

interested in community organisation in late pre-Hispanic Mexico and early colonial New Spain.

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References

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Minian, Ana R. (2018) *Undocumented Lives: The Untold Story of Mexican Migration*, Harvard University Press (Cambridge, MA), 328 pp. £21.95 hbk.

Many years ago, while working in Morelia, I visited TzinTzunTzan. There in the dust, exhausted soil, and dirt floor shanties, were also TV antennas and shiny pick-up trucks. Children in new sneakers played outside while women were inside cleaning, cooking, and watching telenovelas on TV. But there were no men. My surprise at these juxtapositions was supplanted by the sad knowledge of the costs accruing to families whose men were engaged in circular migration to the United States.

Ana Raquel Minian, in this excellent history of the quarter-century between the end of one defining US policy (The Bracero Program) and the passing of another (The Immigration Reform and Control Act), illuminates the dislocation of home for those in Mexico's Central Plateau. The author covers many topics, from state policy to family dynamics, and gives us a detailed examination of the context of this exploitative system of circular migration.

Scholars will appreciate the careful disentanglement of US and Mexican policy. In the first chapter, 'Excess Citizens', the author weaves through legislation and positioning on migration issues from The Bracero Program onwards. Carefully acknowledging both the genuinely felt and cynical deliberations about how to deal with the 'migration problem', the author mostly traces the behaviour of the Mexican government and its see-sawing attitudes about migration through the northern border. Chapter 6 entitled 'The Rights of the People' explores labour and legal challenges in the United States in the quest for human rights. And in the following chapter, 'A Law to Curtail Undocumented Migration', we see that government, business, labour, and grassroots organisations support migrants at times, while at others see them as a hindrance to their own goals.

Between them, the US and Mexican governments propel the disintegration of coherently family-based small towns. The United States long wanted to push its 'migration problem' and responses to it to the border and the Mexican government, pursuing its own needs, vacillated in its support for US policies.

In these policy discussions, the author is less successful at interleaving the critical role of agricultural and trade policies that sealed the fate of these workers in Mexico. The 'migration problem' was forged and tempered by the decisions made about large-scale agriculture, corn, oil, *ejidos*, import substitution, and city building in Mexico and the demand for unskilled labour furthered by the business lobby in the United States. Even though 'men migrated, in part, because their wives, parents, and friends pressured them to head to El Norte ...' (p. 7), we should be clear that it was these economic policies,

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and not family pressure, that pushed rural labourers over the economic cliff – and into the open, if stingy, arms of US employers.

Sandwiched between these national policy discussions is a look at the migrants themselves, supported by oral history interviews. Mexico was home and the United States was work for the men whose migration was typically circular. Migrants moved back and forth because, although being apprehended was a common experience, the costs of apprehension were relatively small. The author documents men's lack of belonging in either Mexico (where they felt useless) or the United States (where they were expendable cheap workers). Gender roles and dynamics are mentioned but not accounted for adequately, given the frequent assertion that women pushed out their men; an in-depth look at family dynamics would be an important focus of another historical volume.

Even if migrants were thrown out of home, the middle chapters of the book show how migrants and the social clubs they established helped to promote a home community whether they were in the United States or in Mexico. Social clubs provided welfare and support while in the United States and inclusion in Mexican home communities. These clubs often financially supported new migrants until they could provide for themselves when newly in the United States and, through regular sports games, created an outlet from constant work. Their targeted financial contributions to local institutions, holiday fiestas, and remittances back to family in Mexico supported their hometowns while reminding them of their presence – even if it was mostly financial. These social clubs and their activities created a binational home space for men who did not feel welcome anywhere.

In some ways this period feels quaint compared to the horrors brought down on migrants and asylum seekers by US policy today – when once again Mexico has acquiesced in playing a supporting role in policy atrocities. But it was never safe and it was never healthy for families and towns. While it is difficult to untangle the myriad reasons for migration to the United States, for the destruction of small communities, and for the consequences of a world where one cannot support one's family while remaining physically present, Ana Raquel Minian does so with sensitivity and a detailed knowledge of the era.

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Buckley, Eve E. (2017) *Technocrats and the Politics of Drought and Development in Twentieth-Century Brazil*, The University of North Carolina Press (Chapel Hill, NC), xv + 279 pp. \$29.95 pbk.

The semi-arid portion of the Brazilian northeastern region has long been known for its devastating droughts, human suffering, social inequity and delusional hopes fuelled by politicians and technocrats. Since the Great Drought of 1877–1878 that killed half the region's population, dozens of plans and policies have been devised to secure water provision and livelihoods, especially for inhabitants of the poor hinterland (*sertão*). But they have hardly improved the fate of the most fragile. Several accounts of the persistence of such extreme social vulnerability to climate conditions have been provided, with arguments ranging from emphasis on natural factors (high rainfall variability, lack of perennial rivers etc.) to the denunciation of socio-political structures (high inequality in land and power, clientelism etc.), but relatively little attention has been paid to the agency