

## Reseñas/Book Reviews

– *The Triumph of Politics: The Return of the Left in Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador*, by George Philip and Francisco Panizza. Cambridge: Polity, 2011.

Jorge Castañeda's division of the Latin American new left between the responsible moderate left on one side and the irresponsible populist left on the other has been disturbingly influential, especially in English-language texts. He dismissed the populists as being intent on maintaining popularity at any cost, picking as many fights as possible with Washington and getting as much control as they can over natural resources, especially oil and gas. A careful English-language study of the three governments of Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, Eva Morales in Bolivia and Rafael Correa in Ecuador has therefore been needed and the book being reviewed here fills the gap admirably.

The authors, both senior academics at the London School of Economics, write that these three leaders combine novelty and 'Old Left values' in a way that is distinctive: 'Their willingness to use both electoral and extra-constitutional tactics against democratically elected governments and legislatures, their radical populist rhetoric, their use of plebiscites to strengthen the presidency, their economic nationalism and strong anti-US stance together form a distinctive political brew' (p. 2) that means they belong in a class of their own, despite the many differences between them. In studying them, Philip and Panizza focus on 'high politics issues', claiming that 'the tactical, rhetorical, organizational and institutional aspects of politics not only matter to the general study of politics but are of particular significance in our three cases' (p. 8).

The approach taken is quite a novel one in the burgeoning literature on Latin America's new left. The six chapters are divided into three pairs: the first two examine the key factors behind the rise of these three leaders, with chapters on the military and on social movements; the second two look at the means used to keep themselves in power with chapters on radical populism and on the mix of personalism, plebiscites and institutions; the third turns to the wider context of economic and international policy issues with chapters on the politics of oil and gas and on regional integration. Each chapter offers a searching but very balanced analytical account and together they add up to a very insightful analysis of the distinctive form of politics being practised by all three leaders. As such the book is an immense contribution to understanding what is most distinctive about the rise of the new left in the region.

Again and again the authors identify key insights that serve to pinpoint essential features often missed by analysts either less familiar with the region's politics or more dismissive of how it operates. For example, in analysing the decline of the military's political role and the rise of social movements, the book concludes that while forms of military-political activity continue to influence the political process, 'the importance of mass mobilizations in both triggering institutional crises and in shaping their outcome has made civil society movements the new moderating power in weakly institutionalized political orders within the region' (179). In examining the use of plebiscites in all three cases, the book highlights how they have

been used to strengthen presidential power as against that of congress but balances any tendency to conclude that this marks a creeping authoritarianism by emphasizing that what marks out these presidents from their predecessors is their popularity, a point often forgotten by some political scientists (especially US ones).

Of all the chapters in the book, that on populism is the most important since it offers an analytical, balanced and dispassionate examination of the topic that is rare in the English-language literature where the term is more commonly used dismissively. The book is most informative in showing how history has shaped in distinctive ways the types of populism practised in each of the three countries and it usefully points to the limitations of the category to define the project of '21<sup>st</sup> century socialism'. In essence, it highlights the apparently contradictory mix of personalism and participationism in the new political order, concluding that while this order has provided short-term political stability 'it is not clear whether the new institutions command enough consensus to gain long-term legitimacy and thus close the gap between legality and legitimacy that undermined the old order' (101).

The chapters on oil and gas, and on regional integration are similarly insightful though perhaps less novel. Chapter 6 highlights the proliferation of integration initiatives but their weak institutionalization which results in 'regional hyper-presidentialism' (171). The book's overall conclusion identifies the key issue for the future as being 'the balance between politics and institutions and between the majoritarian and pluralist elements of democracy' (183). In watching how these tensions evolve, this book will be a very valuable guide. It should be required reading for any student of the region's politics.

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– *The Struggle for Maize: Campesinos, Workers, and Transgenic Corn in the Mexican Countryside*, by Elizabeth Fitting. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011.

To a large majority of Mexicans, life without maize would be a *contradictio in terminis*. It is through *tlayudas*, *sopes*, *tortillas*, *pozol*, *tejuino* and a myriad other compositions of maize that Mexican bodies are constituted. Indeed, from pre-Columbian times onwards, it would have been impossible in Mesoamerica to conceptualize the idea of a person without taking into account processes of consubstantialization with maize. But it is not only people that are made from maize: corn is the only staple food that cannot reproduce itself without the help of people. This symbiotic relation where maize makes people, and people make maize, is central to understanding Mesoamerican ontologies.

