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INSTITUTO DE INVESTIGACIONES HISTÓRICAS

Reseñas

Luis Fernando Granados, *En el espejo haitiano: los indios del Bajío y el colapso del orden colonial en América Latina*, Ciudad de México, Ediciones Era, 2016. 300 p.

At the heart of Luis Fernando Granados's intelligent, sophisticated, and wide-ranging book about the Latin American independence struggles is a question that virtually all students of violent mass political upheaval have confronted. How can the historian know what motivated common people—call them what you like: popular groups, subalterns, the uninscribed, etc.—to join rebellions, insurgencies, or revolutions? While he focuses throughout his extended prefatory introduction and four related essays on the central cases of the Haitian Revolution (1791–1804) and the Mexican insurgency of 1810–1821 (whose bicentennial occasioned the writing of the essays), he approaches the issue of common peoples' role in different ways, and from different angles. Although he makes some interesting suggestions about Mexican independence, in the end he does not quite come up with an answer to the question; but then neither have other scholars, including this reviewer. Let me begin with a few general remarks about the structure and style of the book, then move on to a chapter-by-chapter account of some of the major issues Granados raises. In launching this discussion I should emphasize that I think this a very worthwhile book, and that my criticism is meant less in the spirit of destruction and more in that of dialog.

Since it's composed of a series of essays more or less previously published in one form or another, and here revised and expanded, the structure of the book is somewhat disjunctive. As it turns out this is not a serious problem, since there are several themes that overlap among the essays, and a very perceptive running historiographical commentary in the footnotes in which Granados's discussions with other authors continue from one essay to the next. Obviously a perceptive reader, Granados is very good at invoking in a generally civilized way the major historical works on Haiti, Mexico, and other areas, praising or critiquing them where he feels it warranted (although I take mild exception to his characterization of my book *The Other Rebellion* as a "coda" to the work of William B. Taylor, even if Taylor's influence is palpable there). But even if the gaps among the essays were a problem, the long apologetic (in the older sense of a defense or justification of some proposition) preface would do little to fill them in. That Granados has conceived the chapters (save for Chapter 3) essentially as extended interpretive essays based almost exclusively on research by other historians is suggested by the positioning of the empirical material (drawn almost entirely from secondary sources) in the very long footnotes. While this technique makes for easier reading of a fairly dense text rendered in a complex writing style, it is also faintly irritating, as though the author did not wish reality to intrude on his thinking-through of complicated problems. Luis Granados is a very good writer in a complex style that occasionally rises to lyricism, but he occasionally gets trapped in the play of language and a Gallic rhetorical style in which tropes substitute for clear statements, as when he refers (p. 31) to mass violence as a "metaphor" or "emblem" of more complex social phenomena; emblem, certainly—but metaphor? On the other hand, his default Marxian position peeks through the text in a mechanistic fashion at many points, as in Chapter 2 where he discusses the imperial divide and rule strategy.

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This is hardly surprising, since the book is in some measure an *homage* to his *maître* John Tutino, who directed his doctoral dissertation and whose earlier work was realized in this mode. But when Granados approaches things in this way, as in this particular passage, he tends to dismiss the cultural dimensions—informal or even institutionalized forms of religion, for example, which served as a social glue and tool of subordination through colonial times and well beyond.

The first chapter, which takes up nearly half the volume, glossing the independence struggles in Spanish America with some original insights and placing against that backdrop a discussion of the Haitian Revolution, is the least convincing of the essays, although the author himself might see it as the most original. For one thing, Granados's conclusions get submerged or blurred among the allusive comparisons. Granados wants to locate the insurgency in New Spain within an Atlantic context, for which the Haitian case apparently stands proxy, but he explicitly backs away from doing "historia comparada" between the two episodes. A better strategy might perhaps have been to adopt a more controlled comparison focusing on a limited number of clearly defined variables, although that approach might well have made the writing less engaging. A more important problem, I think, are the questionable statements that the Haitian Revolution "puede ser concebida como un arquetipo que ayude a desentrañar la lógica de los movimientos populares en la América Española de principios del siglo XIX" (p. 84), and that the Haitian struggle was the "apotheosis" of popular revolution in the New World (p. 253). But was it? His unsystematic (but nonetheless interesting) comparison between Saint Domingue and the Mexican Bajío rests largely on the fact that both uprisings destroyed the central pillar of their economies—respectively sugar and silver. This is bold but reductive—true, but *not only* true. Obviously both rebellions were prolonged (about a dozen years, give or take), massively destructive of life and property and disruptive of social relations, characterized by elements of civil war, and eventuated in independence from the metropoli. But almost everything about the two regions was different—their histories, ethnic identities and relationships, labor systems, demographies, systems of property-holding, ecologies, connections to the world economy, and so forth—so that in the end the comparison is between apples and oranges: they are both round and have seeds in them, but there the similarity ends. Altogether more provocative in this chapter is the author's discussion of the multivalent concept of "pueblo" (developed in slightly different terms in Chapters 3 and 4), for which he prefers to substitute "pueblos" to suggest the multiplicity of popular groups throughout Spanish America and the different motivations they had for participating in these massive upheavals. If we are to understand the history of the Mexican independence struggle "from the bottom up," he suggests, we must acknowledge that "el pueblo" was neither what the elite insurgent leadership imagined, nor the homologous magnitude, in his version, that even the most revisionist historiography implies. Granados leads us further down the path toward dismantling the established narrative by emphasizing that neither the Mexican nation nor state were immanent within the insurgency, but were rather the outcome of process and contingency.

