

BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

Recent Trends in State Formation Studies on Latin America

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This essay reviews the following works:

Matters of Justice: Pueblos, the Judiciary, and Agrarian Reform in Revolutionary Mexico. By Helga Baitenmann. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2020. Pp. xvi + 326. \$35.00 paperback. ISBN: 9781496219480.

Pueblos en tiempos de guerra: La formación de la nación en México, Argentina y Brasil (1800–1920). Edited by Romana Falcón and Raymond Buve. Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 2017. Pp. 242. Mex\$180 paperback. ISBN: 9786076281307.

State Formation in the Liberal Era: Capitalisms and Claims of Citizenship in Mexico and Peru. Edited by Ben Fallaw and David Nugent. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2020. Pp. xxv + 334. \$60.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9780816540389.

Heroes, Martyrs, and Political Messiahs in Revolutionary Cuba, 1946–1958. By Lillian Guerra. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018. Pp. 384. \$40.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9780300175530.

In the Vortex of Violence: Lynching, Extralegal Justice, and the State in Post-Revolutionary Mexico. By Gema Kloppe-Santamaría. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2020. Pp. xvi + 213. \$34.95 paperback. ISBN: 9780520344037.

The Injustice Never Leaves You: Anti-Mexican Violence in Texas. By Monica Muñoz Martinez. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018. Pp. 400. \$37.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9780674976436.

A Revolution Unfinished: The Chegomista Rebellion and the Limits of Revolutionary Democracy in Juchitán, Oaxaca. By Colby Ristow. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018. Pp. viii + 312. \$50.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9781496203656.

Fields of Revolution: Agrarian Reform and Rural State Formation in Bolivia, 1935–1964. By Carmen Soliz. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2021. Pp. 280. \$50.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9780822946656.

Historians and anthropologists have long grappled with questions about state formation in a great number of diverse geographical areas.¹ A noticeable trend in this literature over

¹ See Gilbert M. 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); George Steinmetz, “Introduction: Culture and

the past three decades is the sustained attention paid to interrogating how the state is produced in everyday life and the practices of power and rituals that make up the state.² In the Latin American context, two distinct approaches have developed, focusing “on how subaltern groups resist, appropriate or help construct the nation-state,” and how state rule is accomplished.³

The eight books under review engage with these two influential approaches and demonstrate that historians and anthropologists remain invested in asking questions about how the region embraced the liberal project in the nineteenth century, the major revolutions that followed, and the consequences of uneven progress, modernization, and development in the twentieth century. The books cover a vast expanse, from the Southern Cone (Argentina and Brazil) to the Central Andes (Peru and Bolivia), the Caribbean (Cuba), and North America (Mexico and the US-Mexican borderlands). All are preoccupied with overlooked factors that contribute to more nuanced understandings of state formation in the region, such as the larger material and economic processes that shaped nations, the formal and lived expressions of citizenship, the limits of democracy and revolution, the popular participation of ordinary people in mass politics and labor organizing, and the legacy of violence and terror.

This essay first focuses on the protracted and violent process of early nation formation in the nineteenth century, capitalist development, and the creation of novel expressions of citizenship (Falcón and Buve, Fallaw and Nugent). The second section reveals the varied ways ordinary people imbued their political worlds with purpose to demand change and challenge the basis of consent to the social order during revolutionary upheavals (Ristow and Guerra). The third explores how revolutionary upheavals became timely opportunities for marginal groups to refashion the social order, assert rights, and negotiate new contracts with the state (Baitenmann and Soliz). The final section returns to the central role that violence has played in the formation of nations (Martinez and Kloppe-Santamaría). The studies tremendously enrich and advance our knowledge of state formation in the region, which in the past has tended to privilege cultural approaches. These new studies, moreover, have begun embracing the critical material and tangible factors that have formed the political lives of ordinary people in the region.

the State,” in *State/Culture: State-Formation after the Cultural Turn* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999); Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat, eds., *State of Imagination: Ethnographic Explorations of the Postcolonial* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001); Clifton C. Crais, ed., *The Culture of Power in Southern Africa: Essays on State Formation and the Political Imagination* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2003); Diane E. Davis and Anthony W. Pereira, eds., *Irregular Armed Forces and Their Role in Politics and State Formation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Christian Krohn-Hansen and Knut G. Nustad, eds., *State Formation: Anthropological Perspectives* (Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press, 2005); Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, ed., *Chinese Religiosities: Afflictions of Modernity and State Formation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); and Chris Vaughan, *Darfur: Colonial Violence, Sultanic Legacies and Local Politics, 1916–1956* (London: Boydell and Brewer, 2015).