So when, in 2001, news broke out that transgenes had found their way into maize landraces in remote parts of Mexico, many local sensibilities were affected. The first to react were activists and critical scientists, who in a matter of months were joined by a variety of peasant and indigenous organizations. While the incipient social movement initially focused on the environmental risks involved in transgenic flow, the scope of the denunciations soon changed. *Somos gente de maíz* (we are maize people) and *sin maíz no hay país* (without maize there is no nation) were the rallying slogans that best articulated a widely felt sentiment of injustice towards

the millions of rural producers that had progressively been pushed out of their livelihoods by a footloose neoliberal food regime. Most often by necessity, and seldom by choice, farmers became transnational migrants who sold their underpaid labour at other nodes of the food chain – or in construction, that other sector that thrives unusually well under casino capitalism. The discovery of transgenes was insult upon injury, and it was time to react. The life of the Mexican body was on the line.

In a nutshell, this is what Fitting's book is about. She tells the story in two parts ('debates' and 'livelihoods') which eloquently document both the controversy about the introduction of genetically modified maize into Mexico, and the predicaments of rural producers under neoliberal globalization. In so doing, and taking political economy as a point of departure, the book in fact lays bare what is at the root of most of contemporary Mexico's problems: injustice. Yet, and contrary to what one may expect, Fitting's is not the simplistic, knee-jerk reaction of a critique of neoliberalism or the implementation of its policies. Throughout her account, she does not romanticize the imputed values of a 'deep', millenarian peasant culture; neither does she unduly reduce neoliberalism to a linear and deterministic relation between capitalist interests, the formulation and implementation of state policies, and the achievement of desired outcomes; nor does she reduce the clash between opponents and proponents of genetically modified (GM) maize as an issue that can be settled, once and for all, by resorting to an externalist, universal morality. Zooming in on the debate about transgenic corn and a case study in the South of Puebla, the author instead engages the reader in ethnographic, fine-grained descriptions that problematize issues that would otherwise remain hidden in a facile, simplistic account. Thus a historical focus on the violent struggle for water in Atzompa, for example, problematizes and in fact re-politicizes the naïve belief in the existence of homogeneous community. Likewise, her detailed description of the agency entailed in (transnational) livelihood strategies beautifully explains why it is that the desired outcome (the demise of the peasantry and the eradication of 'inefficient' forms of maize production) of the neoliberal state and its multinational entrepreneurial allies ultimately fails. Or, as in the case of the GM maize debate by showing that, as arguments for and against are mobilized, complexities arise that cannot be silenced through 'efficient' (political, scientific, technocratic) solutions; instead, new political identities emerge, allowing what had been pushed to the background before (e.g. traditional maize landraces, peasant forms of life) to come to the fore once again.

Because of its rich ethnography and non-reductionist analysis, the book merits being essential reading to students of all levels who wish to delve into the trials and tribulations of the Mexican peasantry, transnational migration, and the controversy about GM maize. Yet the book has its own 'reading manual'. At first, I could not but arrive at the impression that the chapters in the part on 'debates' did not directly link up with the cases on the livelihoods strategies of peasants in San José Miahuatlán (the author's informants, for example, never explicitly related their predicaments regarding transgenic corn). This might make the reader think this book is in fact an attempt at dovetailing two different ones. So, if the reader expects – in good positivist fashion – a coherent account of the way in which, like a double helix, the debate on GM maize seamlessly fuses with transnational peasant livelihoods, s/he will come out thinking this is a case of 'right time, wrong place' and

that fitting the parts together is not Fitting's strength. But there are more ways to read a book. And, as one is increasingly seduced by Fitting's engaging style, a different book emerges. A book in which one is drawn to read between the literal lines – decoding the meaning, and crafting a multiplicity of different, indefinite, connections. Read in this more allegorical way, the book comes out a little masterpiece, synthesising in a necessarily incoherent but productive way the experiences of a multitude of rural producers with some of the best writings of those who imagine, and actively construct, alternatives to the repetitive, worn out solutions to the problems of the Mexican countryside.

Fitting's story, then, is basically a story of hope. Through her careful documentation of the complex ways in which things (most obviously maize), people, and discourses become entangled with one another, she leaves room for imagining that these elements could be articulated otherwise to enact an alternative to 'development' as understood from a modernist point of view. On balance, her account is convincing, and perhaps the only thing that can be brought in against book is its title: the book is not about the struggle for maize proper; it is about the struggle for the future of the Mexican nation – a struggle for justice, for the dignity of millions who want to have a say in what kind of world they wish to live in.

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– *The Allure of Labor. Workers, Race and the Making of the Peruvian State*, por Paulo Drinot. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011.

