

Focus on Our Faculty

by SUSANNA SHARPE

Sarah Lopez

Migration and home, history and the built environment. The work of Sarah Lopez sits at the confluence of these themes. An assistant professor in the School of Architecture, Lopez studies cultural landscapes, exploring how the history of the built environment also tells the stories of people and their movements across the globe.

She is the author of *The Remittance Landscape: Spaces of Migration in Rural Mexico and Urban USA* (2015), in which she examines how the flow of remittances from Mexican migrants in the United States has influenced the recent building boom in rural Mexico. Part ethnography, part architectural history, the book is informed by Lopez's fieldwork on both sides of the border. In it, she proposes that the construction boom leaves its mark in U.S. cities as well.

The theme of migration is central to Lopez's work, and has been central in her life since childhood. The daughter and granddaughter of immigrants from different hemispheres, Lopez grew up "reflecting on how processes of migration, with the necessary adjustment to radically new and different contexts, shape one's experience of everyday life." As a child in Los Angeles, she observed that people who migrate bring not only languages and cultural practices as they make their new homes; they also tend to recreate the physical environments that are familiar to them.

In her current research, Lopez has begun to look more closely at informal Mexican construction industries on both sides of



the U.S.–Mexico border. "Albañiles [vernacular builders] bring their own ideas of construction when they migrate," she says. Migrants have also started small-scale businesses transporting materials unique to Mexico to U.S. cities. "The transfer of specific construction techniques and the migration of materials such as *cantera* limestone are transforming what are currently understood as 'immigrant' or 'Latino' neighborhoods in Los Angeles, such as Bell, into dynamic places remade by transnational and bi-national networks," says Lopez.

Lopez explains some of the implications of different approaches to building: In the United States, construction is a very compartmentalized field, with different

specialists engaged in different aspects of the building process (the roofers, for example, do not also frame the house or install the floors). The Mexican construction workers who come to the United States bring with them a holistic approach to building—they are accustomed to building the whole structure from start to finish.

Migration stories are also central to Lopez's inquiries about building techniques: "I think that migration is one of the most prescient issues—it shouldn't be a marginal part of how we tell the stories." The excitement happens "in putting together migration histories with histories of the built environment."

Since writing her book, Lopez's primary focus has been on the classroom. She teaches the graduate-level Migratory Urbanism as well as U.S. Cultural Landscapes, a class to which she hopes to add Mexico. She also worked on an important project with graduate students called "Mapping Migrant Detention," focusing on the history of immigrant detention centers in Texas. The project is part of a twenty-state investigation titled *States of Incarceration*, which encompasses a website, a podcast, and a traveling exhibition that will visit the UT School of Architecture from October 5 to 26, 2016. The Texas portion of *States of Incarceration* is called "Spatial Stories of Migration and Detention," and asks the question "How does architecture shape punishment?"

The history of immigrant detention has never been written from this perspective, says Lopez. In fact, immigrant detention

centers tend to be “purposely kept invisible.” The traveling exhibition specifically explores “how the history of building these places can tell us the history of detention.” To Lopez, this knowledge should be a catalyst for action in the face of a humanitarian crisis: “Recording the history of how detention centers develop gives us information to act,” she says.

Lopez has been named a Princeton-Mellon Fellow in Architecture, Urbanism, and the Humanities for the 2016–2017 academic year. This leave from her teaching duties will allow her to further explore remittance landscapes, migration, and the built environment, and to pursue new projects that invite comparative perspectives through collaboration with other scholars.

Visit the online States of Incarceration exhibit at statesofincarceration.org. The UT School of Architecture page can be found by clicking on the map of Texas at statesofincarceration.org/state-by-state.

Paola Canova

In her fascinating work with the indigenous Ayoreo of Paraguay’s Chaco region, anthropologist Paola Canova explores a topic generally regarded as uncomfortable: women and girls trading sex for money, gifts, and status. Her dissertation, “Intimate Encounters: Ayoreo Sex Work in the Mennonite Colonies of Western Paraguay” (2014), looks at the ethical system surrounding Ayoreo women’s and girls’ sexuality, and how aspects of their sexual behavior have changed in the presence non-Ayoreo values and culture.