² Fernando Lopez-Alves, *State Formation and Democracy in Latin America, 1810–1900* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000); Ariel de la Fuente, *Children of Facundo: Caudillo and Gaucho Insurgency during the Argentine State-Formation Process* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000); Miguel Angel Centeno and Fernando López-Alves, eds., *The Other Mirror: Grand Theory through the Lens of Latin America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); James Dunkerley, ed., *Studies in the Formation of the Nation-State in Latin America* (London: Institute of Latin American Studies, 2002); Robert H. Holden, *Armies Without Nations: Public Violence and State Formation in Central America, 1821–1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Benjamin T. Smith, *Pistoleros and Popular Movements: The Politics of State Formation in Postrevolutionary Oaxaca* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009); and Ben Fallaw, *Religion and State Formation in Postrevolutionary Mexico* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013).

³ Helga Baitenmann, “Counting on State Subjects: State Formation and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century Mexico,” in Krohn-Hansen and Nustad, *State Formation: Anthropological Perspectives*, 171.

Violence, citizenship, and capitalism

In the second half of the nineteenth century, landowners and the urban middle class in Latin America thrived, but for a great majority of the region's rural population and *castas* (working people and people of color) material life improved very little. Recent scholarship on the period, nonetheless, has problematized the notion that these social groups remained passive agents of change.⁴ Romana Falcón and Raymond Buve's *Pueblos en tiempos de guerra: La formación de la nación en México, Argentina, y Brasil (1800–1920)* surveys the long, drawn-out (and often violent) processes of nation formation in the region, which began in the wake of independence and accelerated under liberalism. It shows how marginalized social groups—such as *pueblos* (political entities consisting of small towns or communities), tribes, Indigenous communities, Afro-descendants, mulattos, freedmen and freedwomen, slaves, and ordinary people—regularly played active roles in demanding that their rights be safeguarded.

The seven essays explore how these social groups adjusted to these concrete realities and illuminate the conditions that allowed for the reproduction and persistence of internal colonialism in Mexico, Argentina, and Brazil. The volume candidly confronts the violent cost of this process, which the literature on Mexico—until very recently—has overlooked. To explain this process in greater detail, many essays highlight how both social groups and government forces deployed violence strategically. Laura Orta Moreno's contribution, for example, examines *malones* (the deployment of violent actions with the intent of obtaining cattle) in 1850s Argentina as forms of strategic resistance by Indigenous groups to keep the incursions of the state into the frontier at bay (31–50).

Other important themes explored in the volume include social groups' efforts to define their relationships with military officials and their responses to conscription, reclamation of ancestral rights over natural resources, and resistance to onerous taxation and labor requirements (10). Edilson Pereira Brito's contribution, for example, explores the wide array of responses from Afro-descendants and mulattos to the military recruitment imposed by the Brazilian monarchy in Paraná during the Paraguayan War (1864 to 1870)—the largest armed confrontation in the history of South America (81–103). Falcón's essay argues that even though times of war (1850–1870) brought hardships for ordinary people in Mexico State, spaces opened for traditionally marginalized groups to retain a certain degree of autonomy and to actively negotiate with the state and elite groups (159–186). Together, all seven essays remain headstrong in their conviction that history viewed from the grass roots tells us a much different story about how ordinary and marginal groups encountered the advancement of the liberal project over the course of the nineteenth century. Even those who occupied the lower echelons of the social pyramid were able to take advantage of the opportunities created by independence and the turbulent periods of the century (17).

