

very schematic model also feels to obscure essential elements in the aim to theorise elites – and their relationships with non-elites.

Tijo Salverda

**Nájera, Jennifer R.:** *The Borderlands of Race. Mexican Segregation in a South Texas Town.* Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015. 183 pp. ISBN 978-0-292-76755-3. Price: \$ 30.15

In “The Borderlands of Race,” Jennifer R. Nájera tackles an important question in Mexican American studies: If Mexican Americans were guaranteed full citizenship rights by virtue of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 – which legally acknowledged their racial “whiteness” –, what explains the persistence of spatial and social segregation throughout the Southwest long after the formal architecture of racial segregation had been dismantled? For Nájera, part of the answer lays in the uneven and inconsistent application of racial boundaries and segregation practices enacted against ethnic Mexicans beginning at the turn of the 20th century. In this historical ethnography of one South Texas town, Nájera traces the establishment and decline of racial segregation in the 20th century, exploring how deeply entrenched local customs and practices shaped the contours of ethnic Mexican life, and how grassroots activism – both subtle and overt – ultimately challenged the racial status quo.

Nájera focuses on La Feria, Texas, a small agricultural community located in the Rio Grande Valley approximately 25 miles northwest of Brownsville, and argues that segregation took form and evolved through three distinct stages. The first stage, from the establishment of the town in 1915 through the 1930s, laid the foundation for the complete residential and social separation of Anglos and Mexicans. A result of the growth of the agriculture industry – controlled by Anglo landowners and sustained by racialized Mexican labor force – segregation extended to nearly all facets of life in La Feria: its neighborhoods, its schools, its Catholic Church, and even its cemeteries. The 1940s represented the second stage, what Nájera calls an “accommodated form of segregation.” National and state policies aimed at maintaining positive political and beneficial economic ties with Mexico, coupled with a greater push for Mexican American civil rights in the post-WWII era, fostered an environment that allowed for greater inclusion. However, this incorporation was still fragmented and limited, and while civil rights organizations like the American G. I. Forum had some successes, very few ethnic Mexicans in La Feria benefitted from the slowly shifting racial climate. Throughout the span of the 20th century, ethnic Mexicans crafted their own sense of identity and community that provided for mutual support in the context of the racially charged landscape in La Feria. This sense of cultural citizenship and local grassroots actions served to usher in the third stage, the demise of segregation in the latter decades of the 20th century resulting in part from the battles waged by the civil rights and Chicana/o movements.

Drawing upon borderlands scholarship and informed by critical race theory, Nájera uses the example of La Fe-

ria to make important claims about the ways that local attitudes created and maintained segregation. Although Mexicans in La Feria were largely confined to the north side of the tracks, there were exceptions, even in the early years of segregation. Mexicans with the right “cultural capital” (in the form of wealth, complexion, and the ability to speak English) could cross the rigid divides to enter Anglo social worlds that were otherwise closed off to the broader Mexican population. Yet even for these exceptional cases, there were limits. Using rich oral interviews and archival materials, Nájera uncovers the stories of La Feria’s Mexican community to illuminate the messiness, and sometimes the irrationality, of the racial order. For example, despite the practice of racial segregation within the school system, Delia Martínez found a place on the La Feria High School volleyball team in the 1940s, a spot that would suggest a greater degree of social inclusion than many students experienced. However, she vividly recalled her Anglo teammates’ attitudes of superiority and the senior trip to a swimming pool in nearby Harlingen, where the Anglo girls went swimming but the Mexican girls were denied entry to the pool because of their race. In the 1950s, Francisco “Frank” Rodríguez was a well-respected real estate broker who worked with both Anglo and Mexican clientele, but was still refused a haircut in the local barbershop because he was Mexican. And while La Feria may have appointed its first Mexican American mayor in 1949 – Joe Gavito, Jr., a Mexican American businessman whose class and complexion afforded him greater access to La Feria social and political circles – little changed for the Mexican community of La Feria indicating the limited nature of inclusion. In fact, there would not be another Mexican American mayor for more than forty years. While borderlands scholars often focus on the fluidity of national and racial boundaries and identities, Nájera contends that the limited forms of incorporation experienced by La Feria’s Mexican population, rather than revealing the permeability of racial segregation, is actually evidence of its durability, offering only the *illusion* of access and integration. In the absence of legal statutes mandating racial separation, these exceptions were the mechanisms that allowed segregation practices to persist for as long as they did, allowing for it to continue operating much as it had for generations.

While the first four chapters of the book focus on the creation and evolution towards accommodated segregation, the second half of the study turns attention to racial integration with two chapters that illuminate the overt and subtle ways Mexicans pushed for and affected inclusion in La Feria’s schools and church. The hiring of nonpoliticized Mexican American teachers deemed acceptable by the Anglo administration had the unintended consequence of changing the culture of the schools, providing students a supportive learning environment, new student-teacher relationships, and transforming the schools into places of empowerment for ethnic Mexican youth. Similarly, in St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church, where segregation remained entrenched well into the 1980s, small faith-based communities called *comunidades de base* allowed Mexican parishioners to use ideas about social jus-

tice and liberation theology to assert their place within the parish. Tapping into their rich cultural heritage, Mexican parishioners, for example, embraced celebrations of *Las Posadas* (a reenactment of the biblical Nativity story and Joseph and Mary's search for shelter in Bethlehem) as a way of reinforcing community bonds and expanding parish life. In both instances, Nájera reveals how both the vocal activism of Chicano organizations and the more subtle acts stemming from the grassroots were necessary to effect desegregation.