The Ayoreo were first contacted by non-indigenous people in the 1960s. Traditionally, young Ayoreo women, including adolescent girls of about 15 and up, have had great freedom to enact their sexuality. On hunting trips with Ayoreo men, for example, they exchanged sexual favors for items of value. Now, given the proximity of Mennonite missions, the growth of the non-indigenous population, and the presence of seasonal workers, Ayoreo young women’s sexuality is being expressed in the urban setting of Filadelfia, the center of Paraguay’s western Mennonite colonies.



For the many Ayoreo women and adolescent girls who venture outside of their communities, sex partners are white men, and sexual favors are generally exchanged for money. This is looked upon unfavorably by the dominant Mennonite culture, which, says Canova, views Ayoreo girls and young women “as a moral stain on the city and a major social problem.” For their own part, most Ayoreo today self-identify as Christians. So there is an inherent “convergence and collision of ethical systems” surrounding Ayoreo women’s sexual behavior, according to Canova.

Canova argues that in seeking out white partners, young Ayoreo women “are crafting a space for themselves to construct their identities in a place that discriminates against them. Girls who go to the city are building constructive capital, earning money. They are not ashamed of what they are doing.” Other money-making options for adolescent girls are limited in an environment that has historically discriminated against Ayoreo women. Despite some advances of the educational system in Paraguay introduced through the multicultural reforms of the 1990s, says Canova, dropout and illiteracy rates among Ayoreo are still high.

The money they earn allows them to engage in conspicuous consumption, a

way of seeking inclusion in a society that generally rejects them. Canova points out, however, that while earning money this way represents agency and opportunity, it also entails discrimination and exposure to risk. Aside from pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, the young women are sometimes victims of violence in the alcohol-fueled urban environment, where their partners are often seasonal workers. There is little to no access to birth control methods, so young women carry unwanted pregnancies to term and the babies are adopted and raised by the extended family.

“Ayoreo sex work does not fit conventional academic models, which reduce such activity to proof of economic necessity or women’s stigmatization of women. Rather than being a form of feminine submission or exploitation,” argues Canova, “it is a unique cultural phenomenon constructed in a web of social relations forged through processes of cultural change, religious hegemony, and economic shifts experienced by the Ayoreo over the twentieth century.”

Canova grew up in an agricultural region of Paraguay and was taught basic Guaraní, the country’s second language. She deepened her knowledge of Guaraní in college, conducting research for her BA thesis among a group of Guaraní indigenous people. Later, her pursuit of a human ecology master’s degree morphed into social work with agrarian communities.

She began her work with the Ayoreo in 2000 as an independent consultant, her interest then turning to the effects of missions and economic development on the group. She would spend a total of 49 months with the Ayoreo conducting long-term fieldwork for her dissertation, completed at the University of Arizona.

Canova joined The University of Texas at Austin in fall 2015 as a shared faculty member between LLILAS and the Department of Anthropology. Through her courses, she continues to explore indigenous and gender issues in Latin America. She teaches the graduate seminar Gender in Latin America: Contemporary Issues, and the undergraduate-level Global Indigenous Issues class.

Canova says her own research is currently shifting to think about the role of the

state in El Chaco—its historical absence, and how it is reasserting its presence via economic development. The Chaco has the highest rate of deforestation in the region. In her future work, Canova plans to explore how this environmental dilemma shapes indigenous politics and claims to citizenship.

Marcelo Paixão

Associate Professor Marcelo Paixão works at the nexus of economics, public policy, and sociology, studying the effects of racial and ethnic discrimination in Brazil and other Latin American countries, and pursuing policy solutions to inequalities that have long been part of the social, political, and economic system. He joined The University of Texas at Austin as a joint faculty member at LLILAS and the Department of African and African Diaspora Studies in fall 2015.

