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Review/Reseña

The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940. Edited by Mary Kay Vaughan and Stephen E. Lewis (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

The Messy History of Mexican Cultural Nationalism

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A decade after the publication of the path-breaking collection of essays on the Mexican Revolution, Gilbert Joseph and Daniel Nugent's *Everyday Forms of State Formation*, Mary Kay Vaughan and Steven Lewis have provided scholars with a fitting companion to this volume. The revolutionary project, always negotiated, always contested, always fluid, enters new realms in this study, as it

becomes a broad set of nationalist initiatives, cultural changes, and market transformations. Scholars will find this volume extremely useful.

Many of the essays that appear in this volume are drawn from previously published monographs on the revolutionary era, though no single text has brought the collection of issues that *The Eagle and the Virgin* addresses together with quite as much success. In it we see cultural nationalists attempting to produce a national style of art, architects re-imagining the urban space of Mexico City, nationalist musical traditions inscribed through performance and recording, educators trying to bring modern sensibilities to the countryside, and rural Mexico transformed through the imperatives of road-building and expanded markets. The latter—that is, the market—plays a much more critical role in this text than has been the case in most studies of this era. Vaughan and Lewis do an impressive job showing just how the intersections of taste, consumerism, and marketing, not to mention social and cultural changes linked to changing market conditions, worked to consolidate a series of national communities, defined at least in part through what people purchased, watched, listened to, and how they went about their daily lives. We see in this less a coherent nationalist project and more of the messy, sometimes hard to capture experience of modern life in a capitalist society.

As is aptly demonstrated in Claudio Lomnitz' closing essay, Mexican culture emerges from this text not so much as a definable phenomenon -it is not a collection of easily identifiable traits that explain *Mexicanidad*. Instead, it emerges as a series of communities, some forged (at least in part) by a culturally nationalist regime, but others produced through the ways that Mexicans defined their tastes and sensibilities over two decades of revolutionary reconstruction. Joy Elizabeth Hayes' description of central Mexican communities that welcomed government radios but refused to listen to the government's radio station, Adrian Bantjes' and Jean Meyer's

analyses of the unfolding practice of Catholic beliefs, and María Teresa Fernández Aceves' work on the varied experiences of women activists in Guadalajara are particularly instructive here. We see in this something thoroughly Mexican, as they all work within similar textual frameworks, live within the same cultural terms of reference, but nonetheless possess values that differ sharply from those of their neighbors. Likewise, Patrice Elizabeth Olsen's study of the contests over street names and architecture reveal actors who are within a national community, but often at odds with one another.

As one would expect, the state that emerges from these stories is a weak projection of power over a recalcitrant countryside. However, instead of offering a straightforward accounting of the incapacity of the revolutionary state to achieve its ends, collectively the authors reveal the power of cultural and ideological transformations to have significant, if often unintended consequences. This is clearly evident in Lewis and Vaughan's work on education, Michael Snodgrass' essay on labor in Monterrey, and Bliss's examination of public health, but it is also extremely important in the essays that turn to consumption and the market. Hayes' work on radio, but more particularly Joanne Hersfeld's study of film during this period do this admirably. Inasmuch as culture in capitalist societies is closely linked to the imperatives of work and consumption, as well as to factors like road building, the latter essays offer Mexican scholars important insights into how a study of cultural nationalism ought to be approached.

Still, there are a few questions that remain unanswered. Missing from this volume are several other types of consumption that were linked to the emergent national cultures of post-revolutionary Mexico. We see little of Mexican culinary traditions in this era. We also learn little about other, local practices that linked the material cultures of artisans and craftsmen to national priorities. At certain points in the text one wonders just how the consumers of both the

state's nationalist project and a rising tide of mass-culture made meaning of the images and symbols they confronted. Lastly, it would be interesting to see more about the role of the United States in the story of Mexico's cultural revolution, not just as a producer of culture, but as an increasingly important destination for Mexican migration.

Given the already significant reach of this study, these questions are perhaps better left for other scholars. This is an impressive work that will be of great value in graduate and undergraduate classrooms.