

Mark Overmyer-Velazquez. *Visions of the Emerald City: Modernity, Tradition, and the Formation of Porfirian Oaxaca, Mexico*. North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2006. Pp. 231. Paper \$22.95.

Mark Overmyer-Velázquez, Assistant Professor of History at the University of Connecticut, analyzes the lives of Mexicans and foreign investors in late nineteenth-century Oaxaca. He argues that the city of Oaxaca was re-envisioned and transformed by dictator Porfirio Diaz. For the first time since Mexico won independence in 1821, Mexicans experienced political and economic stability. The economic success of the *Porfiriato* era was due to the state's mining operations, the commercial sex industry, the national railroad, and the newly emerging urban spaces. The term Emerald City was given to Oaxaca City because of the modern green *cantera* stone that covered the walls of many buildings. Diaz's motto, "Order and Progress" was popular among elites, who claimed his regime created stability and prosperity. The commercial expansion meant Oaxaca was no longer an isolated state. In fact, it became a major stream of revenue in southern Mexico.

As the economy thrived, elite ideas and practices regarding class, gender, sexuality, and race reinforced their hegemony in the state capital, Oaxaca City. Elites were influenced by European fashion, political, social, and economic trends, and wished to emulate European modernity in Oaxaca in order to attract capitalist investors. At the same time, the elite class and the Catholic Church began to control the working-class, women, indigenous populations, and the lower-middle class, referring to them as "others" and thereby socially condemning them. In turn, sex workers actively adopted elite notions of class, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality to promote themselves and to be perceived as respectable members of society.

Brothel logs and tax records show how the elites, the Catholic Church, the madams, and commercial sex workers contributed to the reshaping of traditions and modernity in Oaxaca City. Oaxacans, elites, and the working-class manipulated these ideas to define themselves as essential parts of a modern Mexico. Financial records illustrate how elites relied on the other for economic gain; elites relied on the tax contributions of sex workers to help fund the municipal government. At the same time, the City Council required prostitutes to submit photographs as part of a larger effort to establish visual order and to segregate indigenous sex workers.

The images of sex workers began to change as they adopted elite notions of social status, gender, and sexuality. By claiming European fashion, poses, and facial expressions, sex workers attempted to gain more respect as modern citizens with social standing, enabling them to work more and receive higher wages. While not his sole focus, Overmyer-Velazquez points to the notable absence of studies on Latin American prostitution and the critical role that gender and race played for the sex workers of Oaxaca City.

This once isolated city of Oaxaca was central to economic progress for southern Mexico during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and contributed to the widespread acceptance of modern ideologies and political stability. Overmyer-Velazquez's analysis is important for those interested in the life and history of the city, for Latin Americanists, and for historians of class, race, gender, and sexual identity formation.

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