

## Latin America and the Caribbean/ L'Amérique Latine et les Antilles

*“Strange Lands and Different Peoples”*: Spaniards and Indians in Colonial Guatemala, by W. George Lovell and Christopher H. Lutz with Wendy Kramer and William R. Swezey. Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 2013. xvii, 339 pp. \$45.00 US (cloth).

Understanding colonial legacies is crucial to interpreting the reality of contemporary Latin American societies. Conquest and colonial rule produced socioracial structures and inequalities that, notwithstanding important changes over more than five hundred years, have persisted into the present. W. George Lovell and Christopher H. Lutz, together with Wendy Kramer and William R. Swezey, offer a compelling reminder that there is little “post-colonial” about Guatemala, a conclusion that could easily be applied to other areas of Latin America. *Strange Lands and Different Peoples* persuasively demonstrates that hostilities between Mayas and other Guatemalans today have their roots in the violent confrontations between Spaniards and Indians in the sixteenth century. But even though Lovell and Lutz concentrate on the “charged,” “adverse,” and “antagonistic” relationship between these two groups in the hundred years following 1524, their story is not simply one of doom and gloom. They write a balanced history of conquest and imperialism in a colonial backwater, one that appropriately recognizes the oppression of Spaniards and the resilience of Indians.

Building upon the last few decades of scholarship, *Strange Lands and Different Peoples* is guided by an “increased awareness of native agency” (p. xvi). The fourteen chapters of this study are divided into four major sections. The first, “Conquest and Resistance,” recounts the history of the conquest of Guatemala by following the actions of both conquistadors and indigenous allies and enemies alike. In the second section, “Settlement and Colonization,” colonial landholding patterns and the official policy of *congregación* (forced resettlement) are analyzed in light of the ways in which Indians altered imperial designs. The third section, “Labor and Tribute,” provides a detailed look at the *encomienda* at the local level to highlight how oppressive this tributary system was for indigenous people. And then in the final section, “Dynamics of Maya Survival,” population decline and recovery among the Mayas is outlined from pre-contact times to the early nineteenth century.

An important contribution of this study is its unique approach to the history of conquest. Following in the footsteps of New Conquest History, Lovell and Lutz move beyond the meta-narrative of Spanish victory to provide an account that includes both Spanish and Indian interpretations of events. Most importantly,

they recognize that Mesoamerican elites forged alliances with Spaniards based upon pre-Hispanic practices and hence did not view themselves as subjected peoples. They also dutifully note that Indians from central Mexico accompanied Pedro de Alvarado and his men to Guatemala. Conquest, then, was “an indigenous enterprise as much as, if not more than, a Spanish one” (p. 32). But even though Lovell and Lutz stress the importance of indigenous actors in the conquest, they rightly emphasize that Alvarado’s ruthless behaviour left a lasting mark on colonial society. Instead of tipping the historiographic balance in favour of the Indians, they acknowledge Spanish influence without transforming the conquest into a biographic telling of one conquistador. Jorge de Alvarado, as a result, rightfully receives due attention given that he secured more of Guatemala than his brother Pedro.

Another significant aspect of *Strange Lands and Different Peoples* is its refusal to interpret the Catholic landscape of Guatemala as an erasure of indigenous social forms. After conquest Mayas were resettled from their scattered villages into *pueblos de indios* (Indian towns), but Lovell and Lutz prove that *congregación* did not equal a total loss of indigenous identities. Much like in central Mexico with the *altepetl* (ethnic state), Spaniards in Guatemala misunderstood the complexities of the *chinamit* (socio-territorial unit based upon lineage) in Guatemala. In their attempt to establish colonial order, mendicant friars placed various *chinamitales* together in hope that they would become unified Indian towns. Indians, however, resisted this form of forced acculturation “by regrouping within *pueblos de indios* around preconquest lineage structures” (p. 119). By taking into consideration multiple spatial geographies, Lovell and Lutz are able to capture the variations in dress, language, and ceremonies at the neighbourhood level in Indian towns.

Readers will also be impressed with the wealth of archival sources upon which *Strange Lands and Different Peoples* is based. Although these documents dominate the organizing structure of chapters 8-14, what is lost in narrative flow is made up for in interpretive possibilities. Lovell and Lutz meticulously turn to overlooked manuscripts like tribute assessments (*tasaciones*) and lawsuits (*pleitos*) to reconstruct the burdens of the *encomienda* system. Through these texts they are able to provide a closer and more detailed look at the demands, quotas, and geographic challenges Indians faced to deliver tribute payments. Lovell and Lutz also inspire the reader, when calculating the size of the indigenous population, to think critically about what we can glean from early modern sources. By placing several colonial chronicles and other official documents together, they imaginatively reconstruct aspects of Indian survival through Spanish sources housed in repositories on both sides of the Atlantic. Their archival revelations and commentaries in both the footnotes and the bibliography will prove invaluable for future researchers.

In sum, *Strange Lands and Different Peoples* is an important study for scholars working on any part of the overseas Spanish empire. But it will also prove enlightening to those researching European colonialism in other regions

of the world. Lovell and Lutz challenge their readers to recognize that the best colonial histories are always written in different keys.

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*River of Hope: Forging Identity and Nation in the Rio Grande Borderlands*, by Omar S. Valerio-Jiménez. Durham, Duke University Press, 2013. xiv, 369 pp. \$99.95 (cloth), \$26.95 US (paper).

The border between Mexico and the United States has been designated as the Rio Grande River valley since 1848, but the meeting of cultures in this area began as early as the eighteenth century. Throughout those years, it has been an area of violence in which multiple conquests have taken place, changing the social and political identities of the people who have lived along both sides of the Rio Grande or, as the river is called in Mexico, the Rio Bravo. This excellent work on frontier contact traces the lives of the Hispanic residents as they were changed from “privileged Spanish subjects into neglected Mexican citizens and, ultimately into unwanted American citizens” (p. 3). Until recently, scholars had traced the civil rights movements in the Lower Rio Grande Valley to the twentieth century. Omar S. Valerio-Jiménez, following the lead of such authors as Katherine Benton-Cohen, Eric Meeks, and Anthony Mora, maintains that the roots of the “hybrid identities” (p. 12) that have been created along the border began 100 years earlier with the actions of such men as Juan Seguin and Juan Cortina. As he notes in his introduction, the “regionalism, cultural practices and kinship ties continually subverted state attempts to control and divide the population” (p. 1). The people of the border region retained power over their destinies and “carved out spaces of opposition” (p. 3). He is careful to note that different areas and different people found different ways to accommodate and ensure their own survival.

As a product of the border environment himself, Valerio-Jiménez benefited from the experiences of his own family and their lives in the border culture. His training at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) and at Southern Methodist University (SMU) provided him the opportunity to work under some of the best historians in the Chicano/a fields both in California and in Texas.

In six chapters, Valerio-Jiménez reviews the history of the borderlands from the earliest Spanish settlements to the arrival of the Americans after the peace treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 and the conflicts which resulted from those changes. Using a variety of sources from archives in Spain, Mexico, and the United States, the author includes court cases, government and personal correspondence, and modern newspaper accounts to provide an historical account that has both depth and breadth of coverage of a complex and difficult topic.