

BOOK REVIEW ESSAYS

Rethinking Mexican Modernity: Nation-State Formation, Politics, and the *Longue Durée*

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This essay reviews the following works:

Chino: Anti-Chinese Racism in Mexico, 1880–1940. By Jason Oliver Chang. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2017. Pp. xiv + 257. \$28.00 paperback. ISBN: 9780252082344.

Paisanos Chinos: Transpacific Politics among Chinese Immigrants in Mexico. By Fredy González. Oakland: University of California Press, 2017. Pp. xiii + 277. \$29.95 paperback. ISBN: 9780520290204.

Camaradas: Nueva historia del comunismo en México. Edited by Carlos Illades. Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2017. Pp. 375. \$18.95 hardcover. ISBN: 9786077457251.

Seen and Heard in Mexico: Children and Revolutionary Cultural Nationalism. By Elena Jackson Albarrán. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015. Pp. 414. \$35.00 paperback. ISBN: 9780803265349.

The Blood Contingent: The Military and the Making of Modern Mexico, 1876–1911. By Stephen B. Neufeld. Albuquerque: University of Mexico Press, 2017. Pp. vii + 400. \$29.95 paperback. ISBN: 9780826358059.

A History of Infamy: Crime, Truth, and Justice in Mexico. By Pablo Piccato. Oakland: University of California Press, 2017. Pp. xi + 374. \$34.95 paperback. ISBN: 9780520292628.

The Power and Politics of Art in Postrevolutionary Mexico. By Stephanie J. Smith. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017. Pp. xiii + 275. \$29.95 paperback. ISBN: 9781469635682.

Toward a Meta-archeology of Modern Mexico: New Approaches to the *Longue Durée*

From the late colonial period to the present, Mexican intellectuals have widely debated the meanings of Mexican modernity. Is it a national aspiration, a historical transformation, or an analytical category? In the past two years alone, the *Latin American Research Review* has published four review essays on modern Mexico. This one joins those attempts to elucidate the concept. Despite their varied approaches, Mark Wasserman, Rubén Gallo, Mary Kay Vaughan, and Jürgen Buchenau have collectively called for a synthesis of politics and culture.¹ Drawing on another recent sample of Mexicanist scholarship, this essay enhances

¹ Mark Wasserman, "All Politics Are Local: Nineteenth-Century Mexico Revisited," *Latin American Research Review* 52, no. 5 (2017): 901–909; Rubén Gallo, "Rereading Postrevolutionary Mexico City: Recent Trends in Mexican Cultural Studies," *Latin American Research Review* 52, no. 4 (2017): 728–734; Mary Kay Vaughan, "Mexico 1940–1968 and Beyond: Perfect Dictatorship? Dictablanda? or PRI State Hegemony?," *Latin American Research Review* 53, no. 1 (2018): 167–176; Jürgen Buchenau, "Beyond Revolution: New Perspectives on Late Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Mexico," *Latin American Research Review* 53, no. 3 (2018): 639–647.

that prescription by arguing for a *longue durée* approach to nation-state formation that centers race and gender in relation to political violence.

Like most Latin Americanist historiographies, those on nineteenth- and twentieth-century Mexico are products of their historical moments. Understandably, Mexico's unfulfilled promise of revolutionary change has heralded 1910 as the genesis of modern Mexico. During the consolidation of the postrevolutionary state, artists and intellectuals cast "the revolution" as an irreversible rupture. They rendered disparate regional movements into a singular national event, capitalized as "the Revolution."² Although their interpretations dominated the historiography for decades, the 1970s and 1980s witnessed the rise of dissident paradigms and the professionalization of regional history.³ Responding to the state violence of the 1960s, Marxian revisionists challenged the populist tendencies of the old orthodoxy.⁴ No longer would the revolution mark a sharp break from the past. A new discourse of betrayed revolution emerged, one in which the Porfiriato morphed into the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI). However, this framework lost currency during the cultural turn of the 1990s. While historians such as Alan Knight cautioned against "statetology," others such as Gilbert Joseph and Daniel Nugent sought approaches that would "bring the state back in without leaving the people out."⁵ Subsequent postrevisionists have extended this line of analysis beyond the 1940s. As the field has become more inclusive, it has become more sophisticated at integrating the social and structural dimensions of power.⁶

For at least a decade, the literature has gestured toward a *longue durée* history of modern Mexico. This approach advances two central contributions: it problematizes the assumption of a revolutionary rupture and underscores the racialized and gendered violence of nation-state formation. While historians often treat the Porfiriato and postrevolutionary regime as exceptions to a longer history of violence, nation-state formation is a cacophonous process. From independence to the present, the relative consolidation of the Mexican state has always been subject to popular contestation. Indeed, nation-state formation is constantly ongoing. Whenever "the state" seems to triumph, it undergoes new permutations. In the same way that the Porfiriato precipitated the revolution, the new order gave way to one-party rule and Marxist insurgencies. Although the Priista state had suppressed or co-opted the revolutionary left by the mid-1980s, their electoral counterparts claimed a historic victory in July 2018 with the election of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador.

