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Walsh, Casey

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*Watering the Revolution: An Environmental and Technological
History of Agrarian Reform in Mexico* by Mikael D. Wolfe
(review)

Casey Walsh

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whether readers are in agreement with his message, however, Temin's moral courage for taking that step is admirable.

Robert Margo
Boston University

Watering the Revolution: An Environmental and Technological History of Agrarian Reform in Mexico. By Mikael D. Wolfe (Durham, Duke University Press, 2017). 317 pp. \$99.95 cloth \$26.95 paper

The Laguna region of arid central-northern Mexico has fascinated generations of historians and social scientists. Two major rivers empty into a desert plain, a dramatic combination of environmental opulence and austerity. Just as dramatic are the human efforts to control and benefit from that environment. Even before the western United States was converted into an irrigated emporium of capitalist agriculture, settlers in the Laguna engineered a complicated system of works to channel floodwaters over extensive plains where cotton, the quintessential industrial cash crop, dominated the landscape. The social formation constituted by this industrial agriculture was unstable and volatile, contributing many soldiers to the armies of the Mexican Revolution. After the Revolution, the Laguna became a centerpiece of the state's developmentalist response to instability—an epic experiment of agrarian reform, studied extensively by anthropologists and sociologists, that included the nationalization of lands and the creation of collective farms.

Wolfe's book is a worthy heir to this literature. With patient prose, he develops an "envirotechnical" approach to understanding the role of water and engineering in this political-economic and social history. Previous work about the Laguna tended to focus on cotton—the crop that defined economy and society—or on the revolutionary movements and agrarian reforms that dominated the headlines during the twentieth century. Using rich national and regional archives in new ways, Wolfe describes the fundamental but unrecognized role played by water and hydraulic engineering in events that have been debated until this point principally in terms of politics and economics. In his telling of the Laguna's history, Wolfe ably incorporates earlier discussions of, for example, the "peasant" or "proletarian" character of the agricultural workers in the region, and the socialist nature of President Lazaro Cardenas' agrarian reform. His engagement with existing literature is reflected in his framing of Mexican water history explicitly in terms of the social and legal dynamics of the Mexican Revolution—"the water of the Revolution"—affirming the centrality of this dominant conceptual architecture for environmental and technological history.

The focus on water and engineering also allows Wolfe to identify long-term human-environment dynamics that transcend this framework. One of these is the key contradiction between conservation and

development enshrined in Mexican law and policy. Although both concepts exist in the law, the expansion of agricultural water use through the implementation of technologies, such as dams of concrete and steel and deep wells with centrifugal pumps, enabled temporary socioeconomic prosperity, and political stability, but at the cost of depleting aquifers. But as Wolfe shows through a careful telling of the history of the Palmito high dam on the Nazas River, the lines of struggle were not those identified by earlier writing about Mexican politics or by those studying environmental destruction. Politicians, businesses, and even peasant farmers and itinerant workers all chose development over conservation.

Watering the Revolution is one of the first books to make groundwater a protagonist. Monumental and photogenic public works such as dams and canals attract much attention from historians, but Wolfe argues that in the Laguna, they could only symbolize the triumph of revolutionary water because of the unsustainable subsidy paid by the region's unseen, and unseeable, aquifers. Groundwater is the perfect topic for Wolfe's "envirotech" approach; it challenges the categories of nature and culture and the boundary between them: Aquifers can be known only remotely through science and technology; they are actively managed as infrastructure through strategies and tools of recharge and extraction.

Watering the Revolution is theoretically informed, but it is still squarely located in the disciplinary customs of history, privileging documentary detail over theoretical reflection. The book thus encourages interdisciplinary historians to push further analytically. The concept *infrastructure*, for example, has generated a rich discussion in anthropology, and the vast discussion of *nature/culture* or *socionature* (analogs of "envirotech") crosses the social sciences and humanities. Wolfe or other scholars could explore these cultural issues and related ones further in later works, inspired by this smart, well-crafted book.

Casey Walsh
University of California, Santa Barbara

Redeeming the Revolution: The State and Organized Labor in Post-Tlatelolco Mexico. By Joseph U. Lenti (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 2017) 355 pp. \$70.00 cloth \$35.00 paper

In late August 1968, students in Mexico City organized a 400,000-person march through the city's busiest thoroughfares. They occupied the Zócalo and raised the red-and-black flag—the international symbol of proletarian militancy and solidarity officially adopted by Mexican labor unions in the 1930s. Days later, after state forces attacked and dislodged the students, a scene took place that microcosmically illustrates an issue that is central to *Redeeming the Revolution*: Federal District workers lowered the "seditious" and "communist" flag while heckled as "*acarreados*" and "sheep" by a small group of remaining protestors (29). Positing the subsequent massacre of