modern Europe; they are also to be congratulated for opening a window onto a distant world in a way which helps us to see it in its own terms, while also enhancing what we know about the transformations that came in the wake of European overseas conquest and colonisation.

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Deborah E. Kanter, *Hijos del Pueblo: Gender, Family, and Community in Rural Mexico, 1730–1850* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2009), pp. xii + 151, $55.00, hb.

Deborah Kanter's well-written, clearly argued book examines gender and family relations across an important time period in Mexican history, spanning the late colonial and early national periods, with a focus on the Tenango del Valle district of the Valley of Toluca and its largely indigenous, though ethnically mixed, population. While Andeanists have thoroughly examined these issues for the emerging nation-state of the early mid-nineteenth century, doing so through the lens of legal codes and the concept of honour, Mexicanists have not yet devoted the same attention to these issues. Thus, Kanter's book takes up important questions. The success of her micro-historical approach is that it helps readers understand this particular region and the experiences of daily life quite well, yet that limited focus raises the question of how her findings relate to other parts of Mexico.

The book's analysis rests on a number of concepts, most importantly, that of patriarchy. Defining it as a 'gendered system of rule and power' (p. 5), Kanter offers a large number of examples throughout the book of the way in which officials, usually Spanish, treated indigenous men and women as children through both word and deed. The notion of leaders as father figures who should wield their powers with concern for their underlings pervades the book. Order was maintained, Kanter argues, through the use of paternal language and the enactment of everyday relations in which domination and subordination were constant elements. As 'children of the pueblo', the indigenous occupants of Tenango del Valle accepted a power structure in which they lacked many kinds of autonomy but held a moral right to protection, a right they sought to enforce legally on a multitude of occasions. The chapters explore, through analysis of legal records and mini-biographies of local women and men, the colonial meaning of patriarchal order and its fate in Mexico when new laws made citizens of Indians and created new legal and political institutions.

After a chapter introducing readers to the region under study, the second chapter examines the meaning of community for the native pueblos. Kinship ties played a significant role in determining community membership, and Kanter argues that the phrase 'hijos del pueblo' encapsulates the sense of rights and obligation that the region's rural population felt toward their communities and officials. The primary benefit villagers received was the ability to own or use land, but land rights did not go uncontested, especially as the population grew. Definitions of community membership became narrower, and women (especially widows) and Afro-Mexicans faced legal challenges to their use or ownership of community-owned or privately owned lands.

Chapters 3 and 4 explore marriage and kinship. Kanter and others have shown that colonial marriage blended elements of complementarity and male dominance, and that clearly and broadly understood divisions of responsibility existed between

partners. Yet real life was never so simple, and unhappy husbands and wives made their disappointments and miseries all too apparent to judicial officials. Threaded throughout the evocative case material discussed by Kanter is the idea of masculinity, yet she does not explore the dynamic ways in which this concept influenced marriage and family life. While pointing out that peasant men found it increasingly difficult to meet their share of responsibility in marital and family arrangements as they 'found their livelihoods challenged by a variety of factors' (p. 39), and noting that wives' autonomy then provoked sometimes vicious responses from their husbands, Kanter neglects the dynamic interplay between masculinity and female autonomy. For example, men who resided with their wives' families experienced significant economic and social insecurity, yet we learn little about why such marriages occurred. What was the history of matrilocal marriage in this region? While most Nahuas have long practiced patrilocal marriage, matrilocal marriages are not unheard of, and more attention to their role in shaping indigenous masculinity in the period covered in the book would have been welcome.

In addition, Kanter downplays the possibility of female autonomy in these and other chapters. Arguing that Tenango's population held firm to the notion of house as the appropriate space for women and street for men, she acknowledges that women had to contribute economically for families to survive. Their activities, her case material compellingly shows, easily provoked male anger over challenges to patriarchal authority, an anger that sometimes took a violent form, yet the same legal texts which reveal that anger also show women using courts to protect themselves and their children or other relatives. Furthermore, these records illustrate how some very strong, even bold women used the legal system to attempt to correct perceived injustices, and in the process harassed adversaries on occasion.