El historiador peruano Paulo Drinot presenta una investigación sobre el mundo del trabajo peruano de la primera parte del siglo XX con una visión controversial sobre lo que la historiografía tradicional suele presentarlo. La visión tradicional sobre el *Estado Oligárquico* señala que los gobiernos que se suceden a lo largo de buena parte del siglo XX se caracterizaron por reprimir duramente cualquier oposición política a los intereses de la oligarquía y promulgar una normativa que reconoce derechos laborales con el objetivo de minar la influencia de ideologías revolucionarias dentro de los trabajadores. Drinot plantea que esa lectura resulta incompleta a la luz de su investigación. La regulación laboral no sólo tiene un objetivo político contra los partidos de izquierda, sino que también evidencian un proyecto de *Estado Laboral (Labor State)* formulado por las élites del país. Este proyecto consiste en identificar la industrialización del país como la herramienta principal para lograr que el país salga de su atraso y se conduzca como una nación 'moderna y civilizada'. La elite peruana establece que el atraso del país proviene de un problema de la raza predominante en el Perú, los indígenas, quienes por un proceso histórico no son laboriosos. De acuerdo a esta visión, el país no puede avanzar hacia el progreso mientras no se resuelva esta problemática. Por ello, se plantea que la industrialización puede cumplir esa tarea al lograr que los indios se transformen en civilizados trabajadores mestizos, es decir, en agentes de progreso. Drinot pone el acento en que esa visión racial es la que explica la acción pública del Estado. No se trata de una cuestión económica sino cultural. Esto explica porque la regulación laboral excluye de su ámbito de aplicación a la población indígena, ya sea porque no se les consideran trabajadores, o porque no laboran dentro de fábricas. Desde esa visión,

el trabajo sólo se materializa en la industria. Así, la construcción del Estado peruano se sostiene sobre la exclusión de lo indígena.

El autor resalta que las elites son conscientes que la conflictividad laboral es inherente a ese proceso de industrialización, por lo que el Estado debe cumplir una tarea arbitral entre los empresarios y los trabajadores, de modo que las normas aseguren una paz laboral en los centros de labores. Las elites plantean que la industrialización le otorga un carácter tutelar al Estado en las relaciones laborales. Drinot resalta que la política laboral de los gobiernos peruanos – especialmente, con la creación de la Sección del Trabajo, la construcción de barrios obreros, la creación de restaurantes populares, la conformación del seguro social obrero – deben ser interpretados como la materialización de ese proyecto de las elites peruanas.

Apoyándose en Foucault, Drinot recupera su visión de la gobernabilidad y de sus dos racionalidades: la de disciplina – expresada en la creencia de la necesidad del control laboral por ser una amenaza social – y la de gobierno – expresada en la creencia de la necesidad de proteger y mejorar el trabajo por ser un agente de progreso –. Son estas dos racionalidades que se complementan las que permiten explicar la política laboral peruana. Sin mencionarlo, el autor deja traslucir que la historiografía tradicional sólo se concentra en la primera racionalidad dejando de lado la otra, por ello su análisis resulta incompleto. A partir de este marco teórico, el libro analiza a las cuatro agencias del Estado: la Sección del Trabajo, los barrios obreros, los restaurantes populares y el seguro social obrero, como la materialización donde concurren las dos racionalidades mencionadas. Para persuadir al lector de su análisis, se apoya en una abundante bibliografía, especialmente en libros y revistas de la época.

El valioso aporte del libro es evidenciar que la política laboral de la primera parte del siglo XX no puede reducirse a una lectura instrumental del Estado como represor de los trabajadores. Sin embargo, peca en sobrevalorar el peso de los planteamientos de las elites sobre su plasmación real en la acción gubernamental. Las elites que señala el autor son en realidad un sector de la intelectualidad que tuvo escasa influencia sobre la oligarquía. Muestra de ello son que la Sección del Trabajo resulta ineficaz en lograr hacer cumplir las normas laborales dentro de las empresas, o que los empresarios se resisten a la constitución del seguro social. Ni bien la oligarquía se opone firmemente a las propuestas de esa intelectualidad, los gobiernos los apartan de la dirección pública. En el libro la acción de los trabajadores se ve empuñada por el rol que cumple la elite. Aparecen las luchas de los trabajadores sólo como el detonante de la medida gubernamental, porque en realidad la elite ha convencido previamente que la demanda exigida resulta conveniente para el progreso del país. Además, resulta controversial postular que se viene constituyendo un *Estado Laboral*, cuando la regulación laboral sólo cubre a una minoría de peruanos, regulación diseñada desde el Estado con exclusión de los indígenas y de los que se considera trabajadores. Una visión crítica de la historiografía tradicional sobre el Estado Oligárquico no requiere caer en una visión pendular sobre los hechos, mostrar que existe una lectura incompleta es un valioso aporte sobre este período de la historia peruana.

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– *Workshop of Revolution. Plebeian Buenos Aires and the Atlantic World, 1776-1810*, by Lyman Johnson. Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2011.

