

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

declared by their syndicates in 1935 (104 strikes in that year alone) and the general strike of May 1936. This labor dispute served to broaden a popular power base that was urgently needed in order to remove *el jefe máximo* (Plutarco Elías Calles) from the political arena (and from Mexico), as he had prevented Cárdenas from running the country as he saw fit. It was Cárdenas who promised the workers an agrarian reform in order to calm them down in May 1936, and so that they would return to work. But in the meantime, 10,000 strikebreakers had been brought to the region, so that Cárdenas was forced to allocate land—not only to the original 28,000 workers of La Laguna district, but to 38,000 workers, whom he settled in 311 collective *ejidos*, with 468,386 hectares, of which 147,710 were defined as irrigated. Beside them, several hundred colonists and private *teratenientes*, held another 89,000 hectares. In fact, a decade before the completion of the El Palmito dam, Cárdenas has already established a settlement that required 2.5 times the level of water demand allowable for the region's ecological balance. The consequences quickly made themselves felt: intensive water pumping, deepening the wells from a depth of 10 meters before the distribution of land up to 90 meters or even more in the years that followed, salinization of the land, and poisoning of its inhabitants (who consumed crops irrigated by toxic water pumped from the excessively exploited wells). Although Cárdenas and his team believed that with the completion of El Palmito they would be able to irrigate 300,000 hectares, which would suffice to accommodate the settlement in the area, this plan was not backed by an in-depth study of the natural or artificial resources of the area. This created a disaster that was not only ecological, but also economic and human, as the book clearly narrates.

The concept “*El agua de la Revolución*,” which Wolfe coined from his comprehensive study of the La Laguna case and according to which water should be regarded as a social rather than a technical resource, was of much greater significance than what Wolfe shows it to be. As Cárdenas gave the distribution of land to poor peasants precedence over any other consideration, he made it into a revolutionary battle cry which was the last effort to rescue the most important ethos of the revolution. It was this ethos that would finally transform the revolution, as he wrote in February 1931 in *El Nacional*, from a political one into a social one. This project would eventually turn Mexico into a nation, adding symbolic weight to an idea and procedure that had been treated coldly and critically from the time of Venustiano Carranza to that of Abelardo Rodríguez. Or, in the words that Calles spoke when addressing this project in June 1930, “*ni una palabra más sobre el particular*.” In November 1930, as governor of Michoacán and Secretary of the PNR, Cárdenas launched his quest to restore honor to this project, embarking on a journey that would shape it as a national ethos and would strengthen his future presidency (which he was already contemplating)

and the status of the political center in general. Land reform thus became a lever for the development of the rural cooperativism in which he believed and for the prosperity of Mexico, and was upheld as a promise that, as it was made to the people, none of the subsequent presidents would be able to deny.

However, as Wolfe writes, this approach was costly to implement, both in regard to the environment and the region's inhabitants, as it forced tens of thousands of *ejidatarios* to live in destitution and poverty. In his view, if the Nazas project had been supported by a more effective system of water transportation to the fields, by systematically infiltrating waters into the aquifers, finding alternative water sources to cover probable dry seasons when the dam was not filled, and if pumping had been executed more carefully, Cárdenas could have more effectively addressed the residential density. The approach suggested by Wolfe might not have completely saved the enterprise of settling the region, the dimensions of which in any case were larger than its absorptive capacity, even after huge governmental investments and constant attempts to correct the deficiencies, such as the *Tlahualilo* project, but it would certainly have eased it.

Wolff's book is interesting, convincing, and challenging. It is thorough, focused, and appropriately backed by statistical data, governmental papers, professional reports, minutes of meetings and conferences, newspaper articles, and private letters that were published over almost a century. However, I find two lacunae in the book. The first is due consideration of the complex social and political context of the *cardenismo* and its unique populism. The second is the absence of a comparative approach. Large dams and "revolutionary" irrigation systems were established elsewhere in Mexico, some by Cárdenas himself. From this point of view, it would have been appropriate to pay attention to the "soft" approach to *watering* in Mexico that Wolfe mentions in his introduction. A comparative study could suggest other perspectives regarding the hydraulic projects of the Mexican revolution, and thus soften a little the harsh conclusions emerging from Wolfe's *Watering the Revolution*.

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LAMONTE AIDOO, *SLAVERY UNSEEN: Sex, Power, and Violence in Brazilian History*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018.

Lamonte Aidoo's goal in *Slavery Unseen* is to "read the story of Brazilian slavery against the silence, contradictions, shame, and concealment surrounding the black body" (p. 10). His approach consists in focusing chapters on particular areas of exploitation in slavery and post-abolition that relate to sex and violence,

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