
NOTAS DE LIBROS

FEIXA PÀMPOLS, Carles y César Gustavo ANDRADE (King Manaba): *El Rey: Diario de un Latin King*. (Ned Ediciones 2020), 512 pp.

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This book is an extraordinary real-life story centered around an extraordinary protagonist, a Latino immigrant from Ecuador to Spain. His name is César Gustavo Andrade and he immigrated as a young man in his late 20's to Madrid, Spain, in 2003, later moving to Barcelona in 2005. But it's more than a single immigrant story that lays bare the multiple challenges and sufferings an immigrant faces the world over in being uprooted, displaced and struggling to forge a new life in a foreign country. It's also a story of a unique, thriving, and complex transnational social organization, called the *Latin Kings and Queens en España*, of which César's story is intertwined. In other words, César's story is similar to many other immigrant experiences, yes, but it's also uniquely shaped and informed by the presence and creation of a socio-cultural and political activist organization created by and for Latina/o subjects at least initially and not exclusively.

Latin Kings and Queens first emerge in U.S. cities of Chicago and New York from community organizing work by Puerto Rican youth street activists and then across various Latin American cities such as Santo Domingo, Ecuador, where César was born and raised. While it began in U.S. cities, Latin Kings and Queens mobile activist members moved to other late-stage capitalist societies across the American hemisphere and European continent where they carved out lives in material impoverishment and politically vulnerable situations but always with a rich sense of self, agency and communal imaginaries.

At the core of the book is the deep relationship and friendship between César and Spanish academic Carles Feixa that began in 2005 when César moved to Barcelona. Dr. Feixa is a social anthropologist based in

Barcelona. A quick glance at his scholarly publications one sees a focus on young people, their sub-cultures, youth gangs and other informal social groupings in the context of globalization and multiple socio-cultural belongings on the margins of society.

The book's format is based around 12 substantive *conversaciones*, loosely structured interviews that easily flow into give-and-take conversations primarily between César and Carles but also sometimes with César and other subjects closely involved at different points in time in César's life and the larger social context of the *Latin Kings and Queens*. It is, in short, a life history as told by César to Carles via conversations, interviews, letters, testimonials and presentations given by César to various institutional groups. As César himself puts it in the Epilogue in a presentation given to a class of Spanish university graduate students, he is grateful *"...de poder compartir con cada uno de ustedes mi historia de vida..."* (...to be able to share with each and every one of you my life history...).

The structure of the book is emblematic of its determined focus on César's story (& his alter ego King Manaba), and that of his situated involvement with Latin Kings and their immigrant struggles to find their footing and belonging with dignity in a place called Spain. This determined focus can be seen in how Carles arranges one conversation after another followed by a post-script or handwritten letter or newspaper clipping and/or a description of an official presentation. All of these serve to reinforce César's story that emerges from the *conversaciones*, to give credence to it and bear witness to the authentic, even noble, values, perspectives and experiences that César and the *Latin Kings and Queens* hold dear.

As a result, other voices emerge to compliment, triangulate and expand on César's role and activities and that of the *Latin Kings and Queens*. For example, after the first conversation Carles Feixa positions a post-script in the form of an email from an executive director of a non-profit from the U.S, a Dr. William Q. Ross, who works across multiple social groups as a consultant and guide, from professional organizations to businesses to youth gangs on the topics of spiritual and communal uplift. In his email Dr. Ross describes himself as a Latin King and archivist of its history for the next generation of members. He describes The Latin Nation as a community resource to fight against systemic racism and agitate for political and social justice. He gives credence to César, or as he is known within the "Nation", Manaba (or King Manaba), describing him as a sincere and honest man with a consistent and never-ending commitment to helping *El Pueblo*, the People. (p. 81-82).

In another example of this discursive strategy reinforcing César's story comes after Conversación #7 where César provides a testimony of his growing up in Ecuador. After the interview Carles places the perspective of another Ecuadorian member of *Latin Kings and Queens*, King Toro, who describes his relationship with King Manaba in Ecuador, and subsequently in Barcelona, and of their work together to "plantar bandera" (establish the Nation) and carry out the communal and social justice work of Latin Nation. In this post-script interview King Toro says, *El hermano King Manaba siempre ha sido una persona dedicada a la Nación, muy leal a nuestros puntos, propósitos, y seguidor de lo que la Nación demanda*. (Brother King Manaba has always been a person dedicated to the *Nation*, very loyal to our key points, objectives and follower of what the *Nation* calls for, demands).

In yet another example, (p. 409-412), we see the testimony of Queen Golden Angy, a Spanish woman, not Latina or immigrant, who shares her experiences of becoming an accepted member of the Latin Nation community. In it she provides her perspectives of the ideals of the Nation and how she viewed King Manaba as a role model and pillar of the community.

