Reviews

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Loveman, Mara. 2014. *National Colors: Racial Classification and the State in Latin America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 377 pp. ISBN 978-0-19-933736. Hardcover US$105, paperback US$26.95.

Two highly sensitive concepts, among all, are the concepts of race and ethnicity. They are so closely related that they are sometimes conflated yet at times can appear to be opposites. They can have different scopes, depending on the historical construction, in different disciplines such as anthropology, genetics, sociology, political science, psychology, history, or demographics. Race and ethnicity do not peacefully co-exist in all these disciplines; on the contrary, they both underlie the crucial issues that humanity has faced during its constant process of involution/evolution, and on which ideologies, political and social attitudes, have taken a heavy toll.

Mara Loveman's book *National Colors: Racial Classification and the State in Latin America* fits well into the critical race theory framework (Crenshaw, Gary and Kendall 1995; Delgado and Stefancic 2001) to explain why racism, while still scientifically and morally indefensible, is inherently systemic because "it should more properly be considered as characteristic of the structure of our social institutions, rather than as a quality of individuals" (Furner and Dunbar 2004, 117). Wars, genocides, crusades, and the subjugation of others have been carried out in the name of a race. Some of the epic social struggles of the last two centuries are directly related to the question of race and the objective of placing all people without distinction in the same civic position: the liberation of slaves, the conquest of civil rights, social integration. They are also emblematic moments of these ongoing social struggles. (Loveman is Associate Professor of sociology at the University of California, Berkeley.)

What are the lessons of this book for knowledge organization? First, the research's results confirm the difficulty, or perhaps the impossibility, to create knowledge classifications with universal value, especially in areas related to human and social sciences. Cultural and ideological conceptions prevailing in different societies are expressed not only in legislations and state policies, but also in the way statistical categories are defined and organized. These conceptions change and also cause changes in the classifications of the categories and the data used for social diagnosis. All of this has an impact like an uppercut to the solar plexus of thesaurus, taxonomy and classification systems.

On the other hand, it reaffirms that prudence should be always taken into account when choosing descriptors or subject headings related to racial, ethnic, religious or gender aspects, to incorporate into thesaurus or subject heading lists. Different authors mention that indexing terms related to controversial or historically conditioned aspects of social life have the difficulty that their verbal formulation may be offensive or inappropriate for certain user communities (Beghtol 2002). In addition, many concepts change concept and scope when they are studied from various disciplines. It is possible that these concepts will even modify their relationships (for example hierarchical or associative) with other terms, and therefore their relative location in the conceptual structure of each discipline.

The first merit of Loveman's solid research is that while she is devoted to studying the particular universe of state practices of classifying citizens who establish ethnoracial distinctions in Latin American countries from colonial times to the present, her text compels us to reflect on the neglect, the apparent indifference, the hidden prejudices or the premeditated aggressiveness with which the concept of race in society is handled (or, better said, is handled by us). In the United States, citizens accept as normal practice that official forms and surveys invite them to answer the question "What is your race?" In Latin American countries people might be astonished and even offended by the question. Many would also hesitate and end up appealing to their nationality to respond, rather than to their skin color or to their ethnic origin.

The establishment of classifications and the allocation of a race or an ethnic origin to each person by the state, under the stated purpose of the statistical organization for decision-making, have often covered other motivations, related to the exercise of power through discrimination, and with more or less indirect forms of social control. In the words of Loveman "the state's classification of individuals by race provided the administrative foundation for the construction of explicitly exclusionary nations, grounded on principles and structures of racial inequality" (4); but, "states have also engaged in official

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ethno-racial classification of citizens in order to combat entrenched inequality, counteract pervasive discrimination, or protect vulnerable minority communities. In the contemporary United States, South Africa, or Brazil, for example, official ethno-racial classification enables states to administer affirmative action programs, monitor compliance with civil rights laws, and extend collective protections to indigenous communities" (4), with greater or less resistance, indirect or active, of a part of the population, still inclined to establish barriers and walls between people on account of their race or ethnicity, or even their religion or their ancestral customs.

