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Paul Liffman

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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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Ideas: Indigenous Historical Agency in Revolutionary Western Mexico

Indigenous Territoriality, Emergent Political Actors, and State Formation in the Sierra del Nayar

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Paul Liffman
El Colegio de Michoacán

Based on original archival research and intrepid anthropological fieldwork in violent times, this book demonstrates with unprecedented scope and detail how the Indigenous communities of a region often seen as subsisting in a magical, ahistorical bubble were fully engaged in the Mexican Revolution. At the same time, it shows how these communities framed this engagement in terms of their local social organization and ritually-centred senses of place and history. As such, *Soldiers, Saints, and Shamans* is an elegant, interdisciplinary milestone in what Morris calls “anthrohistory” (II), the genre that Paul Friedrich conceived for *The Princes of Naranja* (1987), his psychological and mythopoetic *magnum opus* about agrarian violence in revolutionary Michoacán. Both books focus on the symbolic values and blood ties that underpin peasant land struggles, but Morris adds a finer-grained and broader regional and global comparative perspective (62, III, 152–153). Like Friedrich, Morris’s contribution owes much to his ability to interview irreplaceable elder guardians of historical memory and ritual traditions, many of whom have since died, often sadly as a result of COVID-19.

Morris brings his hybrid approach to the Gran Nayar, the multi-ethnic region of the southern Sierra Madre Occidental that is home to Wixárika-Huichol, Náayari-Cora, O'dam-Tepehuano, Mexicanero-Nahua, and mestizo communities in Nayarit, Jalisco, Durango and Zacatecas. For decades the Gran Nayar has been the focus of much anthropological interest, including my own linguistically-oriented work in support of Wixárika ritual experts' placemaking practices and claims to their divine ancestors' landmarks and territories (Liffman 2011, 2018, 2022). But too many studies have been hobbled by community-centred approaches, and until now the region has received only a few important historical treatments.

In addition to Friedrich's anthrohistory, Morris's book has at least two other major influences: the historiographical focus on the role of serrano societies in the Mexican Revolution proposed by Alan Knight (1986), who supervised his dissertation, and the pioneering historian of the Gran Nayar, Jean Meyer (1974–76). Meyer holds that “popular Catholicism” pervaded the nationwide Cristero rebellions that began in 1926 against the new revolutionary state, but Morris questions how far this notion applies to the Gran Nayar. Among the subsequent historical approaches, Jennie Purnell, Ben Fallaw, Philip Coyle, and Matthew Butler are some of the most important scholars cited, but none covers the culture and history of the region with the scope and depth of this book, which Morris rightly calls “the first systematic study of the participation of the Gran Nayar's inhabitants in the Mexican Revolution” (7).

In *Soldiers, Saints, and Shamans*, Morris has worked out the relevant historical and cultural background (Chapter 1); the shifting patterns of alliances with and against the various early revolutionary factions (Chapter 2); the two periods of the Cristero rebellion (or Cristiada) in the region (Chapters 4 and 6), in which he points out that the Wixárika and O'dam fighters were the last in Mexico to disarm (6); and the two interwar phases of state formation (Chapters 3 and 5). Morris argues that these patterns of alliance had much to do with land tenure and communal autonomy, especially outrage at the modernizing revolutionary state's clumsy attempts to culturally assimilate “primitive” and “superstitious” Indigenous societies through capitalist agrarian relations of production and Spanish-language socialist education (except when Indigenous cosmopolitans supported these projects in order to channel federal resources into their communities, if not their own pockets). These processes were shaped by internal Indigenous rivalries, such as “the long-running dyadic conflict”

between the Wixárika communities (162) and opposition to whichever side their generally hostile mestizo neighbours happened to be on (49): “the enemy of my enemy is my friend.” None of this had much to do with the federal government’s increasingly radical limits on the power and wealth of the Catholic Church, which other historians point to as the cause of the Cristiada elsewhere in Mexico, because the religious institution had little presence in the Indigenous Sierra del Nayar.

In this respect, Morris follows Knight’s lead in focusing on the plural, heterodox, and, above all, locally-centred concatenation of movements that together have been called the “Mexican revolution” (7; Knight 1986). Still, Knight’s category of serrano society, however flexibly defined, seems to apply at best selectively to the relatively communal Indigenous groups of the Gran Nayar; one might also characterize them as agrarista, since serrano seems to better describe the social organization of the surrounding individualistic mestizo rancheros (45). Morris attempts to resolve this by redefining serrano impulses as “defence of their communities, of their communal structures, and of the cultural autonomy of the area” (162).