At each of these turns, race and gender have both shaped and been shaped by the violent processes of nation-state formation. Contrary to what intellectuals such as Justo Sierra Méndez (1848–1912), José Vasconcelos (1882–1959), or Manuel Gamio (1883–1960) claimed, Mexican modernity has always been an open question. The postrevolutionary regime no more defined the boundaries of Mexicanidad than did its predecessor, though both certainly tried. Men and women of all ethnic backgrounds fought for inclusion within the body politic of the mestizo state, while challenging the premises of that ideal. This essay develops these arguments in three parts. The first section begins by exposing the harsh realities of the "Pax Porfiriana" and the "Pax Priista," calling attention to the tensions of race and nation vis-à-vis the gendered interactions of Mexican soldiers and the racialized experiences of Chinese Mexicans. Similarly, the second section examines the relationship between gender and power from the so-called reconstructive revolution (ca. 1920–1940) to the ascent of the revolutionary left in the early 1960s. Finally, the third section takes up Pablo Piccato's call for a reinvigorated public sphere in the face of state impunity and the contemporary legacies of the Mexican left.

² On this concept, see Illene O'Malley, *The Myth of the Revolution: Hero Cults and the Institutionalization of the Mexican State, 1920–1940* (New York: Praeger, 1986); and Thomas Benjamin, *La Revolución: Mexico's Great Revolution as Memory, Myth and History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000).

³ For a classic example of microhistory, see Luis González y González, *Pueblo en vilo: Microhistoria de San José de Gracia* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1968).

⁴ Adolfo Gilly, *La revolución interrumpida* (Mexico City: El Caballito, 1971); Arnaldo Córdova, *La ideología de la Revolución Mexicana: La formación del nuevo régimen* (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1973); Ramona Falcón, *El agrarismo en Veracruz: La etapa radical (1928–1935)* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1977); Nora Hamilton, *The Limits of State Autonomy: Post-revolutionary Mexico* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).

⁵ For a detailed discussion of the historiography, see Gilbert Joseph and Daniel Nugent, eds., *Everyday Forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), 12.

⁶ Tanalís Padilla, *Rural Resistance in the Land of Zapata: The Jaramillista Movement and the Myth of the Pax Priista, 1940–1962* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); Jaime Pensado, *Rebel Mexico: Student Unrest and Authoritarian Political Culture during the Long Sixties* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013); Louise Walker, *Waking from the Dream: Mexico's Middle Classes after 1968* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013); Alexander Aviña, *Specters of Revolution: Peasant Guerrillas in the Cold War Mexican Countryside* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Gladys McCormick, *The Logic of Compromise in Mexico: How the Countryside Was Key to the Emergence of Authoritarianism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

From “Pax Porfiriana” to “Pax Priísta”: Rethinking Race and Nation, ca. 1880–1940

In *The Blood Contingent: The Military and the Making of Modern Mexico, 1876–1911*, Stephen Neufeld argues that the military served as metaphor and metonym for modern Mexico. In doing so, he joins a growing number of scholars in deconstructing the myth of the “Pax Porfiriana.”⁷ Drawing on army records, medical reports, literary accounts, and personal memoirs, he reconstructs the everyday life of the soldiers and soldaderas who colonized northern and southern Mexico during the late nineteenth century. In addition to illuminating popular politics, he offers the first cultural and social history of the Porfirian military, foregrounding the gendered and racialized experiences of nation-state formation.

Although Neufeld’s sources privilege the Military Command of the Federal District, which deployed troops across Mexico, they reveal the power dynamics of state hegemony. As Neufeld contends, conscription epitomized biopolitical control. The army impressed working-class teenage boys, forcing them to abandon the *patria chica* in favor of “national” loyalty. Despite the *leva*’s dubious legality, few citizens had the financial or juridical means to evade it. Those who fled risked capture, corporal punishment, or execution. In an era dominated by positivism, the army aspired to unquestionable discipline, including the capacity to kill on command. Yet, for a regime built on “order and progress,” it lacked basic necessities like food and clothing.

