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John Tutino. *Making a New World: Founding Capitalism in the Bajío and Spanish North America*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011.

Braudel Comes to the New World: Rethinking the Evolution of Global Capitalism from the Americas

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As is clear from the massive appendixes in this already massive tome, *Making a New World* is the product of prodigious research and reflection across a long period of time. Even more impressive, in a footnote to the epilogue the author promises a second volume, to be entitled *Remaking the New World*, that will begin where this one leaves off—with the impact of the Independence Wars on the Bajío. The size and depth of this project is best explained by its conceptual and empirical ambition. On the one hand, Tutino aims to provide us with a long-awaited, in-depth explanation of how and why the Mexican Independence Wars—which over the years have been seen by many Latin Americanist historians as a

particularly interesting case of social revolution—began in the Bajío. On the other hand, he aims to demonstrate how the mining, industrial, commercial, and agricultural activities in the Bajío region generated capitalism, and then spread north to create the larger region he calls “Spanish North America” that would be transferred from Mexican to U.S. control after the U.S.-Mexican War, and subsequently provide one of the sources of power and wealth that fuelled the emergence of U.S. expansionism. Tutino also aims to place the development of capitalism in the Bajío in the context of a global economy that included not only the Atlantic World, but also the East Asian region then dominated by the Chinese Empire. It was, after all, the Chinese demand for silver, Tutino argues, that initially generated the boom in silver production in the Bajío.

Ambitious project indeed, especially if we also take into consideration the revisionist perspective on capitalism itself. Conversant with the most recent interventions in historical discussions of global capitalism, Tutino is interested in debunking two interrelated assumptions about capitalist development. The first is that it occurred first in Europe and then spread to the rest of the world. He posits instead a more interactive, global origin in which the Asian and Atlantic worlds participated together in the generation of a new world economy and the production systems to feed it. The economic, military, and political conflicts that accompanied the creation of this new economy were also fought in global context, with reverberations from each one spreading through the rest of the global system. The second assumption is that northern New Spain, as part of the Spanish empire, could not possibly have been an origin point for capitalism because of the honor-driven and hierarchical nature of Spanish colonial society. Instead, Tutino sets out to show that capitalism emerged precisely in the Bajío because, as part of the northern regions where state control was more difficult and local relations among multiethnic populations more fluid, it was, in effect, a sort of *tabula rasa* onto which capitalism could more easily be engraved.

This double focus and double goal—on the one hand, the exploration of a locally generated, complex, and dynamic capitalism that arose in a mining region of the Spanish Empire’s richest colony; and on the

other hand, the insertion of this local process into a rethought, more globalized, non-Eurocentric narrative of capitalist development—is, from the very beginning, a complex and contradictory one. In order to argue convincingly for the emergence of capitalism in what he calls Spanish North America, Tutino must explore in depth not only regional investment and market strategies and the actions of the property owners and managers, but also the local textures of labor relations, forms of resistance to exploitation, and the ways in which communities of enslaved and debt laborers organized themselves. At the same time, the sources available for the period—censuses, marriage registers, judicial records, estate accounts and correspondence—more easily provide information about owners and managers than they do about laborers. What information they do provide about the laboring poor tends to be demographic, through birth, marriage or census records, or filtered through the lens of repression and control when focused on rebellion or resistance. Inevitably, perhaps, the use of such sources generates as many questions as it does answers, and it is perhaps for this reason that, on various occasions throughout the book, Tutino's questions remain on the page, serving in a sense as open-ended reminders of the difficulties involved in closing the conceptual circle under such conditions. The reader can only imagine the intensity of the frustration involved in this uncertainty—and the appendixes, with their detailed accounts of local life as seen through the lens of quantitative sources, bear witness to the struggles involved in trying to go farther.

On the other side of this ambitious project, in order to convincingly connect this local world to the global market, it is necessary to focus on broader issues of trade, diplomacy and war. Perhaps inevitably, there is a disconnect of sorts between the broad conceptual sweep of the international development of capitalism, and the intimate, family by family, documentation on the entrepreneurs of the Bajío. Yet this disconnect is also testimony—and this is, I believe, a crucial point—to the way in which the project seems to have evolved.

As often happens with large projects of historical research, debates have a way of shifting while we labor away in the archives. A project that began, one presumes, from Tutino's earlier signature research on the

countryside in the Bajío, the research that led to his pathbreaking work on “agrarian decompression,” became—in dialogue with emerging trends in Asian, South Asian, and revisionist European history—a work about the New World origins of global capitalism. Along the way, as is evidenced by his landmark 1998 article in the *Hispanic American Historical Review* that now serves as a preview to the promised second volume *Remaking the New World*, the question of what we call “subaltern” participation in the construction of a capitalist economy came to the fore. As Tutino makes clear in the article, the face-to-face, more intimate treatment of *ranchero* subsistence economy made possible by the records of the Puerto de Nieto estate also raised important issues about subaltern participation in the development of capitalism itself. Using the evolution of a local market economy, one marked by, Tutino writes, “a new pattern of production in which many small cultivators increasingly dominated a prosperous, perhaps expanding, agricultural sector,”¹ to rethink the more standard narratives of nineteenth-century economic development, Tutino suggests in the article that the most dynamic forms of capitalism came, in fact, from below, and were stymied by the loss of the prosperous region he now calls Spanish North America to the United States.