Throughout the book one sees the never-ending need and desire to fight against Spanish society's racism in multiple institutional and social forms against the immigrant Other, especially those who are black, darker skin, and/or more Andean Indigenous

looking. To quote Franz Fanon in his 1952 essay *The Fact of Blackness*, "I came into the world imbued with the will to find a meaning in things, my spirit filled with the desire to attain to the source of the world, and then I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects." For César, and other Latina/o immigrants, they come to Spain imbued with a similar spirit and desire but upon arrival are immediately positioned as racialized objects in the cross hairs of the gaze of white Spanish and European eyes.

The pervasive racism in Spain has been documented elsewhere. But, what *El Rey: Diario de un Latin King* does quite effectively is to show how a particular group of young urban Latina/o immigrants resist, struggle and fight back against the white Spanish gaze in very specific ways. The media and the police were two institutions who were convinced of the criminal nature of Latino youth groups in general and that of the Latin Kings more specifically, even with little concrete evidence.

In one opening scene in the Prologue, Carles describes how he came to meet César, aka King Manaba of the Latin Kings. He explains how he got a nervous call from the director of a Barcelonan youth center that was being surrounded in that very moment by a police raid consisting of about a hundred police officers. Members of the Latin Kings, including King Manaba, were inside participating in the life and activities of the youth center. Unbeknownst to them the police had been surveilling and following them. The Latin Kings were seen, framed and harassed as criminally inclined, violent subjects, immigrants to be policed, contained and apprehended if necessary. The director called Carles Feixa for help and to possibly intervene and mediate. The police raid ended without violence but not without all of the young Latino/a individuals inside the youth center identified, documented and classified, information which would later be used for intelligence and surveillance purposes or for political purposes in showing to the press and society that the security forces were in fact in control of Latino gangs, stopping their spread and ultimately their supposed threat.

Throughout the book César and his Latin Nation describe the true principles and objectives of the *Latin Kings and Queens en España*, which at their core are cultural and communal uplift and social justice for those at the bottom of society. In one dialogue session while King Manaba was holding court with

one of Carles' master level graduate class at Lleida University, one of the students asks King Manaba:

"If your work is to help young people, when they hear of the Latin Kings, the people of the street don't think of an organization that helps young people. Why do you think that's the case?"

King Manaba responds: "You have a point. But honestly, it's the fault of the media... we Latin Kings have work to do, not to be at a park doing nothing. We dedicate ourselves to our own individual work and that of the Nation. How do you prove that someone is a Latin King? When you see a Latin King say, 'I know who founded the Nation, when they established it and under which name.' If you don't know that, you're not Latin King." (p. 251). According to César, or King Manaba, to be a Latin King is to be committed to a larger entity called Latin Nation, to know its traditions, principles and its history. King Manaba shows and states throughout the book how the Latin Kings and Queens' *raison d'être* as a social organization aims to bring people together from the racialized margins of inner-city low-income barrios and respond collectively to the oppression, severe constraints and vicissitudes of unequal and hierarchical western liberal societies and their inability in meeting the basic necessities of life for everyday people.

César also carries out multiple interviews of his co-members, friends and family members. It's part of Carles Feixa's attempt at participatory research and elevating César's positionality beyond providing an insider perspective and towards a more democratic and equal relationship with the research subject. In fact, the research subject becomes a co-researcher and a teller of his own story in the process.

I suspect Carles Feixa is being strategic for including other voices and perspectives for they serve as character witnesses adding credibility to César's stories in the court of popular opinion in the wider Spanish society. By allowing an eloquent storyteller like César to tell his own story and then back it up with expert witnesses from around the globe, Carles seems to anticipate and ready to counter the

deeply biased colonial western gaze of Spaniards and Europeans towards historically racialized Latin American subjects in the European metropole and former colonial center.

This book is not a traditional scholarly ethnography of members of a marginalized subaltern group by any stretch of the imagination. Feixa does provide some theoretical framing at the beginning and the book does have ethnographic content and methods. In fact, it is rich in them. But, more accurately, in my opinion, Dr. Carles Feixa is more of a cultural broker and facilitator of César's story in multiple venues, including this book, than he is a scholar analyzing and interpreting a research subject for an exclusive scholarly community. Carles mediates between César and university social science graduate students or between César and Spanish institutions like law enforcement and the judicial system. This book is, in essence, an extension of that cultural brokering process whereby Carles facilitates the telling of subaltern stories in their own voices to a larger Spanish and European audience.

The book is unique in its presentation via King Manaba's own voice and the centrality of his fellow members, inner circle and family as it moves to decenter the privileged voice of the state and counter the racist gaze of much of Spanish society. It is in the end the story of vulnerable populations at the bottom of a western nation that imparts liberal forms of human suffering on those who it deems as unbelonging to the nation. But, as César concludes his story in the Epilogue, he's determined to speak from his positionality as an unapologetic Latin King to say that "the mentality of every Latin King or Queen" must be "to help all of the youth prepare themselves, to educate themselves.." and "to be someone in life..." (p. 436-439).

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Traditional Territories of the Arapaho, Cheyenne, and Ute Nations United States