To compensate for the army’s shortcomings, officers turned to soldaderas. Although Neufeld claims that “women and family experienced Porfirian military life just as did the male troops,” his evidence demonstrates that soldaderas constituted a distinct class (96). Unlike soldiers, soldaderas exercised considerable agency in traveling with and caring for the troops. Though soldiers and soldaderas often formed sexual relationships, soldaderas were not sex workers. Rather, they often formed familial bonds with their male partners. Yet such relationships were neither romantic nor egalitarian. Men, women, and animals slept together in close quarters on individual “beds” the size of a grave and frequently contracted communicable illnesses. Although men were more likely than women to display external symptoms of venereal disease, officials targeted soldaderas for invasive exams. Not surprisingly, women resisted through labor strikes and medical forgeries, revealing the limits of “social hygiene.”

By chronicling the mundane practices of military life, Neufeld demonstrates that they simultaneously reflected and reinforced the Porfiriato’s imperialist impulses. The army maintained the state’s monopoly on power, liberally deploying it against the unsanctioned violence of “bandits” and “barbarians.” As he emphasizes, “Those not fully harnessed to the modern national project became enemies” (273). Regardless of rank, all soldiers were responsible for exterminating those enemies—the Yaqui of Sonora and the Maya of the Yucatán Peninsula. The “pacification” of these regions protected foreign investments and consolidated the Porfiriato by shifting the locus of power from *provincia* to Mexico City, and it depended on both men and women mobilizing gendered and racialized logics of (re)productive labor.

By elucidating the professionalization of the Porfirian army, Neufeld raises new questions about political violence and nation-state formation. Although he highlights the gendered experiences of militarization, he sidesteps broader debates about race and nation in an era of widespread genocide. In part, this is due to the book’s structure. While each chapter addresses specific aspects of military life, their thematic emphasis veers from the larger narrative. He could have elaborated more on how the Porfiriato differed from other periods. Despite these peccadillos, he displays an impressive command of his sources and even braves imaginative reenactments in between chapters, where he speculates how ordinary Mexicans responded to state demands.

In addition to militarization, the Porfiriato prioritized migration. Although numerous scholars have studied the relationship between indigeneity and Mexicanidad, they have been less attentive to other racial formations.⁸ Only recently has the historiography begun to examine the connections between Mexico, Asia,

⁷ Raymond Craib, *Cartographic Mexico: A History of State Fixations and Fugitive Landscapes* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004); Mark Overmyer-Velázquez, *Visions of the Emerald City: Modernity, Tradition, and the Formation of Porfirian Oaxaca* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006); Patrick McNamara, *Sons of the Sierra: Juárez, Díaz, and the People of Ixtlán, Oaxaca, 1855–1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

⁸ Recent examples of the former include María L. O. Muñoz, *Stand Up and Fight: Participatory Indigenismo, Populism, and Mobilization in Mexico, 1970–1984* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2016); David Dalton, *Mestizo Modernity: Race, Technology, and the Body in Postrevolutionary Mexico* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2018); Stephen Lewis, *Rethinking Mexican Indigenismo: The INI’s Coordinating Center in Highland Chiapas and the Fate of a Utopian Project* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2018). Seminal studies of Afro-Mexicans include Herman L. Bennett, *Africans in Colonial Mexico: Absolutism, Christianity, and Afro-Creole Consciousness, 1570–1640* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2005); Joan Bristol, *Christians, Blasphemers, and Witches: Afro-Mexican Ritual Practice in the Seventeenth Century* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007); Frank Proctor, *Damned Notions of Liberty: Slavery, Culture, and Power in Colonial Mexico, 1640–1769* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007).

and the Pacific world.⁹ In *Chino: Anti-Chinese Racism in Mexico, 1880–1940*, Jason Chang offers an original approach to this problem. An ethnic studies scholar by training, he introduces an Asian Americanist lens to the history of Chinese Mexicans. While this framework recognizes parallels between the United States and Mexico—both countries have treated Asian migrants and their descendants as perpetual foreigners—it attempts to “distinguish between Orientalism as the culture of imperialism found in Euro-American empires and the Asian racial form developed in a Latin American context as the domesticating racial populism of revolutionary nationalism” (18).

