

Ramírez, Cristina Devereaux. *Occupying Our Space: The Mestiza Rhetorics of Mexican Women Journalists and Activists, 1875–1942*. U of Arizona P, 2015. 272 pages.

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Cristina Devereaux Ramírez's study of the historical writings of Mexican women is an important contribution to rhetorical studies, as well as to other fields. By delving into Mexican archives, she has rescued the ignored writings of women throughout the history of Mexico, focusing on writers from the late 19th and early 20th century. This work shows that women always have participated in important social movements in Mexico, even while having to adapt to varying patriarchal social constraints. Her analysis of the writings themselves stands as a significant contribution to feminist and rhetorical studies in both the U.S. and Mexico. This review first explains Devereaux Ramírez's mestiza rhetoric theoretical framework, including its history, then provides brief descriptions of the women and their writings that are analyzed in this book, and finally discusses concerns about the theoretical frame of mestiza rhetoric that is stretched to cover all these Mexican women.

Devereaux Ramírez notes the history of her theoretical framework, mestiza rhetoric:

[M]estiza rhetoric was first coined by Andrea Lunsford in her interview with Gloria Anzaldúa in "Toward a Mestiza Rhetoric," and it was developed further in Damián Baca's book *Mestiz@ Scripts, Digital Migrations, and the Territories of Writing*...[M]y interpretation of mestiza rhetoric deviates from Anzaldúa's Chicana articulation. I interpret that mestiza rhetoric stems, in part, from the identity theory of mestizaje that emerged in the modernist phase (1880-90) of Latin American literature, history, art, and philosophy. (33-34)

The identity theory of mestizaje (racial mixture) was articulated primarily by male intellectuals who "embraced their mestizo indigenous roots as a way of understanding their modernist identities" (34). This identity theory is derived most explicitly from a 1925 essay by José Vasconcelos, *La Raza Cósmica*

(the Cosmic Race). Reacting against Anglo-Saxon white racial supremacy dominant in the U.S., Vasconcelos proposed that the future belonged to the mestizos (mixed race people) of Latin America, though he primarily emphasized a European-Indian mixture. This ideology was adopted by the post-revolutionary Mexican state while Vasconcelos was Secretary of Education, and it dominates nationalist discourse in Mexico. Farr (2006) provides a synthesis of mestizaje in Mexican history, but briefly, this nationalist discourse attempts to counter European supremacy by valorizing Mexico's Indian heritage (133-138).

Devereaux Ramírez adopts this nationalist ideology of mestizaje but critiques its male-centric focus by recognizing the ignored late 19th and early 20th century women writers who also promoted the ideology. She emphasizes their marginal social positioning, primarily because of their gender; one of the writers is upper class, and all have varying degrees of mestizaje, but none are born indigenous. This is a significant point because Vasconcelos's ideology of mestizaje, while challenging European supremacy, promotes the acculturation of Indians into the mestizo dominant nation, effectively reinforcing the low status of (non-acculturated) Indians in Mexico, a concern addressed in more detail later in this review.

In chapter one, Devereaux Ramírez reconceptualizes Malintzin, the translator and mistress of the conquistador Cortés. Rather than adopting the traditional (male and now dominant) view of her as La Malinche, a traitor to her people, she views her as the first Mexican female active speaker, although not writer, who "undoubtedly...became a crucial player negotiating ideas and pleas within the complexities of two cultures" (42) and thus opened a rhetorical *puesto* (space) for Mexican women. Each of the women writers she presents throughout the book then further opened this public speaking/writing space for women.

Chapter two focuses on Laureana Wright de Kleinhans, an elite educated woman who wrote and edited a journal during the 19th century colonial period. Wright de Kleinhans used her position in society and her journal to re-present notable pre-conquest (before 1519) and colonial era (until 1821) women by writing about them, as well as to argue for the education of women. To enter the public sphere she adopted the highly formal, syntactically complex genres used by male intellectuals at the time, even though this reinforced the class distinctions such language engenders. Although she accepted some dominant societal ideologies (e.g., of La Malinche and the domestic roles of women), she did open a public space for women and re-envision the role of women in Mexican history.

Chapter three introduces the *Mujeres de Zitácuaro* (Women of Zitácuaro, Michoacán) who wrote and published at the turn of the 20th century. These women led a "progressive Presbyterian movement initiated by visiting

American missionaries" (94), and they engaged in anti-Catholic and anti-(President) Díaz public discourse that was a precursor to the revolution (1910). They adopted traditional revolutionary protest genres to promote a national identity based on the indigenous past (the Cosmic Race ideology), free schooling for everyone (including women), and freedom for women from the patriarchy of the Catholic Church, even while accepting "the nation's sacred calling for women: motherhood" (95).