Ben Fallaw and David Nugent's *State Formation in the Liberal Era: Capitalisms and Claims of Citizenship in Mexico and Peru* also engages with how ordinary people experienced the liberal project in the nineteenth century but extends its coverage into the Cold War's inception. The volume notably distinguishes between the two forms of citizenship that characterized the liberal era: formal and imaginary citizenship, which is the universal form laid out in constitutional charters; and active (or lived) citizenship, which refers “to the concrete, tangible rights, responsibilities and duties that accrued to specific categories of people (as a function of race, gender, class, clientele, etc.) and that structured their participation in everyday life, within specific regional domains” (xiv). This approach, which is reflected

⁴ Peter Guardino, “Connected Communities: Villagers and Wider Social System in the Late Colonial and Early National Periods,” in *Beyond Alterity: Destabilizing the Indigenous Other in Mexico*, edited by Paula López Caballero and Ariadna Acevedo-Rodrigo (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2018), 64.

in the nine contributions, emphasizes how the creation of active forms of citizenship clashed with the reproduction of capital and challenged the basis of consent to the social order (xviii).

The volume is divided into two parts spanning two separate chronologies: 1850–1900 and 1900–1950. The introductory essays to each part are real gems that provide excellent economic and political syntheses of the periods in question and allow the individual contributions of the volume to shine. Part 1 has four chapters and tackles the reproduction of capital in both countries. Carlos Contreras shows how Peru went from being a system of governance supported by custom duties and Indigenous levy in 1850 to a liberal model characterized by sales tax in the decades that followed (chapter 1). Thomas Passananti examines the changing and complex relationship in Porfirian Mexico between the Banco Nacional de México and the ruling regime from 1881 to 1911 (chapter 2). Sarah Washbrook addresses how traditional ethnic relations and political and economic institutions did not hinder the development of export driven state formation in Chiapas, Mexico between 1876 to 1911 (chapter 3). José Ragas analyzes how national regimes in Peru (1880–1930) excluded and “ignored” large swathes of the national population by categorizing them as “undocumented” (chapter 4). Together, the studies in the first part cast light on how existing forms of lived citizenship were undermined and replaced with more oppressive forms that catered to an elite-led liberal capitalist economy. Mexico in this regard proved more adept at sustaining a coalition of ruling elites and better integrated zones of capitalist development.

Part 2 shows how, despite taking radically diverging paths at the start of the twentieth century, Peru and Mexico seemed to converge at midcentury. Lewis Taylor wrestles with the impact of changing “landowner-peasant-state relations” from 1920 to 1930 in the Asunción and Cospán districts of Peru (chapter 5). Paulo Drinot’s essay (chapter 6) spotlights workers’ efforts in Ticapampa (1920s–1930s) “to mobilize the labor state to mediate their relations with capital” and their active efforts to use legislation in “the spirit of social justice and national progress” (213). Nugent’s contribution on labor conscription in Chachapoyas (chapter 7) finds that the Peruvian state’s ability to impose itself in remote regions in the first half of the twentieth century was not dependent on the eradication of “violence-wielding” rivals, but rather rested “upon their preservation.” Fallaw’s study on cooperativism in postrevolutionary Yucatán (1924–1935) reminds us that economic forces and factors can indeed bring a fresh perspective to understanding the consolidation of a lasting postrevolutionary order (chapter 8). Benjamin T. Smith (chapter 9) explores the paradoxes of state formation in postrevolutionary Mexico (1920–1958) that were embodied in the fine line between consensual communal work and coerced labor in road building.

These two collections reflect a discernable new trend in state formation studies, which in the past has tended to privilege cultural approaches at the expense of downplaying the centrality of violence in the construction of new nations and the economic forces and factors that have formed the state.⁵ The above studies demonstrate that these material processes transformed national, regional, and local economies, reconfigured political and economic elites, remade social hierarchies, and involved the deployment of violence. The collections also contribute to the burgeoning scholarship on citizenship in Latin America, which over the past decade has examined how the concept structures participation in everyday life.⁶ In this way they advance knowledge about how marginal social

⁵ Wil Pansters, ed., *Violence, Coercion, and State-Making in Twentieth-Century Mexico: The Other Half of the Centaur* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012); Teo Ballvé, *The Frontier Effect: State Formation and Violence in Colombia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2020); Michael Bess, *Routes of Compromise: Building Roads and Shaping the Nation in Mexico, 1917–1952* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017).