As Chang argues, Mexico’s 1883 colonization law granted white settlers the right to colonize “unused” lands, displacing hundreds of indigenous peoples. Building on mid-century attempts to recruit Chinese workers, it “welcomed” migrants as *colonos* and offered them conditional citizenship while making it more difficult for *ejidatarios* to defend their property claims. The ensuing demographic shift restructured Mexico’s racial geographies into a criollo north, an urbanized center, and an indigenous south. Although Chinese migrants gradually adjusted to these circumstances, they remained “*motores de sangre*” (akin to draft animals) in the eyes of the state.

Mexico’s perceived labor shortage and migration campaigns strengthened state hegemony in contested spaces vis-à-vis racialized violence and mestizo nationalism. During the revolution, armed combatants conflated the Chinese with the Porfiriato and targeted them for extermination. As Chang reminds us, the Torreón massacre of 1911 occurred weeks before Francisco Madero launched his Plan de San Luis. Similar assaults erupted in Chiapas and Sonora before Madero claimed the presidency. Although Chang bypasses historiographical debates about the revolution, he is not the first to note the convergence of *anti-chinismo* and revolutionary violence. However, he departs from previous interpretations in asserting that “the xenophobic explanation is incomplete because it too hastily constructs the formation of mestizo identity as its origin” (97). At the same time, his evidence does not support his claim that “anti-Chinese demonstrations could be found in every state” (109).

Yet Chang maintains that mestizo nationalism was predicated on anti-Chinese racism. In contrast to countless historians who have ascribed the myth of mestizaje to the (post)revolutionary intelligentsia, Chang attributes it to the political battlefields of Obregonismo and the Maximato. He argues that “anti-Chinese politics became a panacea to Mexico’s perennial ‘Indian problem’ because it allowed people to think of themselves as citizens living under a necessary and munificent state” (126). Though tantalizing, this theory raises more questions than answers. To be sure, anti-Chinese organizations gained prominence during and after the revolution. Sonoran governor Plutarco Elías Calles (1915–1919) oversaw one of the largest anti-Chinese campaigns, and Sinaloa’s Junta Nacionalista called on President Álvaro Obregón to deport the Chinese in preparation for the repatriation of twenty thousand Mexicans. Similar responses followed in Nayarit, Durango, Coahuila, and Tamaulipas. By 1929, anti-Chinese racism reached national proportions. However, Chang could have elaborated more on anti-chinismo’s regional implications. Particularly with respect to land reform, it is unclear precisely *how* “the racial contract of mestizo nationalism conscripted a broad spectrum of people to occupy a new category of state subjection—the agrarian citizen” (171).

Despite these loose ends, *Chino* remains an important—and provocative—contribution to the growing historiography on Chinese Mexicans. Chang attests to the challenges of writing a historical monograph with interdisciplinary approaches. In doing so, he poses important methodological questions: Where should we draw our interpretive lines? How much latitude do we have to read beyond our sources? How can we simultaneously historicize and theorize our subjects/objects of study?

Fredy González takes up some of these problems in *Paisanos Chinos: Transpacific Politics among Chinese Immigrants in Mexico*. Looking beyond Mexico, he argues that “Chinese participation in transnational political issues was the legacy of their exclusion from the Mexican nation during the 1930s” (4). Whereas Chang treats anti-chinismo as a barometer for the racialized Mexican state, González demonstrates that Chinese Mexicans straddled two worlds between the consolidation of the postrevolutionary state in the early twentieth century and the establishment of diplomatic relations with the People’s Republic of China in 1972. González thereby reconstructs the politics of the Chinese diaspora. At the same time, he attends to

Mexico Press, 2010); Matthew Restall, *The Black Middle: Africans, Mayans, and Spaniards in Colonial Yucatán* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013).

⁹ Roberto Chao Romero, *The Chinese in Mexico, 1882–1940* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2010); Julia María Schiavone Camacho, *Chinese Mexicans: Transpacific Migration and the Search for a Homeland, 1910–1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); Grace Delgado, *Making the Chinese Mexican: Global Migration, Localism, and Exclusion in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013); Tatiana Seijas, *Asian Slaves in Colonial Mexico: From Chinos to Indians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

the internal variations of Chinese Mexicanidad, contrasting the relative eclipse of Chinese communities in the northwest with their subsequent resurgence in central Mexico and other regions.