Lyman L. Johnson's book *Workshop of Revolution* explores the social, political, and economic conditions of artisans, free labourers, and slaves in Buenos Aires from the creation of the Viceroyalty of Río de la Plata to the revolutionary events of May 1810. The author's extensive archival research, particularly the use of testaments and inventories carried out over many years in Argentina and Spain, allowed him to construct a portrait of plebeian daily life and to analyse the economic and cultural context with which these popular sectors were formed. Furthermore, Johnson analysed their political behaviours in the context of ethnic categories produced by this hierarchical and mercantile society.

The author's intention is to reinterpret and reframe the origins of popular support for independence in Buenos Aires within the context of Atlantic history. In the first part of the book the content ranges from descriptions of the structure of work to already well-known analyses of the silversmith and shoemaker guilds. Chapter one discusses plebeian experiences framed by the dynamic demography of the city in the late eighteenth century. In chapter two the author examines the cultural structures that guided both individual life trajectories and collective actions, while chapters three and four trace the three decades-long struggle to establish guilds of shoemakers and silversmiths in Buenos Aires. Chapter five explores a little-known French conspiracy and rumours about a planned slave rebellion. Chapters six and seven provide price, wage, and wealth data in order to situate the plebe within the late colonial economy. In particular, the chapter on prices and salaries in late colonial Buenos Aires relates artisan earnings to their habitat, patterns of consumption, social activity, and pathways of life. Overall this section presents an excellent analysis of material life dominated by the daily struggle for food and shelter within the context of an irregular labour market, which allowed only a small minority of artisans and shopkeepers to achieve a modicum of wealth and prosperity.

Finally, chapter eight traces the development of popular political culture that arose from resistance to the British occupation of Buenos Aires in 1806-1807. Although less conclusive about their political participation, the author also attempts to show that political activity was on the rise as the military professionalized.

A combination of structural and conjunctural variables contributed to the revolutionary outcome. Johnson argues that together with the European political crisis, a devastating drought pushed up food prices in the local market with effects on real wages and employment levels. At the same time, the boom eroded the economic well-being of professional craftsmen. In this scenario the political and military involvement of the populace can be interpreted as a result of deteriorating living conditions of the popular sectors in Buenos Aires. Finally, among his most important observations include the continuities and ruptures in Atlantic culture as guild practices were affected by urban and demographic dynamics of the city of Buenos Aires.

One area of controversy is that the arguments that highlight some political relevance of these actors are part of a neo-revisionist attempt to raise connections between ordinary people and elites. In the set of circumstances of Buenos Aires, a mass phenomenon was more evident for the period after independence. In any case, what remains to be validated is the hypothesis about the extent of popular

participation in factional struggles, the politicization of public spaces, the existence of some dangerous classes, the styles of political leadership, and popular patriotism. This debate is still on-going and is certainly influenced by the paradigms of recent history.

Absent in this account is the involvement of family strategies and the fabric of social networks in the configuration of these social subjects. In particular, there is a certain neglect of family litigation (well-studied for the late colonial and independent Buenos Aires) that in the era of independence demonstrated an acceptable margin of disputed patriarchal power, the recognition of women's voices as subjects of law, and certain social heterogeneity in the 'occupation' of institutional spaces, in this case the judicial sphere. Such litigation was a device capable of giving power to the theatre of confrontation and negotiation of an important area of social conflict.

A comment on Johnson's narrative method: he starts each section by going through a resource of legitimation, often used by historiographic discourse, in which those tales of life stories of anonymous or relevant characters are used to illustrate the argument. It is true that historiography in its own self-criticism has renewed a relatively hermetic discourse in search of a narrative aesthetic that is able to represent without too much mediation social action in the past. It is, in my opinion, a procedure, or protocol say, flavoured with a return to basics, file times, scrutiny, speculation, and respect for the voices of the past that catches a specific sensitivity, controversy, and the construction of a historical poetic. The result: the reinterpretation of a story imaginatively conceived, eloquently argued, and with tragic appeal. In this sense, *Workshop* comes halfway. The talent lies, I think, in overlapping the historical context with the same structure of the saga and converting it to text. And the author never detaches from some functionalist perspective in organizing the social system. Each character must represent a contradictory unfolding of family tradition, realism, and independence. Furthermore, economic forces penetrate and are altered by wills that accept and defy the rules of a flourishing commercialism. And the legal truth is constructed and reconstructed as a discourse of power.

In short, this book illuminates the everyday life of plebeian *porteños* and their sense of wealth and material culture in the context of the late colonial economy. *Workshop* is a well-written and valuable piece of research – and of course, an excellent book for graduate students – and aims to rescue the working people by showing the social, economic, and mental landscape in which they lived and struggled in order to understand them, inside a literary world where the policies of the powerful are presented as the outcome of natural laws.

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– *Elegía Criolla. Una reinterpretación de las guerras de independencia hispanoamericanas*, por Tomás Pérez Vejo. México: Tusquets Editores, 2010.

