

ELLIOTT YOUNG: *Catarino Garza's Revolution on the Texas-Mexico Border*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004.

When I was in grad school, an eminent political historian told me that there was no need to study the Porfiriato anymore, because Daniel Cosío Villegas had said everything there was to say in his monumental *Historia Moderna de México*. As the years have passed, however, historians have returned to the Porfiriato, asking different questions and looking for completely different answers. This is due, in part, to shifts in both the American academic agenda, in which culture and cultural studies have gained preeminence, and the Mexican political agenda, in which democracy is now a central concern. Elliott Young's book on Catarino Garza partakes of both these trends and, in the process, makes an important contribution to the historiography of the period. It is not only a good biography of a "forgotten" revolutionary –probably the best we can expect, since there are few sources available on Garza– but is also a fine study of the cultural formation of the border between the United States and Mexico during don Porfirio's time.

Young's book is an ambitious, well written, and meticulously researched study of the years during which both the regime of Porfirio Díaz and the U.S.-Mexican border were consolidated: the former as a true political system, and the latter as a cultural space. It raises, however, a variety of theoretical and methodological issues, without resolving any of them. Hence, although the book is very convincing in some parts, it is much less so in others.

Young gives us several interpretations of what Garza's rebellion was about, even though, as he reminds us, it had very concrete "liberal" goals (p. 3) that echoed other nineteenth-century liberal movements and revolts (p. 8). Here are some examples: "Although not a great military threat [...] Garza's rebellion was an expression of broader, and potentially more destructive, racial and class antagonisms" (p. 1); "At a more abstract level, the Garzistas turned their weapons against both governments [U.S. and Mexico] because both were engaged in a similar project of capitalist development and nation building that cut directly into the autonomy and power of borderlanders" (p. 21; the same argument is made on page 59, for example); "[...] the ranks of [Garza's] army were filled with those small landowners and landless peons whose suffering was directly related to the commercialization of agriculture" (p. 132); "[Garzistas] were also fighting for something much less abstract[:] The usurpation of their land and the infringement on their regional autonomy by outsiders violated their sense of dignity, honor, and what was rightfully theirs" (p. 155).

Whereas these positions may seem contradictory, they need not be. In fact, Young integrates and documents explanations that several earlier works have

constructed for social unrest in Northern Mexico prior to or during the revolutionary period. When he says, for example, that Garza's rebellion was an expression of racial and class antagonism, he is very much in line with Benjamin Heber Johnson's argument in *Revolution in Texas. How a Forgotten Rebellion and Its Bloody Suppression Turned Mexicans into Americans* (New Haven, 2003). When he says that it was a reaction to a project of capitalist development that cut into deep values of local political autonomy, he is very close, for example, to Alan Knight's arguments about Northern *serranos* in his classic *The Mexican Revolution* (Cambridge, 1986). To argue that Garza's army was composed of dispossessed, hungry and suffering peons is very much in line with a classic Marxist interpretation of revolution and revolt. And saying that the infringement on regional autonomy violated what people thought was rightfully theirs sounds very much like Paul Vanderwood's argument about the Tomochic revolt in *The Power of God against the Guns of Government. Religious Upheaval in Mexico at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century* (Stanford, 1998). Young's study is very convincing in constructing a multilayered explanation for the revolt.

Young's problem lies not in trying to explain what, how, and why events occurred, but rather in trying to explain how historical actors made sense of what was happening to them. Young tells us in his epilogue –rightfully, I think– that “[...] understanding these objective or material conditions will not by themselves explain why some people on the border chose to pick up arms and fight with Garza, while others chose to side with the U.S. or Mexican governments. In order to answer these questions, the revolution needs to be understood through the competing stories and narratives about the border and about the revolt itself” (p. 304). Theoretically, these are two completely different things: whereas no one contests that the only way to understand objective or material conditions is to restrict oneself to what sources can explicitly tell us, there is no consensus yet in the Social Sciences on how we can understand the ways in which actors make sense of what is happening to them. First, trying to understand competing stories and narratives may not be the only way of explaining historical actors' actions –rational choice theorists can dispute that, for example– and second, there is as yet no consensus as to how one can systematically analyze competing narratives about a historical event.

If, for example, Young is right when he says that “[...] the stories that border people told about themselves and about Anglo Americans, Europeans, and ‘others’ were central to their own political struggles” (p. 25), we have only two options. One is to take what actors themselves are saying about those struggles at face value. This would mean, for example, that if Garza and his followers were advocating traditional liberal values of the nineteenth century in their *proclamas*, the relationship between those values and the objective material

conditions that the sources describe must have been the “true” motivation for the revolt. The other option –which is Young’s choice– is to assume that there is more to what actors are saying in the stories they told about themselves. In this case, the question is how do we know when to “read between the lines” and when not to. When Young asks why Garza chose to include in his autobiography stories about his relations with women and his brawls with men, and what this means, he has several possible answers. How do we know that “[Garza’s] stories, far from being random digressions, complemented his narration of ‘more interesting’ events by linking ideals of masculine honor to a nationalist, cultural, and racial struggle”? How do we know that “[...] dominating women’s bodies metaphorically expressed control over contested territory” (p. 47)? Maybe they were indeed “random digressions.” Young himself recognizes that in the printed exchange between English and Spanish-language border newspapers, there was “a dialogue made difficult by a gap between Spanish and English that allowed for mistranslations or misinterpretations” (p. 36). How can we assume, then, that there is not a cultural gap between Garza’s stories and what we make of them that allows for serious mistranslations or misinterpretations? As rationalists would say, the problem is not analyzing actions but trying to analyze motivations. When we analyze actions, we can make a series of assumptions about motivations: as long as they are useful to predict actions, it is not important what they are. But when we analyze motivations, we cannot make any assumptions; we have to rely on sources, and methodologically, there is as yet no systematic way of making cultural interpretations of sources.

Catarino Garza’s Revolution on the Texas-Mexico Border shows very convincingly that “Garza succeeded in mobilizing support because his rebellion made sense to a wider border community that felt alienated from both the U.S. and Mexican governments” (pp. 57-58), but it is not equally convincing when it tries to show how that *wider* border community made sense of what the revolt meant. It is a book definitely worth reading, even if it takes the theoretical and methodological debates for granted.

Luis Barrón

CIDE

PAUL J. VANDERWOOD: *Juan Soldado: Rapist, Murderer, Martyr, Saint*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004.

In 1938, eight-year-old Olga Camacho left her home in Tijuana for the corner store. She did not return. After a frenzied search of the neighborhood, her body was found. Olga had been raped, her throat slashed. A young soldier assigned