Like Chang, González demonstrates that the Maximato (1928–1934) colluded with anti-Chinese organizations to secure one-party rule. However, he extends his analysis to the transnational realm. As the postrevolutionary state consolidated its power, it specifically targeted the Chinese in Sonora and Sinaloa. Meanwhile, the Tong Wars in the United States and domestic developments within China divided Chinese Mexicans between the Chee Kung Tong and the Guomindang. Despite this friction, González asserts that Chinese Mexicans leveraged their transnational ties to resist Mexico's deportation campaigns. Although the northwestern expulsions forced most of the remaining Chinese to relocate, their engagement with transnational Chinese politics pressured Mexican officials to delay further removals. Nevertheless, González recognizes that by the 1930s, Mexico had deported three-quarters of its Chinese population.

Faced with statelessness, Chinese Mexicans redoubled their activism. While the first generation approached retirement by the 1940s, their children negotiated their bicultural identities. Meanwhile, the onset of World War II deepened the diaspora's political divisions, with some supporting the People's Republic of China (PRC) and others the Republic of China (ROC). On balance, however, González emphasizes that World War II helped Chinese Mexicans "regularize" their status. The postwar period then ushered in a golden age of diasporic politics. While the PRC styled itself as the vanguard of the "Third World," the ROC's attaché threatened to report the diaspora's "communist sympathizers" to Mexico's secret police.

Through his impressive study of new primary sources, González reconceptualizes our understandings of the Chinese diaspora in Mexico by centering their engagement with transnational politics. Unlike most scholars, he differentiates between the Chinese Mexicans who supported the PRC and those who endorsed the ROC. The book's prose is also clear and concise, making it ideal for classroom use. Perhaps its only shortcoming is the way in which González sometimes treats his sources. Like Chang, he could have been more critical in noting certain archival silences, namely the absence of women. Both scholars could have also treated gender as an analytical category, and they could have done more to recognize the fragmentary nature of Chinese voices, though González partially overcomes this problem with oral interviews.

Living in (Post)revolutionary Time: Gender and Power, ca. 1920–1960

As the aforementioned works have attested, the "Pax Porfiriana" and "Pax Priísta" are misnomers. Both during the Porfiriato and after the revolution, the Mexican state militarized the homeland, exterminated indigenous peoples, and persecuted Chinese migrants. Stephanie Smith showcases the "softer" aspects of nation-state formation. In *The Power and Politics of Art in Postrevolutionary Mexico*, she offers a new monograph on two of the best studied subjects of Mexican historiography. Despite the vast literature on Mexican muralism and postrevolutionary politics, few scholars have examined them in tandem.¹⁰ By contrast, Smith argues that "art and state policy overlapped or even merged in a complex pattern of mutual accommodation alternating with state repression and the artists' resistance" (13). As her multilingual research in Mexico, France, Holland, Italy, and the United States demonstrates, famed artists like Diego Rivera, Frida Kahlo, and David Alfaro Siqueiros worked within a transnational milieu. Her sources include documents from the Partido Comunista Mexicano (PCM), the papers of Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera, the archives of the Communist International, the formerly declassified files of Mexico's secret police, and the records of prominent art collectives. In addition to approaching familiar subjects in new ways, Smith contributes to our growing knowledge about the role of women and gender relations within the Mexican left.

Smith argues that the founding of the PCM in 1919 inaugurated modern Mexico, an era in which "art and politics intertwined as artists played major roles in political affairs, and politicians appropriated the art to transmit the 'official' national history" (23). Despite this claim, she notes that artists and politicians often pursued different objectives. Rivera, Kahlo, and Siqueiros had fraught relationships with the PCM. These tensions reflected broader leftist divisions, particularly over President Lázaro Cárdenas's decision to grant Leon Trotsky political asylum in 1937. While elite figures debated Trotsky's case, transnational feminists like Tina Modotti elbowed their way into the cultural revolution, challenging the patriarchal politics of the

¹⁰ Recent and related works include Rick López, *Crafting Mexico: Intellectuals, Artisans, and the State after the Revolution* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Mary Coffey, *How a Revolutionary Art Became Official Culture: Murals, Museums, and the Mexican State* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012); Alejandro Anreus, Robin Greeley, and Leonard Folgarait, eds., *Mexican Muralism: A Critical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); John Lear, *Picturing the Proletariat: Artists and Labor in Revolutionary Mexico, 1908–1940* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017); Lynda Klich, *The Noisemakers: Estridentismo, Vanguardism, and Social Action in Postrevolutionary Mexico* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018).

PCM. At the same time, women and sexual minorities such as Salvador Novo remained largely marginalized. They experienced discrimination from both the state and their heterosexual male comrades. Security forces disproportionately targeted feminists, while men such as Rivera relegated them to peripheral roles in the PCM. When women such as Concha Michel fought back, they jeopardized their Marxist credentials. Still, women mattered. Even Rivera credited a woman, Frances Toor, with internationalizing Mexican art.