El debate acerca de las guerras de independencia ya tiene muchos años. Parece cierto ya que no eran guerras de liberación nacional porque faltaban naciones en el sentido moderno de la palabra y el problema de la nación no fue resultado ni bajo la Monarquía Católica, ni durante ni después de las guerras de independencia porque

quedó un hierro candente por décadas. Las naciones no fueron la causa sino la consecuencia de las guerras.

¿Era una guerra de españoles contra criollos o una lucha de criollos contra de criollos, en otras palabras, una guerra civil? La idea de una guerra civil ya surgió entre varios historiadores en la primera mitad del siglo XIX, pero fue sofocada por la construcción de historias nacionales. El autor está cuestionando a base de informes, ensayos, libros y cartas críticas de contemporáneos al turno del siglo XIX, las construcciones tradicionales de los procesos de independencia y vincula estas observaciones con los trabajos revisionistas que surgieron en la segunda mitad del siglo XX.

Muchos historiadores actuales estarán de acuerdo con el autor que en Hispanoamérica ‘somos prisioneros de una historia hecha por y al servicio del estado’ (p. 56), la construcción de ‘una memoria nacional mitificada y homogénea’ que exigió para su éxito ‘ún genocidio de memorias, locales, familiares, etcétera’ (p. 56). [Aunque estoy de acuerdo con el autor, no emplearía la palabra genocidio]. Una interpretación oficial del pasado tiene que ver mucho con el presente porque nos construye hilos conductores que deben explicar y legitimar. La historia oficial de la Revolución Mexicana es un buen ejemplo que incluyó por décadas la eliminación de memorias disidentes. Pérez Vejo propone repensar lo que pasaba entre 1810 y 1821 como guerras civiles y no como guerras de independencia, una perspectiva que no sólo nos puede ofrecer una nueva mirada sobre el pasado, sino también sobre el presente y el futuro.

Para comprender el estudio de Pérez Vejo es esencial darse cuenta que la Monarquía católica era una sociedad hispana y no española, era un mismo espacio político cultural con, buena y frecuente comunicación entre intelectuales, empresarios, técnicos y funcionarios. Un buen ejemplo era la Real Sociedad Bascongada en el siglo XVIII que tenía sus capítulos en los virreinos y en la Nueva España más de 500 miembros. Ideas y opiniones circularon sin que existía una jerarquía clara entre los que se comunicaron. Criollos y peninsulares que vivían en las Américas estaban bajo la Ilustración hispánica bien e igualmente al tanto de los progresos tecnológicos y de los debates políticos y sociales en los países europeos. Hay que ver lo que pasó con la crisis desde 1808 desde la perspectiva del contexto de aquel entonces. La Monarquía era hispánica, no española. Era una comunidad cultural compartida por españoles, peninsulares y criollos. Tenían muchos recuerdos comunes y compartieron en pleno los valores de las sociedad hispana. Los peninsulares eran una minoría ínfima y distinguirlos de los criollos parece difícil, porque muchos de origen peninsular establecieron sus vidas en las América y nunca pensaron en regresar. Las guerras entre 1810 y 1821 nos ponen en claro que las lealtades no eran sinónimos del lugar de nacimiento.

Según Pérez Vejo ver las guerras de independencia desde la perspectiva de guerra civil permite mejor explicar lo que pasó entre 1810 y 1820 y da también un marco explicativo para el largo período de inestabilidad política a lo largo de la primera mitad del siglo XIX. Estas guerras civiles tuvieron dos fases. La primera se inicia cuando el colapso de la Monarquía Católica en España y Hispanoamérica produjo un vacío de poder en el cual ninguna institución nueva logró recuperar la soberanía real, ni las juntas locales, ni la Junta Central, ni la Regencia, ni las Cortes de Cádiz porque la Constitución (1812) llegó para muchas regiones demasiado



tarde. Antiguos distritos administrativos rompieron su relación con la Monarquía. En la segunda fase de estas guerras civiles vemos en los jóvenes países que surgen de la disgregación territorial el desmantelamiento de una vieja forma de legitimidad y su sustitución por una legitimidad de tipo nacional y una organización de la sociedad basada en valores distintos e incompatibles con la sociedad corporativa y de privilegios colectivos de la Monarquía Católica. Como dice Pérez Vejo, un proceso complejo que no se podía resolver sólo a través de decretos, sino había que imponerlo a veces con medidas drásticas. Creo que en este sentido sí se podría hablar de un tipo de revolución, no tanto de independencia, sino, como ya observó Guerra, de transformación de sociedad.

La parte más fascinante del libro es el análisis de cómo se desarrolló en Hispanoamérica el proceso de separar el peninsular del criollo y la denigración del peninsular hacia español retrogrado explotador y opresor colonialista. Aquí influyeron en mucho los odios generados por las guerras civiles y la maquina propagandística de Insurgentes y los jóvenes estados que tuvieron que legitimarse. Había que borrar los recuerdos comunes y enfatizar las diferencias. Es también cierto que la terquedad de Fernando VII facilitó en mucho el proceso de radicalización anti-español.

