



**Nuevos actores en América del Norte.  
Identities culturales y políticas (vol. 2)**

(New Actors in North America.

Cultural and Political Identities [vol. 2])

*Edit Antal, ed.*

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Volume two of *Nuevos actores en América del Norte* (New Actors in North America), edited by Edit Antal, continues the analysis of new non-state actors who are forging new forms of political and social organization in the region. Under the general topic of cultural and political identities, the book presents different social realities, particularly local ones, that speak to the emergence of different forms of political, social and cultural action in North America.

Like in volume one, this book presents multi-disciplinary work by 12 authors about four issues linked to the configuration of cultural and political identities: 1) the role of immigrants or minorities in the production of film and literature; 2) indigenous movements, a diverse experience; 3) the empowerment of the Latino minority in the United States; and 4) civil and social rights in North America.

In the first section, Graciela Martínez-Zalce, Laura López Morales and Claudia Lucotti focus their articles on identity in Canada based on the analysis of Canadian film and literature, explaining how minorities use these discourses to recognize themselves in a multi-culturally com-

plex society. In the case of film, Martínez-Zalce's topic, the bi-cultural nature of the Armenian minority is central to understanding the recovery of personal identity through a relationship that must be constructed in space.

Laura López and Claudia Lucotti contribute an article historically reconstructing literary production in Canada in order to understand the transformations experienced by two important groups: the Quebecois and women. While López centers on Quebecois literature and its utilization for understanding change and the insertion of this minority in Canada's political, economic and cultural development, Lucotti reviews women's English-language poetry in the light of identity. In both cases, literature helps us to understand the movements of identity and, as Laura López points out, writing becomes the means *par excellence* to give body to the reflection and the formulation of demands and expectations.

In the second section, about indigenous movements, Radha Jhappan, Juan Anzaldo Meneses and Natividad Gutiérrez Chong analyze historically the indigenous struggle around cultural identity. These articles deal with the situation in the region's three countries and the authors agree that respect for indigenous identity is the only way to achieve autonomy for indigenous peoples. Given the clear differences in the scope and advances of the rights won by the indigenous communities of Canada, the United States and Mexico, many paradoxes continue to exist about these communities' status and their insertion in the national societies they belong to. Thus, for example, even though Canada may be the most advanced country with regard to conferring certain constitutional rights to indigenous peoples, it is not as advanced as it tries to equate indigenous self-government with local government. In the United States, indigenous peoples have a similar situation of limited autonomy, particularly with regard to tribal governments and the management of natural resources, a source of tension with the federal government. In the case of Mexico, says Anzaldo, times do not seem to have changed for indigenous peoples and communities.

In the three cases, despite the differences, the authors point to a revitalization of the indigenous struggle's political and social action and organizations, beginning with a reformulation of their relations with the state and non-indigenous society.

The third section, perhaps the best theoretically and empirically concatenated of all, presents articles by Bar-

bara Driscoll, David Díaz and César Pérez Espinosa about the power of Mexicans as a political minority in the United States. These contributions emphasize the efforts of the Latino or “Chicano” movement to achieve greater political representation within the U.S. system. Driscoll does a historical review of the politization of Mexicans living in the United States, using as her starting point the struggle for civil rights in the 1960s when Mexicans took on the concept of “Chicano” to dignify it and turn it into a symbolic weapon of the political struggle, when they began to organize socially and politically and learned a very important lesson for their quest for greater representation: using the democratic and legal instruments of the U.S. political system itself instead of confronting it. Only in this way can we understand the recent increase in Chicano representation in U.S. legislatures and administrations.

A paradigmatic example is Antonio Villaraigosa’s successful mayoral campaign in Los Angeles, California. In his article, David Díaz describes the context of the 2001 mayoral election and the push that Villaraigosa meant for empowering Chicanos. This politician’s political-electoral strategy is interesting, including breaking with traditional forms of campaigning and going beyond Latino barrios to get support from other social groups, for example environmentalists, feminists and the Jewish community, among others. Although Díaz does not say so because his article is situated in a previous time, in effect resorting to the values and tools of U.S. democracy served this candidate in good stead for a victory in the 2005 Los Angeles mayoral race, also aided by the politization of the Chicano labor movement. According to Díaz, the Villaraigosa effect has fostered an important change in the patterns of political representation of the Chicano community both because of the increase in its electoral participation and because of the political victory of candidates from this minority for elected posts.

César Pérez, for his part, talks about the fruits of this growing electoral participation by examining Mexican-origin legislators in the U.S. Congress who seek improvements in the quality of services to the Latino community.

Finally, the last section of the book touches on a topic that is important for democracy in North America: the struggle for civil and social rights. Margaret Andersen and Silvia Núñez García study two cases of marginal groups in the United States, while Jennifer Stoddart deals with the importance of the right to information in

Quebec and Canada in a context of broadening out democratic rights.

In her interesting article, Andersen describes the theoretical, methodological and practical focuses of feminist action. Concerned with the marginal status of women of color—whom she categorizes as anyone not of European descent—the author analyzes the patterns of social links among races and genders. These patterns have been transformed by the actions of certain social movements, but mainly by the economic-productive restructuring of U.S. society. Pro-actively, Andersen proposes that multiracial feminism, which she clearly defines, is a way to overcome the structures of domination that pervade these marginalized women’s daily lives.

Silvia Núñez develops a small case study of the National Coalition for the Homeless in order to deal with the topic of community participation by marginalized actors. Her analysis shows how a small local organization in New York City proves the complexity of the organization of civil society in the United States, and how it has the ability, although limited, to influence national decisions through lobbying Congress. The important thing in this case and the previous one is the empowerment of marginalized groups through social reorganization. In any case, as Núñez points out, these kinds of movements for organized social action help evaluate both the quality of U.S. democracy and the progressive vitality of its civil society.

*New Actors in North America. Cultural and Political Identities* complements the analysis in volume one and demonstrates the complexity inherent to social and political action undertaken by very different actors in contradictory socio-political contexts that also exist in democratic countries, particularly the United States and Canada.

Despite the heterogeneous quality of the articles and the fact that some of the figures are out of date—their update would allow us to more precisely understand the region’s situation—this book edited by Edit Antal is an interesting effort to present the reader, whether he or she is familiar with these issues or not, with a broad panoramic view of the reconfiguration of the societies and the political and cultural and identities of North America through the discourse of film and literature or the study of social or political movements. **MM**

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