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*Making Los Angeles Home: The Integration of Mexican Immigrants in the United States* by Rafael Alarcón, Luis Escala and Olga Odgers (review)

Alvaro Huerta

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a number of Mexican state repositories is especially valuable for revealing the views and motives of regional politicians and soldiers. The conclusions about Mexican society drawn from these documents may be open to debate, but it vastly expands on previous overviews and provides a much clearer understanding of how that nation functioned in the years from 1846–1848.

Douglas Murphy  
*Palo Alto Battlefield National Historical Park*

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Rafael Alarcón, Luis Escala and Olga Odgers, authors. Dick Cluster, translator. *Making Los Angeles Home: The Integration of Mexican Immigrants in the United States*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2016. 259 pp.

Distinguished Mexican scholars of immigration, Rafael Alarcón, Luis Escala and Olga Odgers, along with Roger Waldinger in his Preface for the English translation, have produced an excellent and must-read book, *Making Los Angeles Home*. Originally published in Spanish by scholars from El Colegio de La Frontera Norte, Tijuana, Baja California, Mexico, this English-language translation is a very welcome and necessary study. Written for scholars, students, policy makers, political activists, community organizers and others on both sides of *la frontera*, this book focuses on a topical and timely issue: immigration. More specifically, by focusing on questions of immigrant integration in the Los Angeles area, the authors provide insightful data and analysis of Mexican immigrants. As a clearly written, well-documented, coherently structured and scholarly rigorous study, the authors provide a nuanced account and analysis of Mexican immigrant integration through four different dimensions: (1) economic; (2) social; (3) political; and (4) cultural (185). In doing so, the authors demonstrate that Mexican immigrants (as a heterogeneous group) employ a variety of strategies to integrate into mainstream society, thereby experiencing opportunities and constraints in successfully integrating or achieving the mythical “American Dream.”

This first-rate book makes a great contribution to scholarly immigration literature in the U.S. and beyond. Although there is an abundance of literature on immigrant integration in general and on Mexican immigrant integration in particular—generated or produced

by scholars in the U.S.—focusing on the twentieth century to the present, with many scholars maintaining an assimilationist perspective towards successful integration, few studies by Mexican scholars help shape and frame our understandings and perceptions of these complex processes. To counter these somewhat narrow views of immigrant integration in the U.S. the authors—as Mexican scholars, following in the footsteps of the late Mexican anthropologist and scholar Manuel Gamio—utilized a “... multidisciplinary, multilevel approach employing a combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques to capture the distinct components, dimensions, and levels implicit in this process” (p. xvi).

In terms of quantitative data, the authors relied on census data from both the U.S. and Mexico. In the U.S., this included accessing data from the 2008 American Community Survey (ACS) in metropolitan Los Angeles. For their study, the authors selected Mexican immigrants from three states, which included Zacatecas, Oaxaca and Veracruz. In doing so, the authors analyzed the economic and social integration of Mexicans from these states with five key indicators: “(1) level of educational attainment, (2) English proficiency, (3) naturalization, (4) occupation, and (5) homeownership” (59). More specifically, the authors conducted a comparative analysis among Mexican immigrants with both native-born and other immigrant groups. Additionally, the authors conducted a comparative analysis among immigrants from the aforementioned Mexican states. For their analysis, the authors also accessed Mexican census data, including the *Consejo Nacional de Población* (CONAP).

In terms of qualitative data, the authors interviewed ninety informants (a non-random sample) from the aforementioned states (thirty informants per state), examining “... the immigrants’ economic, social, cultural and political integration from an ethnographic perspective” (5). Regarding economic integration, the authors examined the following indicators: (1) insertion or participation in the labor market, including type of jobs and level of pay; (2) self-employment; (3) small businesses; and (4) investment in real estate or homeownership (in receiving and sending countries). Also, regarding social integration, the authors examined the following indicators: (1) immigration status; (2) family networks; (3) access to health care; and (4) access to educational and language services. They also examined the informants’ transnational ties and participation in associations. In terms of associations, this included hometown associations (HTAs), educational related groups, religious affiliations, cultural activities, sports-oriented groups and business-related organizations (e.g. professional, trades).

Moreover, regarding cultural integration, the authors examined and compared two opposing views of immigrant integration: (1) assimilationist and (2) multiculturalist. While the assimilationist position views incorporation through the “dissolution of difference,” (132), the multiculturalist position views incorporation as acceptance or negotiation of difference. The cultural integration of Mexican immigrants, according to the authors, remains a bidirectional process, where it depends not only on the recent arrivals, but also on the host society. Thus, the authors focused on Mexican practices and activities (in both countries) relating to art, food, culture, music, radio, media, news, dance and religious festivals.

Additionally, in terms of political participation, the authors studied the political role that Mexican immigrants play in the U.S. and the public policies (both positive and negative) impacting them. For example, the authors cited the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986, where 2.3 million Mexican immigrants secured legal permanent residence (44) and the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) of 1996 with its enforcement-related policies and prohibition of federal social services to undocumented immigrants. The authors also analyzed public policies from Mexico, such as its dual citizenship program, where Mexicans who become U.S. citizens can still participate in their states of origin (175–176).

Moreover, the authors also looked at national debates and public policies (federal, state and local levels) and the impacts on Mexican immigrants in the County of Los Angeles and City of Los Angeles. Regarding anti-immigrants policies, for instance, the authors cited the Department of Homeland Security’s Secure Communities Program, where immigration agents work with local jails and prisons to identify and deport individuals who lack legal status. They also referenced a related jail program classified as 287(g) “which involves the questioning and detention of undocumented immigrants in the county jail” (190). In contrast, they also studied pro-immigrant policies, such as the city’s Special Order 40, where the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) does not interrogate or question individuals about their legal status. Given that the authors perceive immigrants as active agents of social change, they provided numerous examples at the local and state levels where immigrants and their advocates have protested and organized themselves to protect or defend the interests of day laborers, car wash workers, farm workers, domestic workers, laborers and students.

Through this detailed analysis, Alarcón, Escala and Odgers have produced a complex portrayal of immigrants from Zacatecas, Oaxaca

and Veracruz in the Los Angeles region, in which they examined various integration strategies that these immigrants employ—based on their place of origin (at the state level), history of migration patterns, migrant networks, length of residency and legal status—whereby immigrants from these three states experience divergent outcomes as Angelenos.

Alvaro Huerta  
*California State Polytechnic University, Pomona*