

director de cine Emilio “El Indio” Fernández pronuncia: “Sólo existe un México: aquél que yo he inventado”. Por más que resulte chocante aceptar que la imagen de *lo mexicano* ha sido una fabricación a veces muy bien planeada y se intente quitar del camino imágenes que a nuestro juicio son poco naturales (¿qué es, cabe preguntarse, una imagen natural?), resulta que en sí mismas capturan toda una anécdota de otro modo difícil de transmitir. La figura del *charro*, por ejemplo, conjuga los dos polos del tipo del “macho mexicano”: el poder y la soledad, la confianza en sí mismo y el patetismo.

En *Looking for Mexico*, John Mraz revisa éste y otros de los momentos y personajes más sobresalientes de la cultura visual de México, desde la fotografía de la Revolución o el cine de la Época de Oro hasta la película *Frida*, con Salma Hayek. De manera generosa y sencilla, Mraz nos hace recorrer esta historia buscando claves para entender por qué somos lo que somos los mexicanos o, más precisamente, por qué nos vemos de la manera en que nos vemos. Todas estas claves nuestro espectador ficticio no puede consumirlas sin revisar su etiqueta. Por más históricamente significativa que aparente ser una imagen y por más que creamos que da fielmente cuenta de su tiempo, no es más que una ambigua y diminuta rebanada de la realidad. Sin embargo, la ambigüedad de estas imágenes es quizás justamente lo que nos provoca reflexionar acerca de su naturaleza y lo que abre una puerta hacia la imaginación histórica.

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ORI PREUSS: *Bridging the Island. Brazilians' Views of Spanish America and Themselves, 1865-1912*. Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2011.

Johnny Walker, the whisky, has been advertised in Brazilian television through an image of the Pão de Açúcar mountain. This symbol of the Rio de Janeiro landscape suddenly wakes, stands up, and walks into the sea. “The giant is not sleeping anymore,” says a narrator. This image captures the new approach of global entrepreneurs and the world press, the MFI (money-flow-index), and President Obama, among others, towards Brazil. The country has come to be seen as a key global player in fair play with Europe and the United States, and the leader in Latin America. From the Brazilian elites’ perspective, this is an old dream finally come true.

Since its independence from Portugal, Brazilian political and intellectual elites have been facing a tricky dilemma on identity. On the one hand, they tried to establish Brazilian superiority with regard to Spanish American countries by

describing Brazil as an extension of European civilization in the tropics. On the other hand, they stressed Brazilian originality in contrast to its former European metropolis by pointing out that it belongs to America. This tension between two identity roots has appeared in many Brazilian books and speeches since then, with the pendulum sometimes swinging toward Brazil's American identity and, other times, its European identity. What seems to oscillate less is Brazil's position regarding Spanish America, which is almost always seen through a negative lens.

At least this appeared to be the case before the publication of Ori Preuss's *Bridging the Island: Brazilians' Views of Spanish America and Themselves, 1865-1912*. The book chose an almost virgin subject, the Brazilian intellectuals' view of Spanish America from the mid-nineteenth century to the beginnings of the twentieth century. It carefully traces its variations and ambiguities, and suggests that the building up of an image of Spanish America and the building up of a national identity were two intertwined processes in the Brazilian political and intellectual mind.

To make its point, the book focuses on the fine Brazilian intellectual production from the time: the writings of the outstanding political-intellectual figures of Joaquim Nabuco and Rio Branco, Oliveira Lima and Rui Barbosa, Eduardo Prado and Quintino Bocaiuva. Preuss chases in this intellectual production the ways the Brazil-Spanish America relationship – and, unavoidably, the Brazil-United States one – has been defined and redefined, according to changes in the political scene of this very contentious phase of national history, the transition from Empire to Republic.

Very well documented, relying on letters and diplomatic documents, newspapers and books, as well as iconography, the author gives a rich description of how three main lines of thought came to be: Americanism, represented by Joaquim Nabuco and concerned to approximate Brazil and United States; Latin Americanism, privileging the so-called ABC alliance (Argentina, Brazil, and Chile), the Brazilian coalition with Latin America countries, a position Oliveira Lima represented; and Luso-Americanism, a somewhat intermediate position that was carried on by Rio Branco, our mythical minister of foreign relations.

The first chapter explores the way the Brazilian monarchy constructed the image of the country as an “island” of civilization floating in a continent of “barbarian” Spanish Americans. The following chapter addresses the racial problems the abolition of slavery and European immigration brought to Brazilian elites and thinkers after 1888, a point at which comparison and rivalry with Argentina grew the most. This chapter raises the most problematic approach in the book, in my view, which is the search for a psychological explanation for political thought (for instance, see pages 71, 73, 80, 86). The third chapter deals with the ways the breakdown of the monarchy blurred the Brazilian disjoining from Latin

America. Quite the opposite image came about in the Republic's early stages, as the chapter title implies: the "unwelcome Hispano-Americanization of Brazil." Caudillismo and militarism equalized Brazilian politics with the always criticized Spanish-American ones. This was also a moment of xenophobia against the Portuguese – for the misfortune of the few remaining Lusoamericans. Chapter 4 is the core of the book, tracing the above-mentioned styles of Americanism, combining an analysis of texts with a narrative of a couple of crucial episodes that define the Brazilian relationship with its American neighbors. Relying on discourse and images, the last chapter is the most creative one, dedicated to understanding how Rio Branco's figure came to be a mythical one in Brazilian history, and, at the same time, how his representation of Brazilian foreign relations as driven by "peace and concord" came to be the official image the country has spread about itself until now.

The book raises a wealth of interesting material and ideas, even though it does not always develop them completely. For instance, it is a pity that such an original point as the mention of the incorporation of Argentine sources by the Brazilian first republican constitution (p. 98) remained underdeveloped. What is more, the explicative axis is ambiguous, with contextual and psychological explanation competing through the book. The relationship between shifts in political thought and shifts in diplomatic and political contexts could have been given more emphasis. Although there is some reference to social and political scenes, there is too little space allotted to the facts and conflicts of diplomatic and political life, which might have shed more light on the variations of political thought. In many places, it remains unclear why actors move from one position to another and why they are split among three different lines of thought, Americanism, Latin-Americanism and Luso-Americanism.

Nevertheless, the book certainly sheds new light on an old subject and it will be very useful reading for students of Brazilian political thought and diplomacy during this period of our history, when the country was still a sleeping giant.

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AMY CHAZKEL: *Laws of Chance: Brazil's Clandestine Lottery and the Making of Urban Public Life.* Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2011.

Laws of Chance pone en el centro del análisis una singular lotería que salió del zoológico del Barón de Drummond, en Río de Janeiro, para estallar en un sistema de apuestas clandestinas en cada rincón de las calles cariocas: el llamado *jogo do bicho*. Amy Chazkel renueva un área de estudios que, a partir de