⁶ Evelina Dagnino, *Meanings of Citizenship in Latin America* (Sussex: University of Sussex, 2006); James Holston, *Insurgent Citizenship: Disjunction of Democracy and Modernity in Brazil* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press,

groups, peasants, and workers engaged politically with their peers to enact citizenship, contest the state, and demand rights.

Democracy and revolution

The following two books question rigid narratives about revolution, democracy, popular revolutionary leaders, and the political capacity of ordinary people. Colby Ristow's *A Revolution Unfinished: The Chegomista Rebellion and the Limits of Revolutionary Democracy in Juchitán, Oaxaca* relates the story of a little-known uprising during the Mexican Revolution that proved to be the Madero regime's (1911–1913) test case for a “version of liberal-democratic rule in indigenous Mexico” (4). Led by José F. “Che” Gómez, the rebellion sought finally to “break the cycle of political imposition” and to “destroy the prevailing social order” that had historically kept the Indigenous residents of Juchitán's *barrio de abajo* in a subordinate position (107). This is a book that explores the limits of revolutionary democracy to reveal “the contradictions between hegemonic paradigms of marginality, which portrayed Mexico's poor and indigenous population as pre-political, and emergent revolutionary discourse of universal citizenship and liberal democracy” (114).

The *gente de abajo* of Juchitán, however, did not simply fall prey to revolutionary demagoguery. As nineteenth-century liberal discourses of universal citizenship began once again to circulate far and wide, Ristow claims that “the *gente de abajo* of Juchitán gravitated toward articulations of democracy and citizenship that reinscribed their corporate identities, and towards leaders who would represent their collective interests in the public sphere” (74). They found that avatar in Gómez, and also demanded the right to stake a claim to political representation. This was embodied in the *jefatura política*, which formed part of the Porfiriato's disciplinary structure that for decades “had been appointed by the state government in consultation with Porfirio Díaz, without the consent of the local population” (107). The book argues that the “changing spatial dynamics” and the profound economic and demographic growth the region had experienced are crucial to understanding why the rebellion broke out, how it was repressed, and its legitimacy undermined.

Ristow's argument is supported by a wide array of rich primary source documentation from regional and personal archives in Oaxaca, repositories in Mexico City, and contemporary newspapers accounts. This research is balanced with an impressive synthesis of the available secondary material. Many of the chapters explore deeply the Chegomistas' public discourse. Chapter 2, for example, suggests that the Chegomistas adopted the modern language of the Mexican Revolution, but couched these claims around traditional rights to self-governance (109). The author provides an even-handed analysis of the conflict. Chapter 4, for example, considers the state government's response to the Madero regime's efforts to resolve the matter. Specifically, it demonstrates how Governor Benito Juárez Maza—who the conservative oligarchy supported—used the conflict as a pretext to take up the cause of state sovereignty to oppose the revolutionary government. Ristow also illuminates how factors such as ethnicity and class, among others, played important roles in denying the high principles of liberal republicanism to popular revolutionaries and Indigenous peoples alike. The book dramatically underscores the liberal elite's failure to “integrate the poor and indigenous majority as anything other than dependents” and documents how a liberal-democratic state formed at the expense of “restricting political liberties to a small minority” (8).

2008); Nancy Postero, *The Indigenous State: Race, Politics, and Performance in Plurinational Bolivia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017).

Lillian Guerra's *Heroes, Martyrs, and Political Messiahs in Revolutionary Cuba, 1946–1958* also explores a local political culture, the rise of radical civic opposition to the state, and the creation of everyday heroes. The book challenges the notion that the 1940s and 1950s—that is, the period preceding the Cuban Revolution—was marked by public passivity, resignation, and political apathy. Instead, the book illuminates “a populace seething with resentment” against a hypocritical and gradually violent government (12, 14). In so doing, Guerra counters the foundational myth of the Cuban Revolution that has long credited only a small handful of brave heroes and the 26th of July Movement for challenging and defeating Batista's forces. At the heart of Guerra's research, however, is not the apotheosis of Fidel Castro (even though he does make an appearance), but that of Eduardo “Eddy” Chibás, founder of the Ortodoxo Party, whose rise to prominence in the 1940s “resulted from and reflected the participatory culture of Cuban society” (23). In the words of Guerra's own grandfather, “Chichi” Heriberto Rodríguez: “Eddy Chibás was revolution. He knew how to remind us how to be Cubanos. . . . He always demanded that Cuba live up to what it should have been” (11).