Another sign of Morris’s openness to interdisciplinary approaches is how his analysis has been influenced by the ontological turn in structuralist cultural anthropology that various researchers have brought to bear on the inhabitants of the Gran Nayar over the last dozen years. The most notable of these are Johannes Neurath (2021) and his former student, Antonio Reyes (2019), originally inspired by their more orthodox structuralist maestro, Jesús Jáuregui. What Philippe Descola characterizes as the analogistic ontology of Mesoamerican cultures such as those of the Gran Nayar (versus Amazonian animism versus Australian totemism versus Western naturalism) is crucially visible in the ritually enacted synecdoche—“an aggregation of multiple, transmutable equivalences”—through which shamans scale local Wixárika sacred ancestral places up to regional ceremonial centres (tukite), all-encompassing geographical and cosmological models (kiekari), and back again (25; Descola 2013; cf. Sahlin 2014).

Beyond this kind of territoriality (Liffman 2011), Morris takes seriously the idea that understanding historical agency requires an engagement with how the inhabitants—both human and otherworldly—both experienced and participated in the revolution ... a time when local warlords channeled occult forces to defend their communities from raiders and

when miraculous statues of Catholic saints resisted the attacks of bandits or raiders, or even took on human form to lead the charge against their enemies (10).

Or when these saints, in what Descola might consider high analogistic fashion, were tortured and shot to pieces as metonyms of their communities (12, 59, 145). That is to say, Morris identifies with local perspectives on how the ritual objects and sacred spaces of Indigenous ceremonialism wielded great power in their own right (137, 140–141). As Jáuregui (1997) has shown before any of us, this cosmopolitical conflation of political leadership with ancestral power can be traced back at least as far as the mythologized figure of the regional warlord Manuel Lozada during the Wars of Reform (1855–73). And insofar as ritual objects—from icons of the gods to sacred (if sometimes absent, if not imaginary) viceregal land titles (78, 98, 141, 145)—are endowed with their own agency and political authority, Gran Nayar cosmopolitics are much, much older than that. One wonders how these logics—often based on the figure of a powerful dark mestizo Other on the western horizon—work now that “the national and international narcotics trade ... place the region and its inhabitants firmly in the Mexican mainstream” (17).

At the same time, Morris implicitly acknowledges the decidedly situated, ironic, and otherwise performative nature of such presumably ontological expressions as the “surreal burlesques” (30) of “glazed-eyed peyote pilgrims in Santa Catarina irreverently yelling ‘Long live the supreme government’ as they romp around their ritual dance ground” (10). In fact, this kind of spectacle is not limited to Santa Catarina, as I have analyzed it for other Wixárika communities as well. Neologisms such as “polyontology” seem like stilted ways of characterizing such clearly improvisational and, above all, shifting stances without which, in Neurath’s striking phrase, “the universe, no longer re-created through ritual, will not only cease to exist but will never have existed in the first place” (25; Neurath 2005).

Instead, performativity is always one step ahead of post-hoc attempts to essentialize its products as modes of being (arguably a Western naturalist impulse in itself). Morris’s attentiveness to the contemporaneity of ritual figuration—national coinage filling in for the sun in votive bowls, ancestral ’uxa pigment applied to rifles and ethnographic notebooks, shamans comparing how they receive ancestral communication to watching television—follows the work of anthropologists who sometimes also want to eat the cake of radical

alterity. But he still makes it fit with his overall intent to de-exoticize anthropology in the vehemently anti-structuralist spirit of Johannes Fabian's *Time and the Other* (2014[1983]). That is, this book

shift[s] away from the idea of the Wixáritari, above all, as representatives of “uncorrupted” pre-Hispanic traditions, and of the Gran Nayar as a whole as a mystical backwater separated from modern Mexico by a distance of hundreds of miles and thousands of years ... to locate the region's cultures and costumbre [ritual custom] within wider Mesoamerican, colonial, Porfirian, or modern Mexican contexts (13).

There is also an indirect debt to the structuralist anthropological history of Marshall Sahlins's *Islands of History* (1985), insofar as Sahlins rejected Claude Lévi-Strauss's “cold society” stereotype of the primitive other and treated native categories as historically responsive transformative devices (“structures of the conjuncture”) that interested actors engage for their own projects, if not just as they choose.

Another major contribution is Morris's systematic scaling of local actors to national-level historical processes, and vice versa, as well as his comparison of the Gran Nayar with other Indigenous regions of Mexico and with global phenomena: “The processes of resistance and accommodation to caciquismo (boss politics), Catholic evangelization, factional violence, assimilatory pressures, and counterinsurgency operations that shook the Gran Nayar all have their counterparts elsewhere in the Global South” (9). In the spirit of both Paul Friedrich's (1977) and Eric Wolf's (1969) work on peasant revolution, Morris thus offers

insights into the dynamics of rural violence and the cultural, religious, and sociopolitical effects of state-building across much of rural Latin America and above all into the causes and nature of clashes between Indigenous groups and national political movements in countries such as Peru, Nicaragua, and Colombia, and beyond as far as India and Vietnam (9–10).