Next follows a historiographical essay in Chapter 2, where he tackles two themes: he offers us a sort of extended commentary on the works of other historians of the independence period upon which much of his own work is built, and a sharp critique of the bicentennial celebrations in Mexico in 2010. While the historiographical passages obviously reflect the author's own tastes (as such essays inevitably will), this is a smart and useful survey. He pays respect where it is due, especially to the graybeards of Mexican independence historiography, among them Luis Villoro, Ernesto Lemoine, Ernesto de la Torre, Carlos Herrejón, and Hugh Hamill (who comes in for high praise at several points here and elsewhere). At the same time, however, he emphasizes that the inattention to the history of common people in the insurgency in these and other praiseworthy, classic works has generated a misunderstanding of exactly what was going on between 1810 and 1815 or so, and about what foundations, mythical and otherwise, the Mexican state is actually based upon. The rest of the chapter embraces a critique, at points quite witty, of the somewhat botched bicentennial celebrations of 2010. He suggests that the *panista* regime was ideologically out of sympathy with the celebration of a popular revolutionary upheaval, and retraces this conservative genealogy back to Lucas Alamán: "El problema era más bien que los herederos ideológicos de Lucas Alamán no estaban en condiciones de celebrar un estallido revolucionario como él que horrorizó el historiador y político guanajuatense hace dos siglos" (p. 141). While I do not believe that this statement adequately describes the complex views of Alamán (of whom I am writing a biography), it is a suggestive point. Granados goes on to heap

scorn on such bicentennial publications as the beautifully produced revista *20/10: Memoria de las revoluciones en México*, and especially upon a number of television productions, "pomposos melodramas cubiertos por toneladas de miel" (p. 143).

In the opinion of this reviewer the best part of the volume is Chapter 3, an extended essay (70 pages), based in part on archival sources, concerning the participation of indigenous people, especially those known as *laboríos* (rural Indians unattached to settled villages), in the very first days of the Hidalgo revolt in the Bajío region. He begins with the question of why Father Hidalgo made the choices he did during the first week or so of the insurgency, particularly why he chose not to march on Querétaro on 19 September 1810. He concludes that Hidalgo went where the population of Indians not attached to villages was densest, and that these people joined his "army" in droves for the attack on Guanajuato at the end of the month. Granados calculates that about two-thirds of the indigenous rural population to the south of the silver city did not belong to settled pueblos, but payed tribute nonetheless, and that it was the promise of the insurgent leadership to abolish the *tributo* that motivated them to join the insurgent ranks. He delves very interestingly into the question of how elites and popular groups interpreted the concept of tribute—the former from a Physiocratic point of view, the latter as a symbol of ethnic subjugation and colonial extraction—and of how *indios laboríos* understood what the leadership was saying about the abolition of tribute. Here he argues that the Spanish Empire was in fact a colonial project (notwithstanding the powerful arguments of Jaime Rodríguez and other historians that it was not), that New Spain was a colony, that the most hated aspect of the colonial structure among indigenous people was tribute, and that from its very inception the rebellion was *ipso facto* "anti-colonial" because it sought to abolish the tributary system. Smart and closely argued as this essay is, I think there are two aspects of it meriting some reservations, although I can only allude to them briefly here. A first question would be not whether tribute represented all the things Granados says it does, but what role it played within an array of other motives for rebellion—ethnic conflict, religious sentiment, issues of land ownership, political autonomy, under- or unemployment, and so forth. In other words, while we may grant that an author cannot do everything within the compass of a seventy-page chapter, the essay is somewhat reductive. This is rather ironic in view of Granados's invocation of "over-determination" (a term he claims to have borrowed from me, but which I did not coin) to encapsulate the multi-causality of the movement. That is, actors may have more than one motive for the actions they undertake, so that to the eye of the historical observer those motives and the resulting behaviors might appear irrational or even incoherent. A second question concerns the relationship between the data Granados does have and the conclusions he draws from them. In the end he does not have the evidence to flesh out his project about the redemption of common people as insurgents, so his conclusions must rest on thoughtful inferential jumps—but inferences nonetheless. He acknowledges the thinness of sources himself (p. 234), but it is a problem nonetheless. For example, he does not have much specific information on the actual composition of the attackers at Guanajuato—no-one does—, so they become the statistics ably aggregated in his tables, but the objects of the generalizing sociological approach he critiques throughout.