The first half of the book focuses on what the author has called “democracy's last stand.” Chapter 2, for example, shows how under Batista, opposition movements organized to demand the “constitutional freedoms of assembly, expression, and citizen's control over government” (75). The next two chapters examine the aftermath of the assault on the Moncada barracks, the growth of civic activism, and “citizens eventual endorsement of armed struggles as the only means for toppling Batista” (158). The second half of the book revises current interpretations of the war against Batista to include overlooked voices, such as the role of students and the urban underground. An important finding here is the leading role that the *clandestinos'* political campaign played in financing, protecting, supplying, and promoting Castro's guerrillas, which the author maintains contributed to the success of the revolution “as much or more so than a military campaign” (230–231).

Guerra is keen to not simply “retell old stories in new ways.” The book makes expert use of newly opened archives in Cuba, oral interviews, personal collections, newspapers, and government publications, among others, to bring to life the “long-lost voices of otherwise anonymous ‘everyday’ Cubans” (16). Yet it does so in a way that is dignified and respectful. The narrative not only centers the ordinary masses in the making of a political culture and participatory democracy but also catapults extraordinary (but unknown) political messiahs into the limelight. The author shows why “control over who has the *right to write* history and who can decide its meaning” matters today more than ever (289), and how great storytelling can capture the resilience of a people struggling against seemingly insurmountable odds.

Ristow and Guerra challenge scholars to think more about the political capacity of ordinary people to enact democracy and refashion the social order. State formation approaches have traditionally focused on how the state is produced in everyday life and the practices of power and rituals that form it. The authors, however, are less concerned with fitting neatly into this mold; instead, they underscore the messiness of state formation and how ordinary people can (and often do) take matters into their own hands to enact citizenship rights and democracy. This approach has important implications for understanding what Greg Grandin elsewhere has called “the strength of Latin American democracy,” which took shape in the mass movement struggles for liberty and equality during the early twentieth century and would later become indispensable to the advancement of democracy in the region.⁷ The two books show that new approaches to state formation studies are decisively bringing the people back in but are not losing sight of the material and tangible factors that shape the political lives of citizens.

⁷ Greg Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), xv.

Agrarian reform and revolution

The Mexican Revolution (1910–1920) produced one of the most radical doctrines on social rights in the twentieth century. The Constitution of 1917 extended social and economic guarantees and protections to all Mexicans. It also added important provisions on labor and the social dimensions of property rights, among others. Central to these efforts was Article 27, which paved the way for a radical redistribution of land and would go on to frame much of the social and political backdrop in rural Mexico during the twentieth century. Yet despite its importance to Mexican history, there are few studies exploring its genesis. Helga Baitenmann's *Matters of Justice: Pueblos, the Judiciary, and Agrarian Reform in Revolution Mexico* explores the lesser-known history of how two early agrarian reform programs—the Zapatista and Constitutionalist projects—were conceptualized, implemented, and adapted to unanticipated village disputes during the Mexican Revolution.

The Zapatista program aimed to restructure landed property at a national level and reduce the monopolization of land and resources, while the Constitutionalist (Carrancista) program was “purposely limited to the restitution of illegally seized pueblo lands and to the granting of enough land to villages for subsistence agriculture” (23). The book claims that their “differences had important implications for the relationship between the executive and the judiciary, the relationship between the federal government and free and sovereign municipalities, and the question of how to deal with intervillage land and water conflicts” (198). For Baitenmann, “what determined the future shape of land reform in postrevolutionary Mexico were conflicts within and between pueblos” (6). And at the center of these conflicts were litigious villagers who over the course of the nineteenth century used the judiciary to engage in old and new land suits against “other pueblos, municipal governments, local caciques, and landowners” (52).