By drawing on new archival sources, Smith illuminates the intimate relationships between Mexican artists and the PCM. She is one of the first historians to reconstruct the personal and public lives of women artists by treating them on their own terms and eschewing the trope of the scorned lover. However, the book's focus on individuals is also a weakness. Smith's eclectic approach strives for inclusivity, but the narrative arc frequently reverts to male figures like Rivera, Siqueiros, and Trotsky. Chapters 1 and 3 focus on the PCM and Trotsky while chapters 2 and 4 return to women in those contexts, before concluding with an addendum about two prominent art collectives, the Liga de Escritores y Artistas Revolucionarios and the Taller de Gráfica Popular. Despite these organizational quibbles, Smith's feminist analysis of Mexican artists and the PCM compels us to think more critically about the gender politics of the broader Latin American left.

In a similar fashion, Elena Jackson Albarrán's *Seen and Heard in Mexico: Children and Revolutionary Cultural Nationalism* examines one of the most understudied aspects of postrevolutionary Mexico: childhood. As the title book's title suggests, the postrevolutionary regime politicized the youth. In a country that lost 1.5 million citizens to civil war, children symbolized revolutionary redemption. By combining government documents with children's words and images, Jackson Albarrán challenges the leftist tendency to romanticize the postrevolutionary proletariat. Children, she argues, were the true heirs of the revolution. Yet, contrary to what state officials believed, children were as socially and ideologically diverse as adult citizens.

Jackson Albarrán begins by examining the discursive and spatial dimensions of childhood. She argues that the postrevolutionary state redefined children as proletarian subjects. In her words, "The symbolic child had become an indelible presence in the official language and imagery and real children had been brought into the public sphere so intentionally that Cárdenas had only to lean more heavily on this established trope in order to push a more radical reform agenda" (73). Accordingly, state officials turned to the visual arts and communication technologies. Though seemingly apolitical, children's art competitions often reproduced patriarchal and racialized logics. Adult jurors privileged boys' drawings, fetishized artwork from predominantly indigenous states, and tokenized indigenous winners. By contrast, the radio promised to democratize childhood. Amid a growing rural/urban divide, the Secretaría de Educación Pública relied on radio programming to promote socialist education. Rural teachers similarly mobilized Teatro Guiñol, an itinerant puppet theatre, to "modernize" the countryside in the face of Catholic opposition, while reinforcing racist ideas through characters like El Negrito.

In other cases, children developed their political consciousness through international or national organizations. Within Mexican organizations they participated in literacy campaigns, prohibitionist rallies, and national conferences. Many of these events, however, reified conservative assumptions. For example, literacy campaigns granted urban children pedagogical authority over their rural peers. Even international organizations such as the Boy and Girl Scouts encountered national hierarchies. While Jackson Albarrán suggests that the Boy Scouts revived Mexican masculinity after the bloodbath of the revolution, their adherence to foreign citizenship models did not relieve them from the so-called Indian problem. Despite their imported uniforms, they addressed each other by Nahuatl titles. Like most privileged Mexicans, they exalted an "Aztec past" and contributed to other forms of internal colonialism. Similarly, the Girl Scouts reproduced gendered barriers. They modeled their uniforms on the Red Cross as part of their conditioning for revolutionary motherhood. Such gendered and racialized performances displayed the political stakes of Mexican childhood.

Whereas Smith and Jackson Albarrán's focus on "soft" power in the context of gender relations and nation-state formation, Pablo Piccato treats real and discursive violence in tandem while problematizing the framework of nation-state formation. Though gender is not his primary category of analysis, it enhances his argument. Since 1985, there have been over fifty thousand registered cases of femicide in Mexico. Nearly a third of them occurred during the last sexennial. Aware of this crisis, Piccato begins with an important recognition: "Like any other history book, this one tries to understand the present" (1). As he demonstrates in *A History of Infamy: Crime, Truth, and Justice in Mexico*, the origins of the narco-security state and its complicity with organized crime and gender-based violence lay in the structures of the postrevolutionary regime.

From the 1920s to the 1950s, Mexico witnessed the disintegration of the "crime-truth-justice nexus" (2). According to Piccato, the revolution and its aftermath complicated the relationship between truth and politics. Of course this process was gendered. Beginning with the abolition of jury trials in Mexico City in

the late 1920s, women lost their right to testify in court. As in the Porfiriato, the public sphere once again became a male space, accentuated by the sensationalism of the *nota roja*. By subjecting “the truth” to literary debate, new genres like crime fiction and the *nota roja* became double-edged swords. They simultaneously democratized access to restricted information and legitimized criminals’ truth claims.