In this book, Loveman presents and maps the history of ethno-racial classification throughout nineteen Latin American countries from independence and well into the twentieth century, focusing on a crucial issue: that the state bears the responsibility of conducting national censuses and through them exhibits demographic and cultural portraits of the Latin American reality, which are useful for the general management of governments. For Loveman, "the question is whether Latin American states engaged in official ethno-racial classification of their citizens, but when they did so, toward what ends, and with what consequences" (6).

The applied methodology starts from an operative definition of the term "ethno-racial" as a "generic, umbrella descriptor to refer to any categorical distinction that names or delimits sets of human beings who are construed to belong together naturally, as a collectivity or community, due to some source of heritable similarity" (37), whose scope is clearly delineated in the following pages. In addition, she decides to use as the main tool of analysis the general population censuses of Latin American countries, which, through their chronological evolution, also guide the changes of philosophy, opinion and mentality from the dominant structures of the State. The decision seems to be correct, although "the evidence of official ethno-racial classification in postcolonial Latin America sits transparently in a wide array of archival sources used by historians ... records pertaining to African slavery and Indian tribute" (6), birth and death records, wills, prison records, army recruitment forms, court documents, police reports and public health statistics, the information accumulated by the national statistics agencies and the censuses represent a strategic site to investigate ethno-racial classification and the state.

Questions related to the research are the following (4): "Why do some states classify their citizens by race or ethnicity, while others do not? What purposes does official ethno-racial classification serve, at what cost, and to whose benefit? How are contemporary struggles over official ethnographic classification created and constrained by the ways states have classified their population historically?"

The work consists of nine chapters that are organized chronologically. Chapter 1 is an introduction about ethno-racial classification and the State. In Chapter 2 ("Classifying Colonial Subjects"), after demonstrating that the word "race" in the colonial period was not a stable signifier and that other expressions were also used with similar meanings (caste, color, class, quality), the author explains the motives and methods of counting the colonial population. Standing out is that the constitutive power of official classification in the colonies was based on the fact that individuals' racial designations set the terms of their relationship to the state and to other colonial subjects within the hierarchical social order. In this way, belief in the "natural superiority" imbued by cleanliness of blood provided ideological justification to discriminatory legal codes, and naturalized social distinctions within populations.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 examine different facets of the national census that took place in Latin America in the first century after Independence. In Chapter 3 ("Enumerating Nations"), Loveman brings into focus how developments in the emergent scientific field of statistics shaped both the form and content of Latin America's early national census. Independent Latin America's first census officials looked to authoritative European sources for instructions on how to conduct a modern census, with the ambition to integrate the community of "civilized nations." Latin American's census officials selectively adapted the international model, created in consecutive International Statistics Congresses (ISC) since 1853, to accomplish their own pragmatic and ideological ends, under the umbrella of a global model. Following this model, not all Latin American states classified their populations by race in their early censuses. In fact, a table posted in this chapter shows the sporadic and irregular attention to the race or color questions in Latin American censuses that took place during 1810-1940 (113).

In Chapter 4 ("The Race to Progress"), the author says that "in an age of scientific racism, Latin American census officials led the charge to document—in the internationally prestigious language of statistics—the inevitable 'racial improvement' ('whitening') of their populations." She also adds that "the racial statistics collected in national censuses became the raw materials for crafting statistical portraits of racially regenerative nations-in-the-making" (40). This chapter provides evidence of the ways in which racial differences, the relations between native languages and ethnicities, and the consequences of race mixtures and immigration are documented. The difficulty of establishing distinctions between ethnicity and race are displayed, for example, in the 1930 population of Panama, which differentiated between white, black, mestizo, mulatto, yellow, and indigenous people.

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In Chapter 5 ("Constructing Natural Orders"), by scrutinizing the practices with which population statistics were collected, aggregated, and displayed, Loveman shows how census officials' tacit racial assumptions shaped, organized and analyzed demographic data. Statistical tables conveyed officials' implicit views about natural hierarchies of humankind, helping to affirm their explicit arguments that equated national progress with "racial progress." In many countries, the first category in official tables generally signaled which racial type most approximated the desired or idealized national type, and subsequent categories represented the other racial or ethnic types recognized as human parts of the nation. In some cases, censuses differentiated between civilized and uncivilized Indians, in order to diagnose, for example, the difficulties to insert them into educational systems, or to directly delegitimize them under expressions such as "savage tribes" or "barbarians," and not to count them in censuses.

