nonetheless sprinkled with colourful anecdotes about individual testators or their families, Christensen and Restall deftly avoid this pitfall by drawing on their extensive knowledge of larger Yucatecan society and comparisons with colonial Central Mexico and, to a limited extent, Guatemala. For example, they observe that provisions for posthumous rites or burial treatment in the Ixil wills were much more modest than in surviving testaments from Central Mexico or Peru – a comparison that could, upon further study, reflect differences in indigenous mortuary traditions or experiences of evangelisation.

This comprehensive approach allows the authors to not simply paint a detailed picture of eighteenth-century Ixil society but to contextualise it. They note features that Ixil shared with or set it apart from its contemporaries, for instance, and thus highlight what their local study contributes to a broader understanding of colonial Mesoamerica. By combining detailed ethnohistorical analysis with an invaluable corpus of primary sources, *Return to Ixil* thus appeals to a broad readership that encompasses not only specialists in Mayan language and culture, but also scholars of colonial-period Mesoamerica and of comparative economic or social history more broadly.

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Anna Cant, *Land without Masters: Agrarian Reform and Political Change under Peru's Military Government*

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'Of course, the real disaster happened after the earthquake', Magdalena told me of the agrarian reform in Peru, repeating a refrain that I've often heard when researching the 1970 seismic shock that destroyed the northern highlands of Áncash. At its time, it was one of the most deadly earthquakes on record. Some 80,000 people were killed, and another 800,000 were left homeless. According to Magdalena, this devastation paled in comparison with the chaos that was unleashed by the redistribution of land that, beginning in 1969, was instigated by the military government of Juan Velasco. Promising to pursue a third political trajectory, between the capitalist and communist lines of the Cold War, Velasco's ambitious programme saw the seizure of private holdings that were larger than 15 hectares and their reallocation, in smaller lots, to agricultural cooperatives, campesino communities and individual claimants. During the course of eight busy years, more than 7 million hectares changed hands. Around 45 per cent of Peru's agricultural land was affected. But not all the earthquake survivors saw this upheaval as another crisis. Accompanied by increased access to politics and education, especially among the rural Andean population, it also helped rebuild lives and expand horizons.

Despite being one of the more remarkable events of recent Peruvian history, the agrarian reform remains woefully under-scrutinised. This is especially noticeable when it is viewed alongside similar processes in Mexico and Cuba, studies of which occupy the reams of many volumes that collectively span kilometres of shelves in bookshops and libraries. *Land without Masters* makes a welcome addition to a scantly populated field, and offers an original take on a movement that, for complex reasons explored in its final chapter, is discussed infrequently in Peru and has largely been overlooked by historians. Anna Cant acknowledges the polarising legacies of the reform today, but it is not her aim to account for why some remember it as a catastrophe and why others, in opposition to Magdalena, recall it as an opportunity or a moment of reckoning. Observing that, to an extent, such contrasting perspectives reflect 'the views of the winners and losers in what was a major redistribution of economic and political power', she also argues that they are 'a mark of the intensely ideological terms in which the agrarian reform was justified and carried out' (p. 2). It is this ideology in its manifold and contradictory expressions that, ultimately, is of interest to our author.

To this end, *Land without Masters* examines a series of Velasco's cornerstone laws, all of which relate to the agrarian reform, but that go beyond the judicial mechanisms that were set in motion by lawyers and academics to modify legal documentation and revise physical boundaries. Cant also focuses on the policies that were designed to restructure political governance, public education and the media, and crafts three compelling chapters around the implementation and reception of the legislation that complemented the reform in these arenas. They are bookended by an opening chapter that situates the reform in geographical and historical context, and another of closing remarks on memory and legacy; these, unlike the rest of the work, which is based on empirical findings, tend towards the theoretical. One of the monograph's distinctive features is its sustained comparison between three different regions. Drawing on extensive fieldwork conducted in Piura, Cusco and Tacna, Cant contrasts the realisation of the reform on the northern Pacific coast, in the southern highlands and on the border with Chile and Bolivia. This reveals how the impacts of these policies, conceived in Lima and delivered nationwide by a dedicated branch of technocrats – working on behalf of the ever-polemical Sistema Nacional de Apoyo a la Movilización Social (National Social Mobilization Support System, SINAMOS) – were tempered by local industries, social frameworks and institutional cultures. It also, in the author's words, 'tells a bigger story about the relationship between central government and the regions, how the idea of the region is consolidated and reshaped through state practice, and the challenges of establishing political hegemony in the context of regional diversity' (p. 7). Such diversity was not only topological. Somewhat paradoxically, the military dictatorship made a bid for hegemony that promised to increase political participation among historically marginalised groups and challenge the dominance of elite-led institutions in the capital.

Land without Masters thus prioritises heterogeneity in its choice of settings and its cast of characters. So, too, does it apply to Cant's sources, which are rich and carefully selected. Oral histories are substantiated with newspaper articles, political pamphlets and the remnants of paper trails that, given the lack of official archives that concern the period in question, exist only when preserved by bureaucrats and members of the co-operatives that they sought to manage. The grassroots administration of

Quechua-language radio stations tells a different story to the censorship of the national print press. School reports reveal how the ideological thrust towards democratisation was often obstructed by deep-set pedagogical dogmas and the dispensations of military discipline. There are some delightful anecdotes in *Land without Masters* that serve to animate its arguments. Take the tale of the campesina who inquired after 'Papá SINAMOS' in the Piura office of the woman she assumed to be his wife, revealing the intransient nature of patriarchal structures and the ubiquity of paternalist patronage. Or the poetic account of how those who exchanged the hoe for the typewriter as part of SINAMOS publicity campaigns soon noticed physiognomic transformations to their hands and their fingers, just as their political agency also altered.

All of this ensures that the conclusions which are reached in this notable work are robust, enlightening and convincing. Effectively, *Land without Masters* shows 'the importance of the agrarian reform as an ideological project that fundamentally reoriented the remit and actions of the state and placed the countryside at the heart of nation building' (p. 177). Looking back at the years that would follow – years of guerrilla warfare, genocide, forced sterilisations and unchecked industrialisation that weighed upon rural communities – when multiple factions competed for power, it is difficult to overstate this sentiment. The book is clearly written, easy to navigate, and beautifully illustrated by the photographs, prints and drawings that Cant has unearthed in the disparate collections that are scattered across the country. It is, therefore, suitable both for broad audiences and specialists. Her research lays the ground for future investigations into the effects of the Peruvian reform in different regions, about which few such publications yet exist: Áncash is one, but there are many others. For those seeking to analyse the Pink Tide rise of cooperativism, agrarian reform, authoritarianism, participatory politics and mass expropriations in neighbouring nations, especially as this tide has turned, it is also a critical point of reference. In this politicised site of enquiry that remains highly divisive, may its blurring of distinctions between democratic and dictatorial practices be instructive.

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Mauro José Caraccioli, *Writing the New World: The Politics of Natural History in the Early Spanish Empire* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2021), pp. 212, $80.00, hb, $28.00, pb.

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Political theorists have long grappled with 'nature' to explain the making, transformation and destruction of human polities. Aristotle connected his *Politics* to his *Meteorology*. Scholasticism drew on Aristotelian physics and meteorology to