Baitenmann unearths a copious amount of land disputes in Mexico's archives to carefully explain why *dotación* (grants) quickly became a ubiquitous feature of the agrarian reform program during and after the Mexican Revolution. On this note, she directly confronts the misconception that restitution and grants were any different in terms of fundamental property rights and conditions. These findings question a prevailing strand in the Mexican literature that has viewed the perceived favoring of grants over restitution in the petitioning process “as a means of embedding state clientelism and a tool for peasant co-optation” (16). The reality on the ground, as Baitenmann underscores, proved far more chaotic and messier. Chapter 3, which provides an overview of the temporary land redistributions Zapatistas carried out, for example, shows that even Zapatista military chiefs were faced with unanticipated problems when villagers invaded lands and “often trespassed on what neighboring pueblos considered their ancestral lands and water resources” (81).

Another significant finding is that the Decree of January 6, 1915—at the heart of the Carrancista program—accidentally established “the main procedures for Mexico's twentieth-century land reform” (109). In fact, the experience of rural dwellers with using the courts in past, and their sustained interaction with the state, allowed them swiftly to adopt a new “language” in the petitioning process. This transformed village representatives into active agents in shaping the program's central tenets and had a disproportionate impact in creating, translating, and adapting agrarian reform to local realities (109). These organic developments would go on to significantly influence how the program developed in the decades to come and proved instrumental in forming the state that emerged after the Mexican Revolution.

The Bolivian Revolution of 1952 also ushered in profound structural changes. It attempted to put an end to the oligarchic control of native labor, nationalize the tin mines, promote universal suffrage, and protect the right of labor to organize. And like

its Mexican counterpart, the revolution also established a far-reaching agrarian reform that substantially impacted rural life. Enshrined in the Agrarian Reform Decree of August 2, 1953, the reform program “not only broke up manorial estates and abolished feudal-like servitude but also sidelined [a prior] conservative program of land reform that aimed to modernize the rural area by investing in rural properties based on unpaid Indian labor” (Soliz, 21). Carmen Soliz’s *Fields of Revolution: Agrarian Reform and Rural State Formation in Bolivia, 1935–1964* “considers the long historical arc of [this] agrarian reform process” to examine how the charged confrontations between property owners, Indians, and peasants shaped the central government’s local policies in the decades following the Bolivian Revolution (4, 190).

The book dispels the notion that peasant unions were merely pawns of the Revolutionary Nationalist Movement (MNR)—a coalition of urban progressives and tin miners, which successfully routed the Bolivian armed forces to take power in 1952. To do so, the author has perused a wide array of source material, such as letters, reports, and court cases from archives in Cochabamba, La Paz, and Sucre to show that the “demand to organize unions in the countryside predated the revolution” (8). This process had profound implications for the course of the revolution because these peasant unions led the charge for land distribution “as the government quickly lost control of the process” (9). Chapter 3, for example, documents a long history of syndicalist organizing in the countryside on the part of both peasant and Indigenous groups in the late 1930s. The formation of these peasant unions “solidified and gave visibility to economic, social, and political units that had formed and operated before the revolution” (90). The success of their organizing efforts also complicates the role of the MNR in rural areas and clarifies why unions did not simply follow its political agenda and why Indigenous communities were able to adopt “the nationalist discourse after the revolution to reclaim their lands” (10).

Soliz’s findings also expand the periodization of the Bolivian Revolution. Central to this effort is the author’s notion of “everyday forms of revolution.” The concept builds on James C. Scott’s highly influential “everyday forms of resistance,”⁸ but instead of privileging the ordinary and day-to-day agency of peasant political actors, the author inverts its meaning to emphasize direct action and overt mobilization of peasant groups against the ruling order. Using the concept in this manner allows Soliz to bring to the fore the two-decade-long legal and political battle peasant groups waged against property owners and the state to enact agrarian reform. The concept comes full circle near the end of the book. In chapter 5, for example, the author makes use of land disputes and court cases to demonstrate how *excomunarios* (members of former Indigenous communities who lost their land to encroaching haciendas and subsequently became part of a dependent labor force) lobbied, petitioned, and seized lands after 1953, and successfully forced the government to act (121). Chapter 6 analyzes how peasant groups continued to force land redistribution under military rule in the 1970s. These findings confirm the success of direct action and overt mobilization in “grant[ing] peasant unions [in Bolivia] a large degree of autonomy that grew stronger in the second half of the twentieth century” (169).

