

a second look at the image of freedom placed before them by those who designed the status quo and to question everything that they think to be true.

Guadalupe Arellanes Castro
California State University, Los Angeles

Randal Sheppard, *A Persistent Revolution: History, Nationalism, and Politics in Mexico Since 1968*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2016. Photographs, map, bibliography, index, 392 pp.; hardcover \$65, paperback \$39.95, ebook \$65.

Unfinished, betrayed, persistent—beyond adjectives, the Mexican Revolution of 1910 continues to define the contours of Mexican political culture, casting its long shadow into the twenty-first century. In this book, historian Randal Sheppard takes on Mexican revolutionary nationalism as perhaps the most steadfast and contentious of the revolution's legacies. He duly scrutinizes the uses and transmutations of revolutionary nationalist mythology, the roots of its popular legitimacy, and its role in statebuilding. Instead of treating it as an uncontested state ideology or a mere instrument to neutralize dissent, Sheppard stresses its power as a discursive repertoire that allowed nonstate actors to articulate their discontent with the regime.

Though keen on appealing to national unity and the historical struggles of the Mexican people, the postrevolutionary state could not overcome its own limitations in addressing inequality and citizens' demands for democratization. This accentuated the cracks in the system of corporatist representation and clientelistic mobilization built by the Institutionalized Revolutionary Party (PRI). Revolutionary nationalism was thus a source of both strength and weakness for the PRI, enabling challengers from left and right, from within and outside the party, to contest the regime in its own terms, setting the parameters of, and giving legitimacy to, the relationship between state and society.

Sheppard's examination of nationalist-revolutionary myths, symbols, monuments, and rituals of commemoration puts a much-appreciated emphasis on the period of neoliberal reform and democratic alternation (1982–2000). This is complemented by six narrative “snapshots” that help the reader situate the use of nationalist mythology in key moments, such as the 1982 nationalization of banks, the Zapatista uprising of 1994, and the 2010 celebrations of the bicentennial of independence and the centennial of the revolution. Following a useful examination of the “epic” view of history that became a source of regime legitimacy, chapters 2 to 4 develop the core of the argument about nationalist commemoration as a practice of contestation in the long aftermath of the violent repression of the 1968 student movement.

By extending the “weak hegemony” approach to his analysis of the uneven process of democratization and the implementation of neoliberal reforms after 1982, Sheppard aptly demonstrates how the new technocratic cadres of the PRI refashioned the founding myths of revolutionary nationalism to reconcile them with

free market reforms. They linked their creed to nineteenth-century Mexican liberalism, referred to crises as catalysts of national unity, and cast their predilection for deregulation, privatization, and austerity as a new “revolutionary” path toward modernization. Pushing reforms from above, the PRI kept democratization under wraps and relied on neopopulist forms of control over labor and peasant organizations. The economic crisis and social dislocations that followed added to the neglect of democratization and became the catalysts for a schism within the PRI and the strengthening of electoral challenges, which culminated in the loss of the presidency to the center-right PAN in 2000.

In the final two chapters, Sheppard examines the strategic use of nationalist rhetoric, symbols, and commemorations by later opposition movements pushing for democratization, from the electoral challenges of Manuel Clouthier and Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas to the indigenous Zapatista movement and the student strike of 1999. As the author notes, these actors saw Mexican history as the product of popular struggles against unjust systems, and formulated claims about democratic inclusion and representation, wealth redistribution, civic freedoms, and the fight against corruption, all of which continue to shape contemporary public debate.

As the arc of the book reaches the present, the author raises a crucial question: can Mexico imagine itself beyond the language of revolutionary nationalism? He pays due attention, for instance, to the often overlooked role of Mexican conservatism as holding a competing vision of nationalism, and makes a strong case for grasping the legacy of the Zapatistas in generating an alternative democratic nationalist project, even as their presence in mainstream politics has faded. On center-left politician Andrés Manuel López Obrador, Sheppard hints that his rise can be attributed to a new iteration of revolutionary nationalism, with the potential to generate new impulses for democratization and social reform, as well as stern resistance to them.

Another question that looms large in the book is the understated importance of Mexico’s revolutionary nationalism in the broader Latin American context. A non-Mexicanist, comparative-minded reader might wonder about the parallels with the discourses of Argentine Peronism or Peruvian *Aprismo*, for instance, or Mexico’s place in the decline of the so-called Pink Tide (both of which are not shortcomings of the book but avenues for further exploration). All in all, *A Persistent Revolution* is a remarkable and accessible work of historical synthesis and interpretation of the unwavering presence of revolutionary nationalism in contemporary Mexico, one that is sure to interest scholars from various disciplines who seek to understand the weight of the past in the country’s stumbling steps toward building a more open and inclusive society.

Luis Herrán Ávila
University of New Mexico