The sequestering of women in *depósito* occurred relatively frequently in this region, as demonstrated by the 100-plus cases Kanter examines in the sixth chapter. She argues that priests, in particular, turned to the practice to better effect adherence to the requirement of female virginity prior to marriage and to undermine *montequitl*, bride service, a custom widely practiced by Nahuas past and present. Protection easily turned into punishment, and Kanter shows convincingly that what began as a tool used by priests turned into one that was relied upon by civil authorities and that, regardless of circumstances, reflected negatively on women's reputations.

What happened to the somewhat tenuous patriarchal order of rural society after independence? For the indigenous communities who expected protective mediation by authorities, independence brought many changes, a good number of them unwelcome, especially by women. Kanter paints a clear picture of a larger, yet more isolated, rural population. More aggressive haciendas, which were taking land and coercing labour, and ruined mines no longer offering employment led to increased impoverishment. Villagers had fewer places to turn for help, exercised less autonomy over community affairs and received less sympathy for their worsening plight from officials increasingly schooled in new ideas of 'equality'. Lawsuits concerned with land and husbands' violence towards wives became fewer in number and rarely led to help for the women involved. Somewhat speculatively (because of the small case numbers involved), Kanter argues that women turned to extrajudicial means, including murder, to deal with abusive husbands after 1821.

The micro-historical focus of this study produces mixed results. Readers will find truly nuanced discussions of marriage, family and community relations – one imagines students at both the undergraduate and graduate levels gaining real insight into the

dynamics of everyday life based on the empathetic renderings presented here. At the same time, however, the regional focus is narrow, and the slice of life described in this book is rarely put into a broader historical perspective. That said, *Hijos del Pueblo* is a well-written book and a solid contribution to the historiography on Mexican gender roles and family life.

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Roberto Breña (ed.), *En el umbral de las revoluciones hispánicas: el bienio 1808–1810* (Mexico City and Madrid: El Colegio de México, Centro de Estudios Internacionales and Centro de Estudios Políticos y Constitucionales, 2010), pp. 404, pb.

Roberto Breña's edited work is a significant addition to the growing list of publications marking the bicentennial of Latin America's independence struggles. Presented first at a conference of the same name that was held at the Colegio de México in April 2008, the papers take as their focus the fateful two years that began with the French invasion of Spain and ended with the dissolution of the Junta Central in Seville early in 1810. It contains chapters on both Spain and much of Spanish America that detail the different as well as the frequently similar responses to the crises, some very fine studies of particular regions and developments, and numerous references in the footnotes to recent publications that will be of great value to anyone interested in the period.

The 13 authors have interpreted the subject in a variety of ways, but a common point of departure is the profound loyalty exhibited toward Ferdinand VII and to the Spain that he represented following the French invasion, Ferdinand's forced abdication and his replacement by Joseph Bonaparte. A second common feature is the authors' espousal of what seems to have become the accepted orthodoxy regarding the independence period: that the principal reasons for Spanish American independence are to be found in the post-invasion developments and not in the previous Bourbon Reform period. This viewpoint has been nurtured first and foremost by Jaime Rodríguez and the late François-Xavier Guerra, so it is not surprising that their works appear frequently in the book's footnotes. This also explains why references to enlightened ideas and animosities arising from the late colonial reforms are few, thereby reinforcing the importance of these threshold years of 1808 to 1810.

Roberto Breña's introduction provides the background and the context for the contributions as well as a discussion of some of the historiography of the period. The following chapters have been organised geographically, beginning with events in the metropole. Ignacio Fernández Sarasola discusses the Spanish move towards constitutionalism after the removal of Ferdinand and the different options provided by contending groups, while Fernando Durán López surveys the creation of public opinion among the same groups, pointing to the liberals' efforts to use the opportunity to reduce the powers of the monarch. Anthony McFarlane provides a bridge between Spain and Spanish America with an inclusive overview of the surrounding events, arguing that while Spain was moving toward greater unity, except in the political realm – as the previous writers had shown – Spanish America was beginning to fracture.