Baitenmann and Soliz not only consider the material factors that shape the political lives of citizens before and during revolutions but also explore their long-term consequences on state-society relations. In the cases of Mexico and Bolivia, the call for agrarian reform came not from a cadre of urban progressives but was fashioned in the everyday experience of the revolution. One of the most important takeaways from these two monographs is that peasants were not simply pawns of revolutionary governments. On the contrary, they engaged in day-to-day battles, used concrete mechanisms available to them

⁸ James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985).

(such as the courts), and created active forms of politics that tested the limits of revolutionary governments and profoundly altered postrevolutionary societies.

Violence and injustice

Violence has played a central part in the formation of nations yet its historical constitution and its role in this process has received scant attention. The two books under review in this section examine how extralegal forms of vigilante justice became entwined with state formation in Texas and Mexico. Both books highlight the dynamics, impacts, and consequences of lynching and terror but do so from different starting points. Monica Muñoz Martinez focuses on the long-term impacts that such violence has had on racialized communities and the sense of injustice that never leaves them, whereas Gema Kloppe-Santamaría addresses the motivations and political undercurrents that made the practice of lynching a tool of social control and justice. They do, nevertheless, find common ground in exposing “the overt and covert participation of state actors in the organization of mob killings, communities’ distrust and rejection of the formal system of justice, and the impact of modernization and centralization efforts on escalating processes of scapegoating and social control” (Kloppe-Santamaría, 115). The books are powerful reminders that the histories of Mexico and the United States have long been intimately linked by violence and terror, coercion and vigilantism, and impunity.

Martinez’s *The Injustice Never Leaves You: Anti-Mexican Violence in Texas* is an immensely powerful, haunting, and heartfelt book. It is a genuine page-turner that unflinchingly documents the history of violence and terror on the Texas-Mexico border. The book shockingly points out that “between 1848 and 1928 in Texas alone, 232 ethnic Mexicans were lynched by vigilante groups of three or more people.” For Martinez, however, “the tabulations only tell part of the story,” because state racial terror and vigilantism worked hand in hand to establish a blueprint for sanctioned abuse and impunity. “The frequency, and normalcy, of anti-Mexican violence seeped far beyond Texas and encouraged a public passivity toward violent policing that has had long-standing consequences for people living near the border” (7).

The first three chapters of the book are organized around two lynchings and a double murder that occurred between 1910 and 1920: a public lynching of a Mexican national in 1910 at the hands of an Anglo mob in central Texas (chapter 1); the double murder of two prominent ethnic Mexican landowners in south Texas in 1915 by a Texas Ranger and vigilantes (chapter 2); and the Texas Rangers’ massacre of fifteen men and boys in 1918, and their relatives’ subsequent quest for justice (chapter 3). Martinez makes it clear that, in the wake of these tragedies, “preserving memories became a strategy of resistance against historical inaccuracies and social amnesias. The family histories expose the heavy burden of those who carry the load of a traumatic past” (126). It is this effort to “linger in the aftermath” and to “search for the lives shaped by violence” that makes this book special and a genuine contribution to reclaiming the histories of those who were targets “of intimidation, mob violence, and police violence, who were nearly erased from written history and rarely remembered in conventional accounts” (25).

The second half of the book explores the profound impact that anti-Mexican violence had on the communities who today are still fighting for social justice, freedom, and full humanity. Martinez reminds us that this history has quite frankly been hidden in plain sight, at institutions of higher learning, museums, and even Dairy Queen restaurants. These are constant and daily reminders that, in the words of Martinez, “require us to search, first and foremost, for lost humanity” (23). Chapter 4 examines the persistent cultures of extralegal violence that continued to thrive in the United States, which state administrators and law enforcement endorsed, permitted, and sanctioned. Chapter 5

documents how “architects of memory,” such as “photographers, journalists, politicians, and historians, historical commissions, and cultural institutions” upheld normative models of American ideals and created narratives that demonized ethnic Mexicans. And finally, chapter 6 introduces readers to the practice of “vernacular history-making,” which has led to a public reckoning and dialogue about the legacy of anti-Mexican violence in Texas.