En fin, en esta reinterpretación global las guerras de independencia no eran de liberación nacional, ni tenían sus orígenes en brotes rebeldes de tipo social, ni en ideologías y programas revolucionarios previos, sino que fueron las diferentes experiencias de las élites americanas frente a la crisis de la Monarquía que desembocaron en una serie de revoluciones para establecer estados-naciones modernos, un proceso que les cayó encima con la crisis de la monarquía cuando con el vacío de poder, soberanía y representación se volvieron en hierros candentes. Aquellas revoluciones no se terminaron con la independencia, sino se prolongó por décadas. La crítica básica a la historiografía tradicional nacionalista es que confundió causas con consecuencias.

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– *Forty Miles from the Sea. Xalapa, the Public Sphere and the Atlantic World in Nineteenth-Century Mexico*, by Rachel A. Moore. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2011.

Moore's study of Xalapa is not a traditional study of the development of a town in its regional or wider context. It is a study of a town that became the inland frontier of Atlantic Mexico in the eighteenth-century, a port without a coastline. The threat of foreign attack and yellow fever induced late colonial and independent Mexican governments to make Xalapa into an internal boundary, quarantine and parapet. Foreigners had to obtain their passports for the interior here, yellow fever victims had to regain their health here, and the military was concentrated here at a healthy elevation of 1500 meters. As a consequence, Xalapeño involvement was increasingly into the Atlantic world of European and Caribbean merchants, travellers and diplomats. Being part of that world included military competition with Havana, and commercial competition with Orizaba and Mexico City. Communication with the Central highland, and its political hub Mexico City, was fraught with misunder-

standing, distrust and scepticism. Together with mutual distrust between the ports of Veracruz, Xalapa and Orizaba, Xalapa was confronted with continuous challenges and changes requiring adaptations all along from the moment Xalapa, under the jurisdiction of the Veracruz Merchant Guild, became an 'indisputable' part of the Atlantic World (1795), and the Restored Republic (1867) when Xalapa engaged on its own terms in the now firmly established Mexican national identity. Difficult communication, the problems of its credibility due to cultural differences, economic competition and political conflicts would seem to be logical consequences in a country which was in fact an archipelago of local societies and city states until the late nineteenth-century.

The first three chapters give us the historical context, even from before the arrival of the Spaniards, and an account of the government's monitoring of the Atlantic coastline, which took place in and from Xalapa. Rachel Moore describes the Xalapeño commercial and political antagonism towards the increasing power of Mexico City bureaucrats and the opposition of its merchants who preferred Orizaba, while merchants of Veracruz preferred Xalapa as the route to the port of Veracruz. Finally, there were the transport rivalries with Orizaba lost by Xalapa. The reasons behind this defeat have to do with physical, political and cultural communication problems. The distrust of the Central government towards Atlantic Xalapa had to do with the lack of reliable information channels, while prejudices were fed by rumours, gossip, press or leaflets. In Central Mexican eyes this resulted in a lack of credibility and scepticism regarding Xalapa's intentions.

Fascinating is the analysis throughout the book, but especially in Chapter Three, of the differences between Xalapa and Orizaba in experiencing the nineteenth-century. The two towns with 'comparable attributes and locations' (p. 81) had very different experiences, among others, due to different economic strategies, geographical obstacles, political and commercial advocacy (e.g. road construction and railway), and attracting different types of travellers. In terms of reputation Xalapa became an integral part of the Mexican Atlantic world, while Orizaba remained integrated in the continental Central Mexican region.

The last two chapters show how the distinct reputations and relations of these two towns with the nation altered quite radically because of the impact of Santa Anna and the Reform War. Chapter four deals with the impact of the Xalapeño Santa Anna on the political consciousness and public discourse in these two towns with their distinct reputations: the more open, better informed and Atlantic-oriented Xalapa, and the more continental, parochial Orizaba integrated in Central Mexico. The main question is what Santa Anna's policies and alliances between 1821 and 1855 did to the views of Xalapeños and Orizabeños about him and the state he so often embodied. The author finds at least part of the answer in the public sphere, especially Santa Anna's authoritarianism and his strong tendency to curb and control the public sphere. Press and cafés were at that time the creative hubs of opinion-making, but taverns and fandangos in private houses – why did the author not mention them? – were also symbols of autonomy and self-determination, trampled upon by an encroaching national state that interfered with their communication habits and freedom to collect information.

