

Book Review

– *New Countries; Capitalism, Revolutions, and Nations in the Americas, 1750-1870*, edited by John Tutino. Duke University Press, 2017.

New countries is an edited volume on the historical origins of the American nation states in the (post) revolutionary era. The book is edited by John Tutino, a specialist in Mexican history based at Georgetown university (USA). Most authors are Latin American scholars working at North American Universities. The aim of the book is twofold: on the one hand, the emergence of nations across the hemisphere in the period 1750-1870 is analyzed from a non-national and comparative Pan-American perspective. This comparative approach shows clear parallels with recent European research, by for instance Stefan Berger and Joep Leerssen, who have also challenged traditional narratives emphasizing the self-evident and unique nature of European national histories. On the other hand, the role of these new nations in the global transformation that led to industrial capitalism is examined as a contribution to a less Anglo-Saxon centered history of globalization. In my view, the volume is much more successful in achieving the first aim than in the second. The key theoretical concept is ‘divergence’, which is studied at three levels: the different trajectories of the American national states, the rise of diversity within emerging nations and, thirdly, the role of Latin America in the ‘great divergence’ between the West and the Rest. The extent to which the ‘divergence’ is used as an analytical tool by the authors of the volume differs greatly and the added value of the concept is not always convincing.

The book consists of three parts. In the theoretical part I, ‘Hemispheric challenges’, broader political and economic developments are analyzed. Tutino argues convincingly in his article on the economic developments that the contribution of Latin-America to the making of nineteenth century global capitalism is often ignored by historians of globalization who tend to focus more on North America and the North-West European countries. In a brilliant article Roberto Breña analyses the political revolutions that took place in the Spanish speaking world from 1808 to 1824. He is critical of narratives that describe the *mundo hispánico* only as a passive receiver of revolutionary ideas coming from the United States and France. While the Spanish American independence processes can be considered an integral part of the Atlantic revolutions, their

Atlantic character stems mainly from the Cádiz constitution of 1812 and less from the American or French revolutionary constitutions. At the same time Breña is critical of the traditional Latin-American historiography that emphasizes the unique and self-evident character of each national history.

In the second part, ‘Atlantic transformations’, four country case studies are discussed. In excellent articles on the United States, Haiti, Cuba and Brazil respectively, many clichés are questioned. In his article on the American case, Adam Rothman challenges the rhetoric of ‘Manifest Destiny’ and states that American independence as well as the expansion and development of the US can be compared to that of most other American countries. As in other Latin American countries the dynamics of state formation were determined by the struggle as well as cooperation between elites who preferred a strong central state versus those elites that defended a federal state with strong local and regional autonomy. In her article on Haitian revolution, Carolina Fink describes how the universalism of the revolution’s liberating aspirations gave way to the militarism and the social inequalities that characterized the last colonial regime. Interestingly, “black” in the new context of Haitian independence became a political category of citizenship and national identity rather than a racial category.

A clear counterpoint to the historiography that regards revolution and independence as self-evident is the case of Cuba. David Sartorius clearly demonstrates that continuity also forms a part of the history of the Americas in the age of revolution. The example of the prosperous Cuban economy in the nineteenth century also questions commonplace assumptions that independence and nationhood offered better alternatives to presumably restrictive colonial relationships. Within the colonial context, to a certain extent, liberal institutions and practices developed in Cuba. Kirsten Schulz in her article on Brazil also emphasizes continuity rather than change. She explains the Brazilian national trajectory by pointing to the continuities of the new state with the eighteenth century Portuguese Empire.

The articles on Mexico and Guatemala in the third part (‘Inversions’) are rather factual and seem to challenge less existing interpretations, although the importance of the regions and the cities vis-à-vis the central state is emphasized. In her article on the Andean heartland, Sarah Chambers argues convincingly that the development of an independent Peru and Bolivia instead of an Andean federation was not a foregone conclusion. She also emphasizes the importance of the (invented) memory of older (Inka) Empires as well as the continuity of pre-independence political patterns. In the final article Erick Langer concludes that during the period that state building was contested and commercial economies struggled, indigenous and popular independence was a clear goal and a lively reality in Haiti, across Spanish America and in continental interiors never subjected to colonial rule. This indigenous moment

disappeared with expansion of export economies and the consolidation of state power after 1870.

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