In the absence of reliable state institutions, Mexicans sought imperfect solutions. The same male “experts” who professionalized the criminological sciences tolerated political corruption and enabled the federal government to profit from caciques and pistoleros. Notwithstanding the regime’s revolutionary rhetoric, women disproportionately bore the burden of state impunity and gender-based violence. Meanwhile, the poor confronted the challenge of criminality. In Piccato’s words, “The fact that pistoleros were not prosecuted was not an anecdotal aspect of state formation but a basic requirement for the consolidation of the political system” (263). However, this conclusion raises broader theoretical questions. Although he takes the state seriously, Piccato questions the historiography’s emphasis on nation-state formation. Instead, he centers the role of civil society and the public sphere in restoring truth and justice vis-à-vis criminal literacy. Yet this process justified extrajudicial “justice.” How, then, should Mexicans contest state hegemony?

Revolutionary Retrospections: Mexican Marxism Reconsidered

Researched at a time when narco-state violence reached unprecedented proportions, *A History of Infamy* stands as one of the discipline’s most prescient commentaries. By being the first to historicize the social processes that sustain and constrain truth claims, Piccato joins numerous scholars in dispelling the myth that Mexico is inherently violent. At the same time, Mexico’s violent past and present are undeniable. As Piccato notes, there can be no justice without truth and no truth without victims. After surviving hundreds of forced “disappearances” orchestrated by former president Enrique Peña Nieto, Mexicans are desperate for alternatives. Regardless of whether President Andrés Manuel López Obrador’s “Cuarta Transformación” succeeds, Piccato leaves us with a liberal conception of truth as justice and justice as due process—a proposition worth contemplating alongside the legacies of the dissident left.

In Carlos Illades’s new anthology, *Camaradas: Nueva historia del comunismo en México*, Illades and his collaborators revisit the rise and fall of Mexican Marxism. In contrast to Smith and others who privilege the communist elements of the PCM, they argue that communism was the least important factor in the party’s founding in 1919. Indeed, the PCM’s internal tensions contributed to its dilution into the Partido Socialista Unificado de México (PSUM) in 1981, the Partido Mexicano Socialista (PMS) in 1987, the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD) in 1989 (initially under Lázaro Cárdenas’s son, Cuauhtémoc), and finally the Movimiento Regeneración Nacional (Morena) under López Obrador.

Though the volume examines the political, cultural, and intellectual history of Mexican Marxism from the 1920s to the 1980s, its best interventions are in political history. Daniel Kent Carrasco emphasizes the PCM’s eclectic and transnational origins, Víctor Jéfets and Lazar Jéfets complicate the party’s relationship to agrarianism, and Patricio Herrera González reappraises the role of controversial labor organizer Vicente Lombardo Toledano. But most importantly, Massimo Modonesi argues that the PCM’s decriminalization in 1978 (as part of a broader reform that granted political amnesty to the insurgent left) relegitimized the PRI. Internal tensions came to a head at the 1981 party congress, when the leadership split over electoral democracy. Amid this context, the PSUM emerged as a dual-pronged strategy: elections cum activism. Nevertheless, the left became further fragmented. The consolidation of the PSUM coincided with the rise of other PCM splinter groups, eventually yielding the PMS. More decisively, the presidential election of 1988 sealed the left’s dénouement. The left’s decline began with a progressive minority within the PRI who formed the Coalición Democrática (CD) under Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas and Porfirio Muñoz Ledo (now president of the Chamber of Deputies) to oppose the official Priista candidate, Carlos Salinas de Gortari. Styling itself as the last of the left, the PMS endorsed Cárdenas only when it became evident that it would lose otherwise. Most of the left followed suit. Despite their best efforts, the PRI stole the election. In what followed, the left regrouped under the PRD with Cárdenas at the helm. Unlike previous mainstream parties, the PRD (and Morena by extension) absorbed partisan socialists.

By reconstructing the political history of Mexican communism, *Camaradas* addresses some of the historiography’s most pressing questions while raising others: How should we characterize the Mexican state throughout the twentieth century? How has Mexican Marxism engaged with the broader Latin American left? How have marginalized communities responded to state repression? What were the gender and racial politics of Mexico’s revolutionary movements? This last question is especially salient, since none of the essays discuss gender and only one of them is coauthored by a woman.