As Tutino himself makes clear in a note at the bottom of the first page of this article, such a perspective was and is controversial, and although he recognizes the importance of—as he writes—trying to “make the larger significance of the Puerto de Nieto case study more explicit,”² doing so is more challenging. In many ways, it is a challenge we all face as we try to make concrete the lives, thoughts, and aspirations of the less powerful. As many of us know, access to subaltern worlds is patchy at best: records like the accounts of the Puerto de Nieto estate are, in this sense, a precious resource. But how much do they tell us? How do we read them, as Subaltern Studies scholars repeatedly remind us to do, “against the grain”? Such questions hover around the edges of Tutino’s narrative and

¹ John Tutino, “The Revolution in Mexican Independence: Insurgency and the Renegotiation of Power, Production, and Patriarchy in the Bajío, 1800-1855,” *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 78:3 (1998): 367-418, direct quotation on 412.

² *Ibid*, 367.

interpretation, and inevitably, they cannot be fully answered. While exploring the “larger significance” of any one estate’s records is, of course, crucial, how to do so is a bit more complicated. The same might be said when trying to extrapolate from one case study. And the more the lens is focused on the broader process, the less it allows us to see the everyday.

One of the frustrating consequences of this conundrum is that, in order to move a broader narrative forward, at times the only recourse available seems to be to invoke precisely the grand narratives we are trying to transcend. Tutino seems to suggest, for example, that global demand for silver determined local processes, even as his overall argument works precisely to question this kind of broader determinism. The notion of patriarchy tends to be invoked rather than explored, serving more as a narrative tool than an analytical category. Given the difficulty of connecting intimate, local documentation to broader processes, sometimes the critical filter of the historian gets lost, and the narrative seems to be governed by sources rather than the other way around. Particularly dramatic examples of this are the extensive use of the diary of the friar Francisco de Ajofrin, and of Francisco María Colombini's poem to the Virgin of Pueblito.

As a pearl emerges from the uncomfortable presence of a grain of sand within a mollusk, Tutino’s struggle with the analytical tension between the detail of local relationships and the broader processes of global capitalism also yields much of value. Even though the meticulous evidence culled from censuses, correspondence, judicial records, and even travellers’ accounts can sometimes overwhelm, it also forms the basis, as is clear in the appendixes, for a reconstruction of daily life.

The results are illuminating. The dangerous and difficult world of the mines, and its impact on workers’ bodies and psyches, helps explain the deep devotion to the Virgin of Pueblito. Otomí, Tarascan, and other indigenous communities and enslaved Africans share a world and, in the process, create distinct and hybrid identities and forms of solidarity. Entrepreneurs are priests, and priests entrepreneurs. But equally important, Tutino employs a Braudelian perspective on the world economy, articulating forms of unfree labor, especially slavery, to the development of

capitalism. As Braudel before him, Tutino removes “‘freedom’ and ‘wages’ from the essence of capitalism” (14), allowing us once again to focus on the ways in which coerced labor was essential to profit and to capital.

And finally, by reconstructing the world of Spanish North America as a dynamic pole of economic growth, Tutino sheds new light on the U.S.-Mexican War. Although the United States is not recognized, even by most revisionist historians, as an imperial power until 1898, Tutino’s analysis suggests that we may want to consider this earlier nineteenth-century conflict as foundational to U.S. imperial ambitions. As he writes in the conclusion, the United States took “advantage of Mexico’s struggles [to become a nation and forge a new economy] to claim much of Spanish North America, incorporating its resources and capitalist ways, and accelerating its own rise to global hegemony” (486).

A controversial conclusion indeed, yet in the spirit of the best forms of revisionist history. Emerging from the inevitable and uncomfortable tensions between global historical perspectives and local quantitative data, between theoretical claims concerning patriarchy and the local stories of families and religious devotion, Tutino’s broad rethinking of capitalist development from a Spanish North American perspective forces us to decenter not only the Atlantic world of European colonialism, but also the origins of U.S. hegemony. Very much like the work of Fernand Braudel whom he admires so much, Tutino deploys massive amounts of data and of conceptual reflection to help us rethink the nature of the world economy. If we remember that Braudel wrote five volumes to make his mark, perhaps we can recognize Tutino’s economy of expression when he promises only two.