Chapter four presents Juana Belén Gutiérrez de Mendoza's revolutionary writing in her dissident newspaper. This writer moved the *puesto* (space) for women in public discourse even further, since her writing is confrontational and activist (what the author describes as *pleito* or "in-your-face" confrontational rhetoric). This woman, unlike the others, argued on behalf of contemporary (not just historical) indigenous communities and against the dominant Cosmic Race ideology that promoted the assimilation of contemporary Indians, even as it glorified Mexico's Indian past. As a mestiza who identified with her mother's indigenous heritage, Gutiérrez de Mendoza's writings do fit the author's theoretical frame of mestiza rhetoric, much more so than any of the other women writers. Yet in identifying with only one side of her heritage, Gutiérrez de Mendoza tended to essentialize the indigenous as the "true identity of Mexico" (57):

As a mestiza, Gutiérrez de Mendoza made the conscious choice of rooting her identity in indigenous people's history as a much more genuine perspective than the popularized movement based in Vasconcelos's theories, which were framed as transitory connections with the indigenous cultures. (157)

The author goes on to note that this move parallels what Anzaldúa calls the "authentic path" (157), consciously choosing the indigenous side of a Chicana's heritage and discarding the rest. The author tells us that she also has made this rhetorical move, identifying with her mother's partial indigenous heritage. This is a political move, and as such it is defensible in intent. Yet when this move entails essentializing and dichotomizing, it is problematic, as elaborated later in this review.

Chapter five analyzes the writings of Hermila Galindo and her progressive women's magazine, *La Mujer Moderna* (The Modern Woman). As the author notes, Galindo's "ideas were highly influenced by European philosophers" (166) who promoted feminism, and her rhetoric integrated these ideas into nationalist politics during the revolution. She was the appointed spokesperson for one revolutionary president (Venustiano Carranza, 1917-1920) and in this role argued for a constitutional government and against the traditionally powerful Catholic Church. Thus this woman occupied a very public *puesto*

that promoted the inclusion of women as well as suffrage for women. In the Epilogue, the author argues that rhetoric (and I would argue, all language use) creates social reality, and as such all these women writers can be seen as gradually opening public spaces for women. Such discourse, moreover, can later “leak” into other contexts, promoting yet more feminist action. This perspective on language, and the author’s commendable use of archives for rhetorical studies, are the significant strengths of this book. The theoretical frame that promotes an indigenous identity over others, however, raises important issues.

Early in the book, the author laments the black-white binary in rhetorical studies (10). This binary, however, is not limited to rhetorical studies but in fact widely pervades thinking about race and ethnicity in the United States. Liberal or conservative, people too frequently equate “diversity” (ethnic diversity, at least) only with the inclusion of African Americans. There has been and is, of course, much more ethnic diversity in the United States, especially in regard to (but not limited to) the growing presence of Latin@s in our demographic. (I use the @ to represent both males and females.) Mexicans (and other Latin Americans) disrupt the U.S.’s black-white binary by simply existing in all skin colors, from (to use Mexican terms) *güer@* (white or blond) or *blanc@* (white) to *priet@* (swarthy) to *moren@* (brown) and *negr@* (black). Of course, African Americans also are comprised of a diverse population that is too often squeezed into a simple black-white dichotomy.

There are historical reasons for the pervasive black-white dichotomy in U.S. thinking (and for the category “white” itself) based on the attempt to exclude anyone with any African heritage; legally you couldn’t be part African American, only fully so. A contemporary explanation for such thinking is that many “whites” in the U.S. (excluding the Southwest) know more about African Americans than they do about Latin@s, or more specifically Mexicans, who comprise about two-thirds of U.S. Latin@s. Unless someone looks stereotypically “Mexican,” and especially if she is light-skinned, she often is not immediately perceived as non-white, that is, until she speaks. Spanish-accented English, or a Chicano dialect, instantly triggers the perception of Otherness and the stereotyping that accompanies it. Stereotypes of Mexicans, like those of any group, including women of all colors, are used to dehumanize and denigrate individuals, forcing everyone in a naturally diverse group into the same negative mold. Another unfortunate outcome of stereotyping is the “invisibility” of people who don’t fit the stereotype. For example, African Americans or Mexicans who “look white” sometimes struggle with not being considered “authentic” members of their groups. But what is “authentic,” and from whose perspective?

Unfortunately, such essentializing of human groups is common beyond the U.S. In Mexico a dichotomy between Spanish-urban-elite vs. Indian-rural-poor has a long history as well as contemporary force. Thus people who do not fit at either end of this dichotomy, for example being more Spanish than Indian in heritage but poor and rural like most Indians (e.g., the “rancheros” in my 2006 book), often are nevertheless assumed to be “indigenous” or Indian by elites or urbanites (but never by the indigenous themselves). As already noted, even Mexico’s well-known Cosmic Race mestizo ideology promoted after the 1910-1920 Revolution, which Devereaux Ramírez rightly criticizes for its male-centric focus and its emphasis on assimilating Indians, emphasized the indigenous over the Spanish heritage—but only in theory, not in practice. The indigenous past is celebrated, but contemporary Indians are generally at the bottom of the socioeconomic hierarchy in Mexico.