Within the broader context of the *longue durée*, *Camaradas* reveals the longevity of Mexico's revolutionary process. The PRI sought but did not secure a monopoly on revolution, paving the way for the second-wave revolutionaries of the 1960s. Unlike their predecessors in the early twentieth century, these new movements were explicitly Marxist. The volume's coverage of the PCM and related causes is necessarily selective, often privileging institutional and ideological analysis over political violence, but the authors recognize that Marxism is fundamentally heterogenous. Read alongside Piccato's call for a reinvigorated public sphere, *Camaradas* reminds us of the failures and possibilities of the Mexican left. While Piccato's public sphere is premised on a liberal conception of democracy, Illades and his collaborators are more sympathetic to radical politics. Though the volume's strongest essay focuses on the dissolution of the dissident left, all of the authors attest to the constant renegotiation of the "Pax Priísta." Precisely how these processes are evolving under López Obrador's self-proclaimed Cuarta Transformación—a moniker that harkens back to Mexico's other three "great" transformations of Independence, Reform, and Revolution—remains to be determined. Has the "Pax Priísta" or its inheritor, the "Pax Príanista" under presidents Vicente Fox (2000–2006) and Felipe Calderón (2006–2012), simply drifted off? How has nation-state formation in Mexico changed in light of the neoliberal turn of the late 1980s and the more recent resurgence of the global right? It is too early to make any definitive predictions, but one conclusion is clear: Mexico's ongoing "democratization" has been more violent than many scholars previously believed.¹¹ One may even argue that Mexico's alleged democratic opening after 1978 has merely created more channels for narco dollars, further underscoring the challenges of nation-state formation.

Toward a History of Futures Past

As the works surveyed above have demonstrated, recent scholarship has centered the themes of violence, race, and gender. Neufeld, Chang, and González represent Mexican modernity as a historical process rooted in asymmetrical relations of power. By foregrounding the intersections of statism and racialized violence, they attest to the *longue durée* processes of nation-state formation. Read alongside foundational studies, they disrupt the trifold myths of revolutionary rupture, mestizo nationalism, and political stability. Smith, Jackson Albarrán, and Piccato similarly examine the continuities of the Porfiriato while tracing the permutations of the Priísta state through a gendered lens. Although the cultural politics of the postrevolutionary regime created partial apertures for democratic participation, authoritarianism remained the order of the day. As Illades's anthology implies, the PRI retained the Porfiriato's ability to repress and co-opt dissidence at the majority's expense.

By the late 1980s, the PRI's relative hegemony was gradually unraveling. Mexicans had had enough of the institutionalized revolution. Yet only in 2000 did the center-right Partido de Acción Nacional (PAN) claim the presidency with the election of Vicente Fox. The rest is (recent) history. But why was this change so long in coming? Whereas social scientists have explained this transition through formal modeling, historians are accounting for it by extending the temporal lines both directions. For if "the historiography of the revolution has influenced scholarship on the era after 1940," as Tanalís Padilla has observed, the political trends that underwrote those literatures have similarly redefined our understandings of prerevolutionary Mexico.¹² The works reviewed in this essay thus reframe our study of modern Mexico by casting the period in a more holistic vein.

Following the postrevisionist turn, historians of modern Mexico have begun moving toward a more inclusive history of the present. While we do not have all the answers, studying the Porfiriato and the Priísta state in tandem reveals more parallels than discontinuities. If the historiography of the last thirty years has taught us anything, it is that the state is not an abstraction: it emerges through the patterned—and often violent—interactions of everyday life. Beyond multicausal arguments, we need multivocal and multidimensional histories. We need the diachronic and synchronic, the structural and experiential, the discursive and material. As we rethink the legacies of authoritarianism, we need to be more attentive to gender and the transnational turn. At a time of international refugee crises, we need to think beyond the politics of the nation-state and move toward a history of the present, a history beyond borders, a history of futures past.

¹¹ Paul Gillingham and Benjamin Smith, eds., *Dictablanda: Politics, Work, and Culture in Mexico, 1938–1968* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014); Randal Sheppard, *A Persistent Revolution: History, Nationalism, and Politics in Mexico since 1968* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2016); Jaime Pensado and Enrique Ochoa, eds., *México Beyond 1968: Revolutionaries, Radicals, and Repression during the Global Sixties and Subversive Seventies* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2018).

¹² Tanalís Padilla, *Rural Resistance in the Land of Zapata: The Jaramillista Movement and the Myth of the Pax Priísta, 1940–1962* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 13.

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