
RESEÑAS DE LIBROS / BOOK REVIEWS

JOHN TUTINO, *THE MEXICAN HEARTLAND: How Communities Shaped Capitalism, a Nation, and World History, 1500-2000*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018.

In this book John Tutino presents a broad interpretation of Mexican history from the time of the Aztec empire up to the twenty-first century. To carry out this ambitious project, the author first places Mexico in the context of the globalized world economy created by European expansion. Then, he turns more specifically to Mexico and to a region that he calls the “Mexican Heartland,” which embraces the area just to the north, west, and south of Mexico City. His chapters alternate between general interpretations of Mexico and detailed studies of the selected region.

The book essentially reiterates the argument that Tutino first put forward in his book *From Insurrection to Revolution in Mexico: Social Bases of Agrarian Violence, 1750-1940* (Princeton, 1987). The author sees Mexico’s village society as being at times vibrant and somewhat autonomous, as it developed mutually beneficial, symbiotic relationships with landed estates, and then threatened by the expansionist forces of world capitalism, which tended to undermine or destroy the basis of village autonomy. His previous book was criticized for reducing history to a materialist struggle about filling the stomach and ignoring the importance of culture in adaptation or response to outside threats. Now he tries to remedy that defect by discussing popular religion and the significance of patriarchy in rural society. Yet, his treatment of those topics here is too brief to enhance the interpretation significantly. Fundamentally this book is about social and economic history. Insurrections are still mostly about food.

Tutino also attempts to respond to criticisms of his award-winning book, *Making a New World: Founding Capitalism in the Bajío and Spanish America* (Duke University Press, 2011). There, he argued that modern capitalism was born in sixteenth-century Mexico because it was there that an economy based on wage labor first emerged. Now he abandons that narrow Marxist interpretation and embraces a more general, Braudelian explanation of capitalism as the system of world trade and production that came into existence once the economy became truly global in nature. Some people would see that definition as one so broad that it deprives the term of any meaning. Indeed, he even mentions different kinds of capitalism, such as “silver capitalism” and “Jesuit capitalism”

in the colonial period and then “medical capitalism” in the twentieth century. Apparently an economy can be composed of thousands of kinds of capitalisms.

Tutino continues to manifest his leftist credentials, as when he argues that the United States entered World War I “to preserve Atlantic hegemony and industrial capitalism” (7). Since the United States declared war on Germany in April 1917 and the Bolshevik Revolution began seven months later, it is hard to see how the declaration of war could be motivated by a desire to protect capitalism from a non-existent socialist revolution. The narrative of the book fundamentally is all about the struggle of the people against the capitalists.

The book’s best parts are those chapters dealing with the Heartland region. In these, Tutino presents a great deal of original research that adds significantly to the study of Mexican history. At the same time, these chapters serve as the basis for his general argument regarding the alternation of local autonomy and external threats. These chapters really do demonstrate that rural communities could and did survive in close proximity to haciendas, and also that the very existence of those communities was threatened by the periodic return of expansionist capitalism. Unfortunately, in the general chapters on “silver capitalism,” as in his 2011 book, he fails to take into account the incorporation of communities in southern Mexico into the silver economy through the coerced production of cotton textiles for mining camps and urban centers. Numerous details of Tutino’s study can also be debated, as when he uses tithe revenues to estimate agricultural production in 1829-32 (180). Since tithe collection was usually farmed out and resistance to payment intensified after Independence, Church tithe income reflects nothing but what people paid for the right to collect, not ten per cent of production.

The latter chapters cover the twentieth century, when local people were involved in the Mexican Revolution and largely benefitted from agrarian reform. However, rapid population growth led to land shortage and outmigration, which in turn helped produce the massive urbanization creating modern Mexico City. Meanwhile, a protectionist economic system supporting an authoritarian regime collapsed and was followed by massive changes resulting from low tariffs and globalization. Eventually this led to the total destruction of local communities of ancient origin, which in some cases were swallowed up by the expanding mega-metropolis.

Since the Mexican Heartland is in fact a large area, micro-regions exist within the larger region, and therefore information from one area may not be representative of the whole. Tutino is aware of this and tries to offer examples from as many areas as possible, but future scholars may well find some contradictory evidence. Moreover, a great deal research is needed to understand the history of Mexico since the 1960s, and therefore Tutino’s arguments will undoubtedly be refined in the future.

For the reader who knows little about Mexico, the general chapters provide context for understanding the history of the Heartland region. However, for those who are familiar with Mexican and world history, the general chapters might seem much too long and sometimes tedious to read. Still, all the chapters serve to support what is a convincing materialist interpretation of Mexico and the world economy. On the other hand, Tutino's prose in these lengthy chapters at times reads like the script of a leftist documentary about how noble and resilient the Mexican common people are. Everywhere they are putting up resistance to the evils of capitalism. This borders on romanticization.

Despite shortcomings found in any ambitious book, however, Tutino demonstrates the continued value and validity of an interpretation based on historical materialism. The book is an important contribution to the study of Mexico, globalization, and capitalism—no matter how one wants to define it.

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MIKAEL D. WOLFE, *WATERING THE REVOLUTION: An Environmental and Technological History of Agrarian Reform in Mexico*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2017.

Mikael D. Wolfe's book is an original, enviro-technical account of the La Laguna project spearheaded by the Mexican revolutionary government. La Laguna is a desert-like area that was famous for being one of the places where, in 1936, Lázaro Cárdenas implemented a dramatic land reform and built a large dam on the Nazas River to support that reform. The book's interest lies in the tension created in the region between the demands of intensive cultivation, introduced to the area by *cardenismo* and its successors, and the available water resources the region could offer. This tension could not be resolved because of the high demands created by a dense population there, which was two to three times higher than the region's ecological viability even after the Nazas dam was constructed: that area could support 100,000 irrigated hectares while remaining ecologically balanced, and about 150,000 hectares under imbalanced ecological conditions. This limitation was particularly put to the test by cotton crops, the prevalent plant in the region. Cotton is a very large water consumer in itself. Measured at the required depth of moisture — at least one meter — and the duration of the growing season — about half a year, it has between double to triple the water demands of tomato growth, for example.

The person responsible for this ecological imbalance was Cárdenas himself. He supported the unionization of the 28,000 local workers, as well as the strikes

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