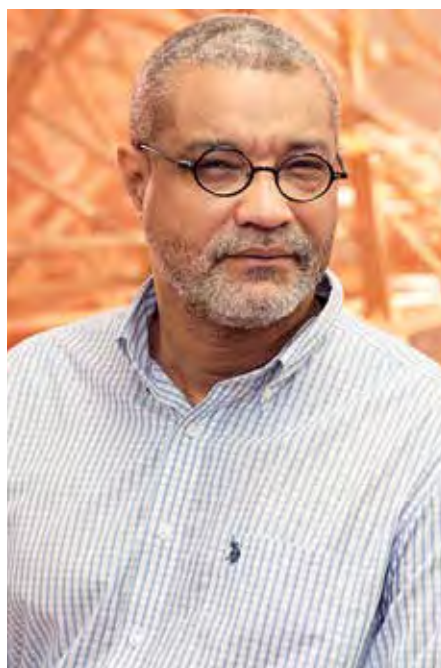
Brazil is often touted as a racial democracy. This has made it more difficult for scholars and activists to emphasize the country's deep inequalities and speak of them in terms of race. As Paixão wrote in the *New York Times*, "In Brazil, we need to overcome an ideology that not only assumes racial privilege is a right, but also implies that everyone who is critical of this reality is committing a crime against the national identity" (Opinion Pages: Room for Debate, March 29, 2012).

Prior to his arrival in Austin, Paixão was an associate professor at the Institute of Economics of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), where he also served as coordinator for LAESER, the Laboratory for the Economic, Historic, Social and Statistical Analysis of Race Relations. He argues that the lens of race and ethnicity is essential in explaining inequalities, and differentiates LAESER's approach from that of earlier organizations, such as the United Nations' 1950s-era Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), which has traditionally viewed Latin America through a white, middle-class male lens.

Followers of the ECLAC model sought to understand Latin American underdevelopment, says Paixão, "but they forgot to examine racial and ethnic inequality in explaining

inequalities in general." In his 2013 book *The Legend of Enchanted Modernity: Toward a Critique of Brazilian Thought on Race Relations and the Project of the Nation-State*,* Paixão reflects on the development model as "a narrative that hides race," arguing that "in Brazil, modernization itself was achieved through a specific process based on racial and ethnic inequality."

In a conversation about shifting approaches to understanding Latin America and Brazil in particular, Paixão describes the evolution of historical narratives that have come to hide race. The positivism of the early 1900s contributed to notions of white superiority. This was followed by the narrative of *mestizaje*, which emphasized Latin



America's "mixed" roots. Yet Paixão says the embrace of mestizo identity erased the concept of racial/ethnic discrimination, functioning as an "escape valve"—a catchall term for racial and ethnic self-identity for people who aren't white.

Bringing race back into the conversation in a productive way is not always easy: Paixão notes that reliable data on inequality can be difficult to collect in Brazil because of people's resistance to self-identifying as minorities. There have been public campaigns to encourage Afro-descendant Brazilians to self-report as black on the census. For example, the 1991 census campaign featured the slogan "Não deixe sua cor

passar em branco"—"Don't leave your color blank [white]."

Paixão believes that people should have the right to self-identify as they see fit. If the state decides who belongs in which category, he says, it is a way of exerting demographic control. His hope is that Brazilians will reflect on race and be conscious of its implications in society. Through the conduct of his research and the policy recommendations it engenders, he says, "we are trying to empower the population to guarantee them visibility."

There is resistance to Paixão's theories in mainstream economics, which emphasizes market forces, not race and ethnicity. Nonetheless, he has seen the translation of some of his work into actual policy. He has seen the stamp of LAESER research on Brazilian affirmative action policies and labor market reports.

While Paixão's work has been focused on Brazil, he has been learning about and contacting other Afro-Latino communities in Latin America over the last decade, saying this was an important change in his work. "When I visit another country or population, I go to teach, but also to learn." As for his new home at UT Austin, "I will be receiving my daily lesson from students and colleagues here," he affirms.

Paixão teaches the undergraduate course Racism and Inequality in Latin America, as well as the graduate seminar Race and Ethnicity in Latin America. He has also brought LAESER to Austin. In its University of Texas version, the laboratory will broaden its scope to include a more comprehensive agenda: student researchers will collect data on indigenous populations in Latin America, as well as information on all Afro-descendant populations in the region. Paixão hopes it will become a benchmark for data on Latin America: "I wish to create a center where students can conduct studies to reflect, produce empowerment, and generate strategies for public policy. I will encourage international students to use this information to lobby or produce policy proposals for their own countries." 🌟

Note

* *A lenda da modernidade encantada: por uma crítica ao pensamento social brasileiro sobre relações raciais e projeto de Estado-Nação* (Curitiba-PR: Ed. CRV, 2013).