Martinez deftly uses state and private archives and oral histories to challenge the “keepers of history” who have “convinced the broader United States that this period should be remembered as a time of progress” (8). Along the way, the author exalts the voices of those that lived the legacy of this violence: “The interviewee made his goal clear from the beginning. He wanted to give an account of a series of murder he witnessed and learned about. . . . Sitting in front of a tape recorder, he testified to the history of racial violence along with the names or titles of Texas Rangers, local law enforcement officers, and area ranchers who participated in these extralegal executions” (294). These fine emotive details help Martinez to place dignity at the heart of the book and to make central the voices of those who traditionally have been left out of the historical record.

Kloppe-Santamaría’s *In the Vortex of Violence: Lynching, Extralegal Justice, and the State in Post-Revolutionary Mexico* deploys a different approach to studying extralegal forms of vigilante justice. Instead of focusing on the victims’ families and the afterlives of violence against Mexicans, the author interprets lynching as “recognizable sociological and historical phenomena that can be studied in terms of their motivations, organization, and cultural and political significance” (3). It defines lynching “as a collective, extralegal, public, and particularly cruel form of violence aimed at punishing individuals considered offensive or threatening by a given group or community.” In shifting the focus to perpetrators of violence, the book contends that citizens’ interactions with the Mexican state from the 1930s to 1950s gave lynching form and meaning and was viewed by these groups “as a legitimate means to attain justice” (3). The prevalence of this practice in postrevolutionary Mexico, however, did not indicate that the state was nonexistent or dormant but was prompted by communities’ “view of state authorities as abusive, intrusive, and ultimately incapable of providing the type of punishment they deemed appropriate to attain justice” (9). This approach complicates traditional views of the state as an institutional order retaining a monopoly on the use of force.

The book investigates over three hundred cases of lynching and attempted lynching from the 1930s to 1950s to explore “the manifold beliefs, ideologies, and practices” that allowed extralegal forms of vigilante justice to flourish (6). Chapter 1 introduces three modalities of lynching present in postrevolutionary Mexico: lynching as resistance, lynching as corrective justice, and state-sanctioned lynching. Taken together, the modalities demonstrate how state encroachment into communal life led to lynching and mob violence being “promoted as a form of governance and social control” (18). Chapter 2 considers the bearing of religion as a catalyst for the organization and legitimation of lynching and finds that “religious beliefs and practices contributed to rendering lynching a legitimate means to punish individuals perceived as threatening to the spiritual and political integrity of Catholic groups and community” (61). Chapter 3 explores how crime news shaped broader perceptions of the futility of Mexico’s justice system and helped construct justification for “lynching as an acceptable, even moral, response to crime” (67). Chapter 4 analyzes how mythical beliefs, fantastical mythical characters, and the state’s modernization efforts precipitated a rise in lynching and provided popular explanations to social groups that begrudged the intrusiveness of the modern state. The four chapters reveal the varied ways ordinary masses used lynching (and by extension, violence) as a tool of social control, how they challenged the revolutionary claims of the ruling regime, and why they came to reject its formal system of justice.

Martinez and Kloppe-Santamaría show that governments and institutions have long asserted, diverted, and regulated violence to suppress perceived threats and dangers. This is a theme raised in the edited collections discussed above (Falcón and Buve, and Fallaw and Nugent) and serves as a poignant reminder that violence itself cannot be divorced from its wider context. Future works must account for its frequency, motivations, and long-term consequences. Collectively, the eight books reviewed retain a focus on how subaltern groups construct nation-states and how state rule is accomplished, which over the past three decades has been a hallmark of the state formation literature. However, these recent works have given weight to often overlooked factors, such as the larger material and economic developments that have shaped nations; how popular participation in mass politics and labor organizing affected state-society relations; the nature of democracy, citizenship, and activism; and the political capacity of ordinary people to effect change. Future studies on Latin American state formation would do well to continue bringing the people back in, while not completely dismissing the critical material factors that shape the political lives of ordinary people.

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