de los criollos en la historia épica de Villa Clara contada por los descendientes de judíos y europeos, o, por el contrario, en la visibilización de ellos, de los indígenas e incluso de los afrodescendientes allí donde los nativos oficiaban de narradores. Las diferencias entre unos y otros encuentran incluso la mirada atenta de Freidenberg, que las redescubre en el propio ordenamiento del espacio geográfico de Villa Clara, en el que los europeos “blancos” ocupan el centro y las propiedades más valiosas, mientras que los criollos morenos habitan en las periferías. La relación entre la experiencia de los criollos realmente existentes y la celebración del gaucho (judío o no) reclama una lectura perpleja. Porque si bien, por una parte, la criollización de los judíos habla de una hibridación, por la otra sostiene formas específicas de diferencia. En el trabajo de Freidenberg esto aparece en varios pasajes: por mencionar uno, en el sugerente análisis de las celebraciones del centenario de Villa Clara, en cuyas narrativas oficiales se omitió por completo la preexistencia de los criollos y se limitó la participación de los no-europeos en la organización de los eventos, pero al mismo tiempo se invitó a una asociación tradicionalista a desfilar en traje gauchesco (p. 176).

Los hallazgos de la autora, en este sentido, nutren la interesante deconstrucción de la metáfora del “gaucho judío” que propone el epílogo, interpretada menos como prueba de integración exitosa que como imagen de un mundo posible (pero no realmente existente) de mutua imbricación entre lo criollo y lo foráneo. En fin, lo antedicho hace de la aparición del trabajo de Freidenberg una noticia digna de celebrarse.

Ezequiel Adamovsky

CONICET/Universidad de Buenos Aires


Daniela Gleizer’s Unwelcome Exiles will interest many Latin Americanists and immigration scholars not only because it provides a detailed history of the Jewish diaspora in Mexico, but also because it does so from a renewed perspective. In 2011, Gleizer’s original manuscript was published under the title, El exilio incómodo: México y los refugiados judíos, 1933-1945 (El Colegio de México: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana-Cuajimalpa). El exilio incómodo challenged the collective memory of Mexico as a haven for exiles even as it detailed the welcoming of refugees from the Spanish Civil War. These stories continue in Unwelcome Exiles, but are bolstered by new research on Gilberto Bosques, Mexican Consul to France (1934-1940), which deepens our understanding of
Mexico’s closed-door policy toward Jewish refugees during the years of Nazism and the Holocaust. Mexico’s asylum policy, Gleizer shows, was one of selectivity and discretion, subjected as much to diplomatic malleability as it was to political intransigency. Through successive presidencies, however, exclusionist calls from the Mexican Right to reject Jewish refugees as members of the body politic resolutely filled that political void.

Gleizer takes as her starting point Mexico’s immigration policies based on mestizaje, that when coupled with diplomatic responses to the Jewish refugee crisis, proved to be the whetstone on which to deny Jewish exiles from settling in Mexico during the mid-to-late-1930s. Mestizaje upheld the view that national identities were forged from the racial mixture of European criollos (creoles) and indigenous peoples. The discourse of mestizaje (racial mixture) by José Vasconcelos, its most eloquent progenitor, offered post-revolutionary Mexican immigration architects and state-makers a foundation for national unity and race homogeneity based on the triumph of the Europeanized mestizo. The discourse of Vasconcelos placed special emphasis on mestizaje as the ideal synthesis of racial diversity on which Mexico’s national identity was hinged. But, as Gleizer argues, Mexican immigration policy initially did not so much legislate barring certain ethnic-cultural groups from entry as much as it worked alongside the selectivity of foreigners who—real or imagined—were either racially and culturally compatible or incompatible with a nation whose population was predominantly comprised of mestizos. By 1934, however, restricting certain immigrant groups from admission was an increasingly well-defined project of the postrevolutionary state as Jews, among Latvians, Persians, Greeks, Afghans, and Egyptians and others, were specifically barred from Mexico. Jews, it should be noted, were singled out as a group “who more than any other, due to their psychological and moral characteristics … proves undesirable” (page 30). At about the same time that immigration policy worked against admitting Jews into Mexico, new population policies such as the General Law of Population (1936) favored, for the first time, natural growth over immigration as a strategy to unify a nation of mestizos to the exclusion of others.

As Gleizer astutely points out, ideological misgivings about Jews were only one part of the equation that ultimately justified their rejection; the other influencing dynamic was that no legal concept of refugee existed in Mexico. Refugee status, Gleizer reminds us, was a term derived from the international sphere and, when adopted and applied, usually referred to a group of individuals who were recognized as systematically persecuted by a broad spectrum of political and/or human rights violations or affected by a natural disaster. On the other hand, asylum, a policy adopted in Mexico, extended protection to individuals who were at risk of torture, maltreatment, or whose lives were in danger. Asylum seekers
(asilados), above all, were vetted individually, not corporately, and claims were reserved for those who were fleeing states in which they were members. When, in 1938, the Jewish refugee crisis gained momentum after the Nazi invasion of Czechoslovakia and the annexation of the Sudetenland and Austria, Mexican immigration and population architects struggled to orchestrate a unified and consistent approach to a flood of asylum applications from Jewish petitioners. Furthermore, as a stateless people (denationalized in 1935), Jewish refugees did not enjoy the privileges of citizenship, and in the absence of diplomatic reprisals or official political advocacy, Mexico’s position of treating Jewish exiles as immigrants held sway. International pressure and bureaucratic discretion to admit exiles ultimately had little impact on Jewish petitioners. These forces, however, did expose an ideological division between Lázaro Cárdenas’ (1934-1940) receptive refugee stance and members of his cabinet, who successfully worked against admitting Jewish “racial refugees.” The presidency of Manuel Ávila Camacho, although breaking off diplomatic relations with all Axis powers after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, encountered its own internal obstacles that stood in the way of assisting Jewish refugees, despite an ostensible willingness to do so. Under Ávila Camacho’s watch, thousands of dollars earmarked to aid Jewish refugees, including the purchasing of visas and passports, disappeared.

Unwelcome Exiles stands as a poignant study that challenges Mexico’s reputation as a haven for politically persecuted groups. By drawing on an impressive array of Mexican, Latin American, and European immigration and diplomatic records, Gleizer provides scholars with a detailed history of the Jewish refugee crisis in Mexico to convincingly argue that selective and discretionary immigration and population policies shaped Mexico’s postrevolutionary society between anti-Semitism and mestizophilia.

Grace Peña Delgado

University of California