial terms. *Sui generis* national types were constructed, each based on a mixture of distinct racial categories. However, official accounts were not uniform. The different demographic realities rendered diverse natural constraints on how census officials could plausibly portray racial status and the projected transformations of each national population. Racial demographic change was portrayed as influenced by three demographic processes: natural and social selection, immigration, and *mestizaje*. These dynamics moved away from racial diversity towards homogeneity. The idea of a white future was possible given that census officials imposed a linear, evolutionary narrative structure on the demographic trajectories of Latin America populations.

Still focusing in the period between independence and the mid-twentieth century, in chapter 5, Loveman analyses the methods used by census officials to portrait race mixture in order to elucidate the tacit cultural assumptions that informed the production of ethno-racial statistics. Census officials not only had to decide how to count and classify populations, but also how and which results to show. Looking at census publications, she depicts how census officials' tacit racial assumptions shaped how they organised and analysed data. The different tables presented conveyed officials' views about natural hierarchies, helping to ground their arguments on the equivalence between national and racial progress. For this reason, censuses strengthened beliefs implicitly through the methods used to collect data and display results. Thus, official statistical description took common-sense ideas of race and presented them as authoritative observations. As such, race became an objective individual attribute, a characteristic of nature, rather than a matter of subjective identity. The ethno-racial categories were developed in an interpretative and discretionary way, reinforced by

the enumerators' own understandings of racial groups. Consequently, Loveman depicts that there was subjectivity in how ethno-racial data was collected and how information was displayed. Given all these processes, she argues that these first modern censuses pronounced nation-state consolidation as a foregone conclusion.

Chapter 6 advances towards the 1950s. In the wake of the Second World War, the matching of national progress with racial progress came under close examination. There was a global discrediting of race as a scientific concept as well racial improvement as a political project. Thus, in practically all Latin American countries, census officials discontinued the questions on race, but broadened to ethnically-coded cultural practices. Other types of questions emerged, which drew attention to indigenous populations, but undermined those of African descent. Once again, Loveman successfully looks towards the international sphere for explanations on the regional trends. However, Latin American census officials' concerns about the quality of the race data collected was their justification for the exclusion of the race query. The underlying aim was to preserve the scientific integrity of the censuses, but Loveman stresses that ideological and racist motives were also behind the omission. Despite these changes, she argues that the notion of progress was still linked to the ideal of a civilised and homogeneous population. The differences related to the language used to discuss the homogeneity, the questions used to measure it, and the types of differences made statistically visible.

Chapter 7 focuses on the last decades of the twentieth century until present day. Since the beginning of this period, Loveman identifies a shift in how Latin American states use the census to classify their citizens. This is a reflection of the rejection of the racially evolutionist vision of a nation's progress as well as of a democratisation of the censuses. The latter means that the enumerated became part of the debate on what questions and categories should classify them. Consequently, from the 1990s there has been a reappearance of ethno-racial classifications on censuses, in the form of questions on ethnic or racial identity or origins. In the 2010 round, practically all countries included a query anchored on the inter-subjective basis of ethno-racial distinctions. The addition was due to a specific convergence of domestic and international interests, where social movements and international organisations had a key role. The latter exerted pressure on Latin American countries in search of complete demographic data that would allow them to acknowledge diversity and address ethno-racial inequality. Pressure was exercised indirectly through the support of domestic activists and there was direct logistical support and public advocacy for the incorporation of new questions. The latter was bolstered by the introduction of new organisational goals and

evaluation procedures for development projects fostered by the international agencies. Censuses became strategic battlegrounds in the fight for recognition and rights.

Chapter 8, the conclusion, begins with a re-cap of the previous chapters on the historical perspective of official ethno-racial classification. Loveman stresses the underlying continuity in the region's use of ethno-racial classifications to define national, country identities and to chart national progress. Throughout the whole period analysed, the author depicts how the micro-politics behind the determination of the questions and categories to use were shaped by the macro-politics of efforts to build modern states. However, she points out that currently the field of census politics has opened up to include newly politicised historical actors. Nowadays, a census' legitimacy depends on prior negotiation with several actors. As such, there is a new politics of official ethno-racial classification, which aspires to combat inequality, deepen democracy and promote national development. The conclusion lists and analyses three characteristics of present-day politics of ethno-racial classification in Latin America: democratisation of data production, the creation of constituencies for categories, and the tension between prescription of paths to development and description of the nation. When analysing these characteristics, Loveman shows the limitations and implications of this new trend, highlighting advantages and some disadvantages to look after. For example, she warns us about the excessive dependence on and influence of international organisations in recent years.

Throughout all chapters, the book registers the structural ideological shift experienced in Latin America from the blending and disappearance of ethno-racial distinctions to the recognition and institutionalisation of clear, categorical divides. As such, the present situation of ethno-racial classification in the region has opened up a range of controversial sociological, political and ethical issues. For Loveman, given the lessons provided by history the evolution and influence of international rules of modern nationhood and of international guidelines for measurement and development goals will continue to guide the dynamics and results of political struggles.

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