"The Borderlands of Race" offers fresh insight into the pernicious nature of Mexican segregation – fiercely maintained in local and intimate ways, and shored up through selective inclusion. By focusing on a small community, rather than a larger city with proportionally larger Mexican communities, which were often centers of Mexican American political access and organization, Nájera illuminates not only the very intimate ways that segregation bled into every facet of life, but also the very personal ways that people challenged its basic premise. Closing with an evocative description in the epilogue of the high school football game, Nájera reminds us that while much has changed, the legacies of this fraught history remain. In recent day La Feria, the best seats in the stadium are occupied by greater numbers of Mexican Americans who represent the town's economic and political leadership, but recent immigration has raised new questions about boundaries and belonging within the community. How those questions will be answered in the 21st century will be determined by how well the lessons from the past are taken to heart.

Monica Perales

**Narayanan, Yamini:** Religion, Heritage, and the Sustainable City. Hinduism and Urbanisation in Jaipur. London: Routledge, 2015. 235 pp. ISBN 978-0-415-84466-6. Price: £ 90.00

The fascinating title of Yamini Narayanan's book raises great expectations, although she relativizes them by clarifying her ambitious project in the subtitle "Hinduism and Urbanisation in Jaipur." Jaipur, the capital and largest city of the Indian state of Rajasthan, has more than 3.1 million residents and about 77% of them are Hindus. The keyword "sustainable" in the challenging title may cover a large number and a wide scope of subjects and Narayanan points indeed at everything relating to environmental and/or ecological implications of citizenship. She emphasizes that gender awareness, religion, and cultural heritage should be decisive in the planning for a viable future of today's megacities.

The introduction contains an overview of social, cultural, political, and environmental realities, following M. Sepe when he says that "a localised sense of place, place identity, and placemaking have been identified as vital elements of sustainable cities ..., and which modernist planning in Indian cities has almost entirely neglected to consider" (3). Well-read, Narayanan argues that various problems cannot be solved without understanding the influence of religion shaping urban space. She emphasizes that reviewing history is important in order to understand

the vital sense of the "*genius loci* or 'spirit of place';" which according to Norberg-Schulz "constitutes the essential, defining, and enduring character of a place" (8). Her main argument for a renewal and a sustainable development of India's old cities is based on the assessment of tangible and intangible heritage. She concentrates on tangible features such as the sociocultural, religious, and gender-based sentiments and manifestations among Hindus, while also interpreting the experience of people in terms of the intangible physical, built, and natural structures and spatial design in Jaipur. Furthermore, she emphasizes strongly that "the current Master Plans [of the Jaipur Development Authority] fully ignore the religious dimensions of place and urban development in Jaipur ... Indeed, it is one of the major tasks of this book to argue that religion's influence – enabling or problematic – *should* be acknowledged in the planning analyses of such cities" (16).

The first chapters contain detailed information on: the urban planning history and policies in Indian cities, especially the Walled City areas; socio-spatial justice, economic sustainability, and environmental protection since independence; religion as a special category of development concepts and religious qualifiers to heritage sites; "equitable gendered participation in the planning and future of Indian cities" (86). Old Jaipur's sacred and secular religious heritage is treated with particular reference to both the classical Hindu *Vāstuvidyā/Vāstusāstra*, which are dealing with architecture, and the modernist planning. The author relies on the excellent expertise and works of V. Sachdev and G. Tillotson to which she refers throughout the book.

Narayanan presents her primary research on Old Jaipur in chapters 6–8. "Hinduism and Space" (chap. 6) reviews critically the role of religion in inter-communal living and their visibility, communal tensions, sectarian violence, trade and commerce. She suggests that shaping space is mainly influenced by a Hindu male dominance and predominantly male values leading to "masculinisation of the city's public spaces ... and spatially marginalising minority religious groups" (125). How the experiences, vulnerabilities, and specific needs of women are determined by religion and culture are discussed in the following chapter. She pays special attention to their social status in the home, women's quarters, and public spaces. Their negative experience is mainly attributed to the prevalence of Hindu patriarchal practices and traditions. She suggests that an amelioration of women's life can be achieved by enforcing "right to mobility, right to employment and education, and right to safety" (168). In the 8th chap., "Religion, Nature, and Urban Development in Jaipur," Narayanan focuses on the actual relationship between Hindu religiosity and four environmental problems, namely: "water scarcity; green cover; the problem of stray animals in the city; and congestion and traffic problems" (184) in view of planning urban ecological citizenship and towards a sustainable development appropriate to the needs of contemporary cities. The chapter closes with "Conclusions. A Bioreligious Approach for Urban Policy" (206 ff.).