

**Carlos San Juan Victoria (ed.):
El siglo XX mexicano. Lecturas de un siglo**

México D.F.: Ithaca 2012, 282 p.

Sherin Abu Chouka | sherin.abuchouka@fu-berlin.de

♦ The anthology *El siglo XX mexicano lecturas de un siglo* sets out to analyze fascination and rejection, or, as the editor and professor of the National Institute for Anthropology and History (INAH) Carlos San Juan Victoria puts it, the »attraction to the vertigo of human transformations«, which the 20th century has caused. The compilation envisions and interprets contradictions of simultaneous processes of inventions and progress of the last century on the one hand and the widening poverty gap, growing violence and corruption on the other. This rather wide scope on the 20th century should be shared by the reader, since a clear thematic arrangement of the articles is missing, instead the anthology unites cultural essays, micro historical research and historiographic reflections. The collection of essays is based on discussions from a history seminar which took place at the INAH (National Institute of Anthropology and History) eight years ago. Editor San Juan Victoria, who is specialized in micro and contemporary Mexican history, describes contributors' intention of creating an interdisciplinary work, which relocates specialized micro-historical researches within »great lines« of historical processes (14).

The anthology is divided into four sections: the first includes cultural essays on the

questions of nation and social culture by well-known writer Carlos Monsiváis and the poet José Joaquín Blanco. In the following chapter the historian Tania Hernández Vicencio analyzes the beginnings and twists of right wing opposition, and the economist Saúl Escobar Toledo traces turning points of post-revolution union mobilizations – both of them old and rigid, so called »dinosaur«-institutions, that have marked Mexican society over a great period of time and still exist today. The third part of the book presents micro-historical investigations on migration treaties, the treatment of migrants, and cultural changes in Mexican communities abroad. The topics range from Mexican American beauty contests to the well-known topic of Mexican rebel cultures of 1968, whereby the focus remains on the culture of the social movements and not on state violence. In the concluding section, historian Emma Yanes Rizo examines sources provided by the internet and discusses the question of their historical value. Ethelia Ruiz Medrano shows connections and similarities of past and present in treatment of indigenous people and aims for the recognition of Mexico as a multicultural nation.

As these examples indicate, the compilation includes many different analyses, but here I will concentrate on two articles that

deal with issues of security and violence, which deeply affect perspectives of and feelings towards the Mexican nation and can be better understood through reflections on functions and ruptures within PRI-Party policy.

The first essay is neither a historical investigation nor a linguistic study case, but a trenchant review on the cultural use and the different perceptions of the nation from Mexican elite and the popular class. In »El siglo XX mexicano« Carlos Monsiváis traces the use and significance of the highly symbolic terms »nation« and »homeland«. For a long time, these terms had been substituted by the Mexican Revolution, which offered a rhetoric that included every Mexican. As Monsiváis states, it performed as a »Revolution for which you should not die, but die to live in.«¹ Since the myth of the Revolution has ceased to be a unifying factor and with increasing violence and corruption, the traditional »Viva México!« is lately often combined with the affirmation »I do not ignore its limitations.«² Pinning down the important aspect of class differences with regard to Mexican nationalism, the author concludes: »For the excluded of fierce capitalism, the community where they circulate is the only real nation, [...] the one of sedentary people who have no alternative. The ones of the dominant minority only come back to the home country for affective occasions, like a goal, a song, a celebration a disastrous love affair, a moral and political indignation.«³ Far beyond the official

¹ "No se muere por la Revolución, se muere por vivir dentro de la Revolución." (27)

² "No ignoro sus limitaciones." (37)

³ "A los excluidos del capitalismo salvaje la comunidad en donde circulan les resulta la única nación real, [...] la de los sedentarios porque no les queda otra. Los de la minoría dominante sólo vuelven al gentilicio mexicano en las ocasiones afectivas, ante un gol, una

discourse of past glory, heroism and independence of the Mexican nation, Monsiváis analysis of class differences on the Mexican nation dates from eight years ago, before former president Felipe Calderon declared his war on drugs, militarization followed and the numbers of dead increased from approximately 9.000 in 2006 to more than 47.000 within the last five years. Nevertheless, his evaluation of the different perceptions of "nation" by the elites and the popular classes takes the reader back to the beginning of the war on drugs and could add an essential aspect in ongoing discussions on security and violence.

This is also valid for the essay »1983: the year of Leviathan«⁴ by economist San Juan Victoria, since it gives an interesting insight on functioning and internal restructuring of the policy of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) before 2000, focusing on the neoliberal turn in the 1980s. The author dismisses the hegemonic readings which explain the crisis of the state by »populism« and »democratic transformations«. Traditional PRI policy has been altered in 1983 through the paradoxical state measure of subordination to international financial powers and ending corporative relations to a broad coalition of political agents (260). The author argues convincingly that »democratic reforms« did cause the crisis of the state, instead they were part of flexible PRI-politics which had worked from the Revolution until the beginning of the eighties to foster changes aiming to maintain the status quo. PRI-Party which had historically held monopoly of the use of force and of public safety has

canción, una fiesta, un desastre amoroso, una indignación moral y política." (37)

⁴ »1983 el año del leviatán« (231)

succeeded in this years presidential election campaign promising to recreate a »strong state« which can manage with the war on drugs. This does not only demonstrate importance of the security topic but shows clearly the necessity to deal with and know about former political policies on the war of drugs.

In summary, the anthology presents a kaleidoscopic view on selected topics with different scientific approaches, an outlook on future historiographic works and insights on Mexican perspectives on national identity, migration and cultural transformations. Given a broad interest on contemporary history, the reader can surely find aspects of interest, because the book deals with important institutions, treats effects of great historical events and integrates essays on cultural changes. As suggested in the title, the compilation presents some of the many possible »lectures of a century«. Unfortunately the articles do not refer to each other, leaving the readers without clues on debates and exchange within the seminar. However the articles shows changing views on national history and the relocation of PRI interpretations and take the Mexican community abroad and the history of indigenous peoples into account. The balance in dealing with attraction and rejection to Mexican history here presented provides clearly reasons for disillusionments – in the form of the unequal social structures that still prevail in Mexican society.♦