Chapter five continues with the already whetted appetite for information during the Reform War and French Intervention. The author focuses here on the issue of

the Church and gives the case of Orizaba. Orizaba, much more Catholic than Xalapa, met the anticlerical laws of Juárez with a certain complacency. Was it the permeation of modern ideals brought from Europe in the population? Was it ‘the ability of the residents of a nation in flux to adapt’? The anticlerical reforms deprived the public of information from the pulpit and contributed to the debate on what were now the obligations of the government regarding information. The author sees a correlation between these anticlerical initiatives and the demand for improved distribution, regulation and protection of private information. Was the central role of the Church in diffusing information now partly taken over by a secular postal system distributing newspapers and government sponsored reading rooms? I think that the public school system in the towns was perhaps even more important and the Church also went on to give its information to the public, and even local Liberal officials often ignored Mexico City. But the author is perfectly right in that increasingly larger parts of the population started to ask more and more from a state which they could no longer ignore, even if they wanted to. It seems true that, to cite the author, ‘individuals broke away from their previous beliefs about government’s obligation to the governed and embarked upon a search for new sources of legitimacy’ (p. 148). The outcome was hybrid all through the Porfiriato and beyond.

This book triggers a lot of thinking and certainly contributes to the debates on the general population and the public sphere in a century in which Mexicans from many regions slowly and separately from one another adapted to and became integrated into a nation and a national public sphere.

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– *Creating Good Neighbors? Die Kultur- und Wirtschaftspolitik der USA in Lateinamerika, 1940-1946*, by Ursula Prutsch. *Transatlantische Historische Studien* 33, Stuttgart: Steiner, 2008.

This volume analyses U.S. cultural and economic policies toward Latin America during World War II. It focuses mainly, although not exclusively, on Nelson A. Rockefeller’s Office of Inter-American Affairs (OIAA). One among dozens of emergency agencies established to manage war-related problems, the OIAA was certainly not the most important actor in the inter-American arena. Key policy directives were defined higher up in the Roosevelt administration and policies were implemented by a range of (often competing) government agencies. Yet it makes sense for Prutsch to focus on the OIAA. Her study is concerned not so much with the Good Neighbor policy as defined by the nation’s leaders in Washington, DC, but with (what may be called) the infrastructure of power and the implementation of policies on the ground. The OIAA coordinated wartime policies with a host of non-governmental forces, including big business, and therefore provides a privileged window into the workings of this infrastructure of power. Although Prutsch relies primarily on U.S. archives, she avoids reproducing ‘the view from Washington’ by incorporating a wide variety of Latin American sources, which allows her to take into account how Latin Americans, at both the state and non-state levels, received, appropriated and, at times, undermined U.S. initiatives. She thus analyses

U.S. foreign policies in a highly complex and inter-active framework.

Following a brief introduction, Prutsch recounts the historical circumstances that led to the establishment of the OIAA and she highlights the agency's main programmes and modes of operation. Her major contributions, however, are to be found in the two case studies that follow. The first focuses on the agency's activities in Brazil, a subject that has been explored by a number of scholars including, more recently, Antonio Pedro Tota and André Luiz Vieira de Campos. Prutsch adds depth and colour to the story by taking a closer look into the personal histories of some of the men and women who, in one way or other, participated in the OIAA's efforts to secure and deepen inter-American understanding and cooperation. Thus, she shows how Brazilian writers, artists, and intellectuals came to be 'cultural ambassadors' or advisors on the payroll of the OIAA, but rather than converting into puppets of the United States, they cooperated for their own reasons and continued to be independent minds. And she vividly reminds us that for the Brazilian government cooperation with the United States did not imply the loss of autonomy. The Vargas regime knew how to make good use of the OIAA's health and sanitation programmes, by incorporating them into its own nation-building policies. Rather than passively sitting by, it also kept a close watch over the OIAA's cultural and propaganda programmes and did not shy away from censoring them, as Prutsch shows in her analysis of the agency's interactions with the Estado Novo's powerful Department of Propaganda. Even though Brazilians were exposed to unprecedented levels of propaganda and cultural manifestations emanating from the United States, they were not easily impressed or swayed into having friendly feelings toward the Colossus of the North. Closer contact did not necessarily make better neighbours, Prutsch suggests, particularly in those regions that became host to U.S. military bases and procurement missions.

The second case study focuses on Argentina and provides somewhat of a contrast to Brazil. Here the OIAA maintained a rather narrow range of programmes, related mainly to propaganda and cultural exchange, and many of these had to be curtailed or discontinued due to increasingly severe restrictions imposed by the Argentine government. Yet Prutsch also shows that even in Argentina the OIAA wielded some results as it was able to draw on a well-organized infrastructure of power. As elsewhere in Latin America and in close cooperation with U.S. business, it was rather successful in crowding out Axis-friendly companies in the media and other economic spheres. Hence, if this study contributes to a growing postcolonial trend that seeks to bring Latin American agency into the inter-American equation by 'retiring the puppets,' it does not ignore fundamental asymmetries that provided the United States with considerable economic leverage.

