
RESEÑAS DE LIBROS / BOOK REVIEWS

SALVADOR SALINAS, *Land, Liberty, and Water: Morelos After Zapata, 1920-1940*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2018.

Land, Liberty, and Water brings important new research to bear on questions of politics and state-building in Morelos, Mexico, after the defeat of the community-based insurgency that defined the region during the decade after 1910. Based primarily on archives of the Constitutionalist regime-in-construction, Salvador Salinas offers a new understanding of the political conflicts that engaged community leaders, state officials, and national actors during two pivotal decades. He links those conflicts to questions of land distribution, water use, and commercial cultivation, notably of rice, to seek an ecologically grounded vision of post-revolutionary reforms and consolidations. The work closes with a revealing chapter on a little-known rebellion that began in resistance to Calles in 1934, to be pacified under Cárdenas in 1938.

Salinas' archival revelations, with their local detail, will be essential to scholars seeking to understand post-revolutionary Mexico. He builds on that research to argue for a positive role for post-revolutionary state builders, notably the Calles regime, in forging community gains in cultivation and resolving land and water conflicts. He details how separate municipal, *ejidal*, and water authorities engaged each other, state powers, and national agencies in long contests, in the end making national powers the arbiters of disputes. Communities became dependent on national actors. Whether that dependence served community interests is another question.

Salinas' research does not engage the everyday struggles of families in Morelos. The challenges of community life before 1910 gain little notice (despite a rich historiography)—but as reminders that Porfirian sugar estates were more “efficient” at managing water than the communities that turned irrigation to rice production in the 1920s. Salinas rarely notes what Morelos villagers surely remembered—that the regime builders of the 1920s were political heirs to those who crushed their insurgencies and assassinated Zapata. Nor does he recognize that state-makers, faced with the political necessity of pacifying rural communities, imposed the structures that separated municipal, *ejidal*, and water authorities. By dividing local interests, the national regime would gain. Facing those divisions, village factions had to deal with the state. In a conflictive

reconstruction, seeking allies in the regime often proved the only way to make even limited gains—structured by dependence.

Salinas' detailed research on the rise of community rice cultivation is an important contribution. Still, his analysis erases maize from Morelos' political ecology. Are Jesús Sotelo Inclán, Felipe Ávila and John Womack, Oscar Lewis and Pedro Martínez, Guillermo de la Peña and Arturo Warman, and John Steinbeck, too, all wrong? All show variants of a regional history in which maize and sugar jostled in a long history, to give way after 1910 to new ecologies in which maize linked to and competed with diverse crops including rice, tomatoes, and, in time, sugar, again. Recognizing the importance of maize in relation to rice would have offered a more complex vision of post-revolutionary communities—and given greater meaning to the population pressures that Salinas repeatedly notes but rarely analyzes.

It would also have made clearer the importance of the rebellion led by *El Tallarín* between 1934-38. Salinas rightly emphasizes that the movement demanded land rights, defended religion, and protested political coercions—inconsistently seen as inseparable. That the movement began in opposition to Calles, weakens the emphasis that the Jefe Máximo was a positive force in Morelos communities. And was the rebel demand for land only about rice? Did maize matter too? Cárdenas responded with his classic approach to reform, aiming to improve the terms of rice production, addressing demands for maize lands, while building state power.

The Morelos villagers interviewed by Lewis, de la Peña, Warman and others lived the decades that Salinas studied in the archives of state power. They repeatedly saw the importance of maize—in interaction with other crops. They reported regular dealings with changing state powers as ongoing, often frustrating, necessities that brought limited, often temporary, gains.

I came away from Salinas' study with a deep appreciation of his primary research—and of *El Tallarín's* analysis. The rebel took arms to protest Calles' impositions and to demand communities integrated by landed autonomies, religious independence, and political rights. He surrendered to a Cárdenas regime that delivered land and eased cultural-educational intrusions, all to consolidate political rule. Like his dream, *El Tallarín* quickly disappeared from history. The state endured and the communities of Morelos continued to struggle.

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