Finally, Chapter 4 offers some very astute observations about the fragmentation of the accepted *historia de bronce* version of Mexican independence under the impact of the revisionist historiography that has split up the narrative by region, period, and social group while emphasizing the role of ordinary people as opposed to that of "high politics." In this essay Granados remarks once again the semi-impenetrability of popular thinking, making a plea for the recognition of multi-causality affecting many different groups, the "pueblos" of which he writes in Chapter 1. In keeping with this, it is worth quoting at some length his definition of a revolution offered earlier in the book (p. 69), but invoked here in relation to the construction of a new overall framework for New Spain's independence struggle: "Se impone entonces comprender las cosas de otro modo: revolución no como un Proyecto unitario que se realiza desde y para el poder. . .sino como el efecto acumulativo de una multitud heteróclite de acciones grandes y pequeñas de grupos rebeldes grandes y pequeños, casi siempre al margen del estado, que en conjunto, e independientemente de su composición étnica o de clase, pero también de su signo politico particular (que siempre es coyuntural, por lo demas), socavan de manera repentina y vertiginosa al antiguo regimen contra el que se enfrentan hasta hacer imposible su funcionamiento." He notes that the revisionist historiography has produced a vision of the trees at the

cost of losing the shape of the forest, arguing that a new framework beyond the conventional narrative is needed to get the late colonial, insurgency, and early republican years into focus as a whole. It is a bit difficult to reconcile this *cri de coeur* with his apparent approval of the revisionist trend itself, one of whose major achievements has been precisely to begin dismantling the view of the Mexican independence struggle as a unified if not homogeneous movement, and in doing so to bring common people back into the picture. But one is prompted to pose the question: what if there *was* no general shape—no forest, in other words—and the essence of the extended insurgency was fragmentation itself? Instead of generating a new overall framework, then, the task would be to see how the many strains within the insurgency were articulated. Granados seems to lay out a vague program for this in stressing, in this chapter and elsewhere, the primary importance of what he calls "process," which admittedly says much and little at the same time. "Process" in this sense would imply change over time, allowing for the central role of contingency (a change in leadership here, a lost or won battle there) and its effects on interacting groups, what Alan Knight has called "the logic of revolution." In this view national independence and the role of various social groups in attaining it were not immanent in the movement from the first moment, but rather developed in an ad hoc fashion, but within certain social and political constraints that were dispositional rather than determinative. Process would thus be "located" conceptually along a diachronic, experiential axis. On the other hand fragmentation, as described by Granados in the revisionist historiography, has implied the disaggregation and analysis of the independence "movement" into its component parts, located along a synchronic/sociological axis. While these two axes are orthogonal to each other, Granados's prescription for a more nuanced interpretation of the Mexican insurgency is to combine them, which will take some doing.

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Will Fowler, *Independent Mexico: The Pronunciamiento in the Age of Santa Anna, 1821–1858*, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 2016

Will Fowler's *Independent Mexico: The Pronunciamiento in the Age of Santa Anna, 1821–1858*, published by Nebraska Press last year,[1] is the fourth book deriving from his research project (2007–2010): *The Pronunciamiento in Independent Mexico 1821–1876*. Other products of this project are: *Forceful Negotiations: The Origins of the Pronunciamiento in Nineteenth-Century Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010); *Malcontents, Rebels, and Pronunciados: The Politics of Insurrection in Nineteenth-Century Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012); and *Celebrating Insurrection: The Commemoration and Representation of the Nineteenth-Century Mexican Pronunciamiento* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012). These three texts are edited volumes of collected essays in which a large number of historians have participated, including myself, Timothy E. Anna, Linda Arnold, Michael P. Costeloe, Erika Pani and Josefina Zoraida Vázquez, amongst many others. As part of this project, Fowler has also drawn up a searchable database of Mexican *pronunciamientos* issued between 1821 and 1871 complete with transcriptions of each document. This can be accessed via the University of St. Andrews's webserver.[2]

In other words, Fowler has spent the better part of 10 years researching and writing about Mexican *pronunciamientos*.[3] His efforts have greatly advanced the study of the *pronunciamiento* as a political phenomenon and provided new perspectives for our understanding of Mexico's complex nineteenth

[1] Will Fowler, *Independent Mexico: The Pronunciamiento in the Age of Santa Anna, 1821–1858*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016.

[2] "The Pronunciamiento in Independent Mexico" <http://arts.st-andrews.ac.uk/pronunciamientos/> [accessed 17 January 2017].

[3] Also see: Will Fowler, "Entre la legalidad y la legitimidad: Elecciones, pronunciamientos y la voluntad general de la nación", in José Antonio Aguilar Rivera (ed.), *Las elecciones y el gobierno representativo en México (1810-1910)*, Mexico, Fondo de Cultura