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## RESEÑAS DE LIBROS / BOOK REVIEWS

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ALMA DURÁN-MERK: *“In Our Sphere of Life:” German-Speaking Immigrants in Yucatán and Their Descendants, 1876-1914*. Frankfurt: Vervuert, 2015

For scholars interested in German immigration to Mexico, Alma Durán-Merk’s comprehensive study on Germans in Yucatán during the Porfiriato and the early part of the Mexican Revolution (1876-1914) offers a useful counterpoint to works that have analyzed well-to-do immigrant communities, especially in Mexico City. Far away from the capital, in the southeastern state of Yucatán, the author encountered immigrants in humble professions who interacted with the native population, and especially its largely indigenous lower class, without eliciting “expressions of xenophobia” and, for the most part, well integrated into the host society (page 22). The author’s thesis contrasts with the experience of what the historian Walther L. Bernecker has called “trade conquistadors,” who customarily remained within their own cultural bubble and enjoyed only limited interaction with their host society until at least World War Two. Based on painstaking research in Mexico, the United States, and Europe, including a wide array of sources from archival documents through newspaper articles and oral history interviews, this book is an important addition to the literature on European immigration to Latin America.

The book consists of eight chapters, the first two of them introductory. Consistent with the standards of scholarship generated in Germany, Chapter One not only provides an overview of the subject but also an extended and helpful historiographical discussion. Chapter Two provides the theoretical foundation of the study. In this case, we find a discussion of the analytical and theoretical concepts that have been used to study immigration before introducing the author’s “transcultural” perspective (borrowing from Fernando Ortiz’s influential work) centered on the *yuca-alemanes*. The chapter is particularly useful for scholars based in the Americas because of its review of literature generated in Europe.

In Chapter Three, the author provides an analysis of German immigration to Mexico between 1821 and 1876, a time of political turmoil in Mexico and of rapid state and nation building in Germany. The immigrants hailed from many of the different states that coalesced into the German Empire in 1871 under Prussia’s aegis, and an estimated 21 percent were artisans, miners, and “poor”

migrants, as compared to the 54 percent that were either traders (48 percent) or professionals (page 101).

Chapter Four analyzes Yucatán's situation as a "receiving society" in the Porfiriato. Based primarily on existing scholarship and eyewitness accounts, this long chapter (105 pages) gives a thorough overview of Yucatán's society in the nineteenth century and the conditions immigrants found when settling there. To non-specialists, the analysis might appear too long, while specialists on Yucatecan history are probably familiar with most of the details. The most helpful part of the chapter is the final section, which returns to the theme of immigration to show that immigration into Yucatán was not monolithic—either in terms of the social origins of the newcomers or in terms of the professions in which the immigrants worked.

Chapters Five to Seven analyze and answer the author's central research questions regarding German immigrants to Yucatán. Chapter Five looks at the German immigrants in terms of a "group portrait" before showing the different social origins of these immigrants, compared to the wealthier newcomers that settled in the national capital and other major Mexican cities. Chapter Six examines the immigrants' structural incorporation, social membership, cultural incorporation and aspects of identity, and argues that most of the sharp social and cultural lines that both Mexicans and immigrants perceived in Mexico City were far more blurred on the periphery. Finally, Chapter Seven examines the *Lebenswelten*, or "lived worlds," of the Yucatec Germans as multifaceted and subject to great social and cultural differentiation.

The conclusion, which is followed by an extraordinarily detailed appendix including an annotated list of sources, returns to the themes laid out in the introduction. The author makes an excellent case for her assertion that immigration in the Mexican periphery looked quite different from that in the capital. For example, most Germans in Yucatán came to work, and not to invest; the percentage of women was far higher in Yucatán (31) than in Mexico City (3-5); and many of the newcomers established German-Yucatecan families. Absent the kind of wealth that characterized many of the trade conquistadors, the Germans in Yucatán also were not able to form the German cultural institutions (churches and schools) that aided the establishment of a separate German "colony" in the capital.

Readers might find themselves querying the time frame chosen for this study (1876-1914). The author describes this as the "Golden Time" of the *yuca-alemanes*. The beginning point—the coup d'état of General Porfirio Díaz, which ushered in his long dominance in Mexico and a heyday of export-led modernization—appears sensible, with the caveat that some scholars have pointed to the Restored Republic (1867-1876) as the beginning of the era of modernization, particularly

in tropical enclave economies that did not require much railroad construction for their success. The end point (the beginning of World War One as well as the almost coterminous beginning of the war between the factions during the Mexican Revolution) begs for more explanation. Although it may appear tedious to request additional material in a book that is already more than 600 pages long, readers might finish the book wondering what happened to the Germans when the revolution arrived in Yucatán with the troops of General Salvador Alvarado in 1915, followed by the interruption of German-Mexican trade relations with the U.S. entry into the world war in April 1917. A brief analysis would have made for a perfect epilogue, and a longer analysis might be a topic for a future volume. In any event, Alma Durán-Merk has written a detailed and useful book that should be required reading for specialists in European immigration into Latin America.

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GEORGE F. FLAHERTY: *Hotel Mexico: Dwelling on the '68 Movement*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016

This is an ambitious book that seeks to reevaluate the experiential context of the 1968 Student Movement in Mexico City and its “afterlives” from the perspective of architecture, literature, artistic practices, and film. Flaherty moves, often effortlessly, between different temporal and interpretative modes, locating his narrative in 1950’s architectural discussions one moment and an evaluation of post-’68 remembering the next. What is especially impressive is his ability to integrate these different interpretative lenses into a wide-ranging, kaleidoscopic analysis of how key nodal points of the capital city were shaped, contested, and experienced across approximately six decades.

The title of the book serves as a metonym for Flaherty’s central thesis. In 1966 construction began on the Hotel de México, which was envisioned as “the country’s tallest, largest, and technologically most sophisticated property” (page 98). Its inauguration was originally planned to coincide with the start of the 1968 Olympiad, but this grandiose marvel of architectural design and technological innovation failed to be completed in time and ultimately fell short of the capital needed to finalize the project. Instead, it lay semi-finished and nearly abandoned for more than three decades until it was later transformed into a commercial trade center during the neo-liberal period in the 1990s. Only the Polyforum Cultural Siqueiros, originally conceived as an integral component of the hotel complex, would open in 1971. Flaherty builds outward from the planning of the Hotel de