*Creating Good Neighbors?* is based on the author's *Habilitation* thesis and the product of years of intensive archival research in four countries. It provides fresh evidence on a host of important issues. The narrative avoids jargon and is directed at interested readers in general. At times, however, the profusion of details is such that it overwhelms the argumentative plot. A more thorough editorial revision could have avoided unnecessary details and repetitions, and thus would have helped to throw the overarching conceptual framework into sharper relief. Nevertheless, this is an important contribution to the history of the inter-American relations.

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– *Between Horse & Buggy and Four-wheel Drive – Change and Diversity among Mennonite Settlements in Belize, Central America*, by Carel Roessingh and Tanja Plasil. Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2009.

This book is about the dynamics, the controversies and the multiplicity of human social life and culture. By focusing more specifically on the Mennonite population of Belize and the circumstances under which they maintain their identity and community, anthropologists Carel Roessingh and Tanja Plasil, together with six contributing authors, have shed light on the universal human need of making a way in the face of change and adjustment. Meanwhile, they clearly demonstrate the fact that the concept of ‘community’ is far from equivalent to uniformity.

The main finding of this book’s eight chapters is that the contemporary world-wide faith community referred to as Mennonites does not only encompass an enormous heterogeneity, they commendably illustrate that it moreover consists of entrepreneurs, in terms of committed community members adjusting to and parrying processes of change without sacrificing their fundamental religious beliefs. Importantly, Roessingh and Plasil put the Mennonites of Belize into wider context by providing not only a historical and universal framework but above all a detailed depiction of the Belizean context within which approximately 10,000 Mennonites reside. As a consequence, this book simultaneously contributes to an increased awareness of and knowledge about Belize, which (according to the authors) is often referred to as ‘the end of the world’.

*Between Horse & Buggy and Four-wheel Drive* offers a pleasant reading experience owing to its engaging tone and understandable reasoning. Moreover, the authors’ attitude as regards their task and their own knowing is appealingly unpretentious in a way that is rare in academic circles. The greatest strength of the book is nonetheless its rich ethnographic contribution. Five case studies based on ethnographic fieldwork in five Mennonite communities provide us with new valuable ethnographic material that increases our possibilities of making comparative analyses within various fields of social and human sciences.

The book is deliberately ethnographic and descriptive rather than theoretical and problematizing. This is not necessarily a weakness, but a clearer theoretical framework knitting together the ethnographical content with the editors’ concluding discussion would most likely have deepened and enhanced the benefit of the book considerably. Still, it will without a doubt turn out valuable for readers along the entire scale from already well-informed Mennonite scholars to amateurs and an educated public. Between these two ends of the scale of potential readers we find students, who will certainly have much to gain from this book.

From an anthropological perspective this book makes no ground-breaking theoretical contributions. Yet it casts much needed light on concrete examples of Mennonite entrepreneurs making a living, upholding community and maintaining their Mennonite identity whilst adjusting to new conditions and change. The different cases display the complexity of the processes involved, hence making the book an important reminder of the necessity of continuously examining and deepening our understanding of community and the dynamics of identity.

Nevertheless, the discussion concerning the integration and future of the Belizean Mennonite population puzzles me. The authors ask whether the Mennonites in Belize will ever become fully integrated into the Belizean society and population.

Besides the fact that reliable prognoses regarding social and cultural processes are never possible to make, the question in itself appears quite incompatible with the way the Belizean society is depicted as heterogeneous and multi-ethnic. From a general anthropological perspective one may even question the relevance of this question. Of greater significance is, I would say, whether or not the Belizean Mennonites would ever *want* to become fully integrated. This issue takes us down to the essence of ethnicity; i.e. a need to distinguish oneself and one's own group from others, even though the perceived differences might (from an 'objective' point of view) be close to non-existent. Mennonites all over the world, and not least Mennonites in the Americas, are living proof of the possibility of taking part, interacting and blending in, while staying apart and staying different. This book provides us with excellent examples and illustrations of precisely these processes.

Furthermore, the book unmistakably displays that modernity and tradition are not simply each other's contrasts, but are in fact inevitable aspects of one another and must thus be perceived of and studied as such. Important to note is that Roessingh's and Plasil's study clearly shows how the Mennonite case casts light on modern man's ambiguous relationship to the past and to tradition, and how this relationship often enough comes to expression in terms of an enforced traditionalism as regards 'the Other' and how 'they' ought to live in order to be genuine and authentic. As always, concepts and terminology reveal more about those employing them than about those to whom they are being applied.

To conclude, a further major benefit of this volume is that it verifies that human social and cultural life everywhere constitutes dynamic and on-going processes, far from being stagnated – even as we turn our gaze towards 'the end of the world'.

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