U.S. essentialist views of Mexicans also tend to emphasize the Indian identity, whether to denigrate and exclude them as “half breeds” or to valorize and support them as an oppressed minority. Scholars, who tend to be progressive, often take the latter view. Thus Devereaux Ramírez adapts (but modifies) Gloria Anzaldúa’s “mestiza rhetoric” that emphasizes the indigenous side of Mexicans and Chican@s. This is an understandable response to U.S. racism, yet it furthers dichotomous thinking, and it does not match the actual felt identities of many Mexican-origin people living in the U.S. or in Mexico. My (and others’) critique of this view applies not just to this book, but equally to Vasconcelos’s essay and to other scholarly works, including Anzaldúa’s “Toward a Mestiza Rhetoric” and Bonfil Batalla’s *Mexico Profundo: Reclaiming a Civilization*. Much recent scholarship has shown people’s identities to be multiple, fluid and dynamic, rather than essential (see, for example, Christiansen). Moreover, historians have documented the multiethnic and multicultural sources of Mexican heritage, including Africans, non-Spanish Europeans, Middle Easterners, Chinese, Jews, and others. Finally, the indigenous culture that is imagined in this move is long gone and unknowable given the intensity of both biological and cultural mestizaje following the Spanish conquest of Mexico (Knight). What is perceived as “indigenous culture,” even historically, is actually already a synthesis of indigenous and Spanish (and other) cultures.

My own linguistic ethnography (Farr, 2006) afforded me a rare opportunity to understand dynamic identities from within Mexican-origin families both in Mexico and the U.S., as well as how these identities often collide with U.S. perceptions of Mexicans as primarily indigenous (especially in the jokes about their own light skin color vis-à-vis white people). Moreover, in Mexico the truly indigenous view such mestizo rancheros as outsiders not to be trusted. A mestiza rhetoric that emphasizes fluidity and multiple, shifting identities is powerful. One that promotes an indigenous heritage as more “authentic”

unfortunately furthers dichotomous racial thinking. For example, the author ascribes authenticity to indigenous culture but not Spanish culture in critiquing a journal which published mostly male writers in the late 19th century: "*La Semana* [the journal] focused on Eurocentric ways of being for women. This focus both suppressed and silenced the more authentic claim to their culture and cemented women's ways of being" (66). Both in the U.S. and Mexico, this ideology collides with the reality on the ground, as much as the Cosmic Race ideology does. The reality, that is, is multi-faceted, rather than dichotomous: a spectrum of colors, rather than simply black and white.

Mexican scholarship has explored the pervasive Spanish heritage in Mexico (Diego-Fernández Sotelo), as well as an African heritage (Chavez Carbajál), moving beyond Cosmic Race ideology to recognize all sources of Mexico's complex heritage. An aspect unexplored so far is the effect of demographic movements from the U.S. to Mexico over time, including many southerners who lost the U.S. Civil War, missionaries, and contemporary retirement communities. Back and forth flows of people from long before the U.S. - Mexican border closed in the 1920s inevitably affect cultures and thus rhetorics. Devereaux Ramírez' father himself (Devereaux) was a Mormon missionary who acculturated to Mexican culture and married a Mexican-origin woman (Ramírez). Although Devereaux Ramírez notes that she "leans toward" her mother's heritage, in fact she is mestiza in yet another sense, combining heritage from both the U.S. and Mexico. In this regard, she is like one of the women whose rhetoric she analyzes, Laureana Wright de Kleinhans, who also combined these heritages in parentage and then married a German. Although the other rhetors analyzed in this book are more mestiza and less elite than Wright de Kleinhans, only one, Juana Belén Gutiérrez de Mendoza, identified with an indigenous community, even though she was not born in one. The others rhetors, moreover, were influenced variously by Protestant missionaries from the U.S., European philosophers, and worldwide feminist movements, as Devereaux Ramírez clearly explains. Yet these strong global influences are left out of the analysis under a theoretical framework that emphasizes indigeneity, as the mestiza rhetoric does. A broader conception of mestizaje (mixing) that includes all sources of cultural and thus rhetorical heritage would not only be more historically accurate, but more analytically powerful, especially as it highlights the indeterminacy of positioning within such a mix. I hope that the author's prodigious scholarship leads her to examine these more nuanced aspects of mestizaje in the future.

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Marcia Farr is a sociolinguist and linguistic anthropologist who studies language and cultural diversity. She has published on language and identity, multilingualism, and literacy practices and ideologies. Her book, *Rancheros in Chicagoacán: Language and Identity in a Transnational Community*, presents a long-term ethnographic study of language, culture, and identity among a social network of Mexican families in Chicago and in their village of origin in Michoacán, Mexico. She is Professor Emerita of Language, Literacy and Culture and of English at The Ohio State University and Professor Emerita of English and Linguistics at the University of Illinois at Chicago.