



Book Review

Zapotecs on the Move: Cultural, Social, and Political Processes in Transnational Perspective. By Adriana Cruz-Manjarrez. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2013. xiii, 249 pages.

AMELIA FRANK-VITALE

Department of Anthropology, University of Michigan

Zapotecs on the Move traces the migration history of one indigenous Zapotec village in the state of Oaxaca, Mexico. Beginning with a historical overview of five generations of migration from the village of Yalálag toward the city of Oaxaca, Mexico City, and the U.S., the book then focuses on the current transnational experience of Yalaltecos both in their community of origin and in their now-established community in Los Angeles, California.

The strength of *Zapotecs on the Move* lies in its close examination of the identity formed through the transnational experience of Yalaltecos. Its broad strokes tell a familiar story of migration from a rural, peasant town in Mexico to an urban (often undocumented) life in the U.S. The outlines of this story are now commonplace for many villages across Mexico: Yalálag is a town and community where fewer of its members live inside it than out, yet the pull of the hometown is still strong in the social imaginary of its members, in some cases even for those born abroad. *Zapotecs on the Move* traces the social disintegration that steady out-migration can cause for a small community and explores the reconfiguration of identity among the now-transnational community. Cruz-Manjarrez gives life and breath to the individuals who experience this kind of social dislocation and identity reconstruction, humanizing the now-standard tale by delving into the repercussions that out-migration has had for this particular

community. Her deep analysis allows her to make two important observations that form the book's primary contribution to the study of Mexican migration.

First, building upon her earlier work focused on cultural practices and performance among Yalaltecos, Cruz-Manjarrez discusses transnational identity formation by examining the dynamic nature of the performance of traditional Yalalteco dances and their social importance both in the community of origin and among Yalaltecos in Los Angeles. She details the ways in which community tensions surrounding the transnational experience (inequalities of wealth, "modern" or western dress, mannerisms, and values conflicting with the traditional, and gang participation and drug use among Yalalteco youth) are expressed through the incorporation of new parodic dances into traditional religious festivals. The dances, like the dance of the *cholos* (gang members) or *las minifaldas* (miniskirts), parody the dress, mannerisms and values of the "Americanized" Yalaltecos. The dances are performed in Yalálag, as well as in Los Angeles, often by the "Americanized" youth whose lives they represent. In this way, the dances provide not only a safe space for social critique but also an opportunity for inclusion of immigrant Yalaltecos into the transnational community.

Second, beyond the close examination of the incorporation of transnational realities into the traditional dances of the Yalaltecos, Cruz-Manjarrez also makes interesting observations about the particular way in which Zapotecos develop a multilayered identity as immigrants in the U.S. Through extensive interviews with Yalaltecos in Los Angeles – both immigrants themselves and their U.S.-born children – she explores the way in which Yalaltecos become more Mexican in U.S. than they were in Yalálag. While in Mexico, a Zapotec identity was in constant tension with Mexicanness. In the U.S., Yalaltecos develop an identity derived from more frequent positive interactions with

the Mexican state and closer affinity to other Mexican immigrant communities in California. Tellingly, Yalaltecos, who speak only Zapotec, find it more useful to first learn Spanish upon arrival in the U.S. than to first learn English. The specific Yalalteco and Zapotec identities that immigrants bring with them from the mountains of Oaxaca get layered into Oaxacan, Mexican, Mexican-American, Chicano, or Latino identities in California. Cruz-Manjarrez's conclusion, that Yalaltecos "learn to be Mexican through migration," is an important contribution to understanding the complexities inherent in the development of a transnational identity for any community.

While *Zapotecs on the Move* offers certain significant insights and while its close telling of the Yalálag experience of

transnationalism is valuable, it sacrifices a careful contextual analysis for the sake of a deep case analysis. Outside of the case she knows so well, Cruz-Manjarrez tends to over-generalize in ways that are problematic. One example of this is her treatment of gang culture among the transnational community. She lightly touches upon the reasons that immigrant youth might join gangs, but the surface-level discussion she offers detracts from her careful detailing of the ramifications of the introduction of gang culture in Yalálag, as does some unevenness in the editing of the overall text. Despite these issues, *Zapotecs on the Move* offers a valuable account of the complexities of transnationalism through a deep analysis of the experience of Yalaltecos in Oaxaca and Los Angeles.