Chapters 6 ("From Race to Culture") and 7 ("We All Count"), analyze developments from post-World War II to the beginning of the twenty-first century and examine "how Latin American census officials reconciled their commitments to the continued pursuit of national progress with the global discrediting of "race" as a scientific concept and "racial improvement" as a political project" (41). In this way, a transition from a racial to a cultural perspective occurred; descriptions of human difference in terms of culture rather than biology were compatible with positivist and evolutionary ideas. These chapters exude a familiarity with the famous texts of Lévi-Strauss (1952, 1971) about race.

In Chapter 8 ("Conclusions"), Loveman places Latin American's modern politics and practice of official ethno-racial classification censuses in historical perspective. She also states that in the early twenty-first century, the national census permits to plurinational and pluricultural Latin American nations to play a critical role in the production of basic knowledge about populations and are a political instrument to recognize the political participation and representation of particular ethno-racial groups. She comments that the implications of the new politics of official ethno-racial classification in Latin America are meant to reduces inequality, deepen democracy, and promote national development in the region as the twenty-first century unfolds. It also evidences how racial and ethnic classifications' histories serve as a palimpsest of the dilemmas and social crossroads that several countries have suffered, and for which they have paid their blood price. This investigation is supported by an extended bibliography: about six hundred heterogeneous and with a diachronic wide spectrum of sources, according to the nature of the research.

Those responsible for classification systems know the situated consistency of these issues in schemes that claim to be universal. The *Dewey Decimal Classification* has auxiliary table 5 which is called "Racial, Ethnic, National Groups." In the categorization of the title, a simplification is sought to overcome the conceptual difficulties that these expressions contain, even at the risk of mixing epistemological visions that are not necessarily compatible with each other. Also, under 03 the so-called "basic races" are listed: Caucasian, mongoloid and black (in that canonical order); while under 04 a list of just four "mixtures of basic races" is established, a very limited list when compared to the 53 types of castes from colonial Mexico (Leon 1924, 79) mentioned in Loveman's book (65). The rest of the divisions of the 1 to the 9 follow a geographical distribution from the identification of specific racial, ethnic or national groups.

The Universal Decimal Classification also has a table of common auxiliaries of human ancestry, ethnic grouping and nationality, in which prevail the geographical criterion to identify the so called "human ancestry groups." The scope note of this concept makes visible difficulties finding an accurate definition, when it's said that "human ancestry groups, previously simplified to the concept of race, are difficult to define because of the population migration and shared ancestry. Study of DNA sequence variations has revealed geographical structuring of human populations, but enumeration can vary from five to seven" (UDC Consortium 2005). On the other hand, the numbers in this table denote the nationality or ethnic aspects of a subject represented by a main UDC number. They are mainly derived from the common auxiliaries of the language, but also are usefully to distinguish linguistic-cultural groups.

Then again, in the processes of creation or revision of knowledge organization systems, the cultural warrant seems to fit better as a support to the processes of terminology selection in this field, since it enables hospitality methods to adapt universal schemes to local purposes, or directly to create *ad hoc* classifications from a more open, descriptive, rather than prescriptive perspective of thinking. This way, it favors the choice of indexing politically correct terms to identify each race and ethnicity through the cultural expressions that give them identity, as well as the phenomena and social problems associated with them.

The very concept of race has been in dispute in recent decades, from anthropological, sociological, or biological points of view, and consequently knowledge organization still intervenes in ethnic and racial matters with uncertain steps and with the awareness that it will be very difficult to find satisfactory solutions, more or less definitive, that will satisfy the various disciplines that research them. In

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any case, Loveman's book makes an important contribution so that specialists in knowledge organization can reflect on the textures and the scope of the conceptual structures with which they should work.

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