Each of the book's six chapters—each of which is divided into sections focusing on the different experiences of the region's four major Indigenous groups—addresses these major anthropological and historiographical issues. It begins with a politically clear-eyed and culturally sensitive synthesis of ethnographic and historical sources on the Gran Nayar, a bulwark of resistance to Spanish colonialism for two centuries (Chapter 1, “The Gran Nayar”). The relative success of Gran Nayar people at both repelling and incorporating the

technologies and idioms of Hispanic domination on their own terms led the region to be famously misperceived as an isolated, mystical enclave.¹ This was despite the fact that, on the eve of the 1910 Revolution, engagement with the market based on symbolically charged commodities, reminiscent of Sahlins's "cosmologies of capitalism" (1994), had already produced class relations in the Sierra (36, 43); indeed, people had long before appropriated Spanish coinage as a ritual signifier of ancestral productive power. At the same time, Morris carefully traces the antecedents of revolutionary-era divisions within and between Indigenous communities, as mestizo colonization gathered steam during the late nineteenth-century dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz (40–41).

Chapter 2, "The 'Armed Phase' of the Revolution in the Gran Nayar, 1910–1920," traces the rise of self-aggrandizing caciques "already adept at moving between [their] own communal, Indigenous world and that of the mestizo Mexico that surrounded it" (56). Given their slippery ability to shift the scale of their action, it is understandable that Morris applies a plethora of terms to them. Expanding on Alan Knight's "cacical grading system" (52), we are presented with caciquillos, chiefs, chieftains, municipal and regional caciques, political bosses and warlords, especially in the case of the aforementioned Manuel Lozada. Call them what you will, these figures, associated with semi-autonomous *defensas sociales*, "grew powerful with the help of supernatural forces, defended their communities from bandits [a.k.a. revolutionaries], and took back lands stolen by mestizo invaders, but ... soon began to challenge the legitimate authority of elders, cargo-holders and *costumbre*" (44, 146). Concurrently, many of them drew closer to (and were often as not absorbed by) Venustiano Carranza's *Constitucionalistas* despite the communities' diverse circumstances.² The irony of this struggle with the more traditional cargo-holders is that both factions derived their legitimacy from their ability to translate idioms of power inaccessible to most members of the community, and thus to mediate between their communities and external forces. Of course, the traditionalists located most of these powers in ancestral beings (54), while the new political bosses were also valued for their ability to negotiate with superordinate military actors. But, as Paul Friedrich so dramatically demonstrated, this capacity was now achieved through bloody violence that alienated local constituencies as much as it appealed to their demands for land and autonomy. Morris's account, drawing on local petitions, revolutionaries' reports, and military telegrams, is enriched by the unique resource of

“second- and third-hand stories gathered during [his] own fieldwork” (44). We should not discount these just because they are indirect, since the mythologized social memory of the Lozada rebellion, which had ended two generations before the revolution, remained as crucial to people trying to respond to things then (47) as it does today (64).

In another example of Morris’s broad comparative scope, he points out that

Unlike the Yaqui or Mayo, many of whom sided on a “tribal” basis with either the Villistas or Carrancistas, the inhabitants of the Gran Nayar, whose primary loyalties lay with community rather than ethnicity, behaved rather more like the highlanders of Chiapas, forming alliances with different revolutionary actors at the communal (or even subcommunal) level to fulfill specific local objectives (45).

However, this may characterize Wixáritari more than Náayarite (136–137), and in the end, Morris calculates that however successful they were in achieving those objectives, one in five Wixáritari fled to the Bolaños canyon near the Tepecano community of Azqueltán and to the Nayarit lowlands, where a large fraction of the Wixárika population has lived ever since (97).

Relying more exclusively on archival sources, Chapter 2, “Schools, State-Building, and Communal Autonomy Under the Sonorans, 1920–1925” shows how factionalism—always teetering between “caciquismo and consensus... in communal politics” (87)—infused the initial period of post-revolutionary state-building. In the Sierra, everyday state formation was based on ambivalent, piecemeal agrarian reform and heavy-handed, assimilationist, monolingual Spanish education programs under the Secretaría de Educación Pública. The SEP resorted to the same abduction of children into nightmarish Indian boarding schools, including the storied Casa del Estudiante Indígena, that have recently scandalized Canada, Australia, the US, and other settler societies, but whose lingering legacy Mexican scholars have yet to fully confront (80–81).³ Such programs were inspired by conservative models imported from the global North and first administered by Secretary of Education José Vasconcelos, who shared their premise that rural poverty was due to cultural backwardness rather than structural marginalization. Vasconcelos also tasked teachers—“the primary agents of cultural change” (93)—with fomenting mestizo colonization (which, as Philip Coyle has pointed out, has since taken over many communities to the point of not only constituting a resident economic elite but actually displacing

the Indigenous population). Indicative of the breadth of the teachers' role in the region, they were also instructed to identify valuable minerals and other resources to be extracted (88, 92)—not to mention the local children, land, and federal funds that they grabbed for themselves.

Chapter 4, “The Cristero Rebellion in the Gran Nayar, 1926–1934,” is the book's most ambitious: a tightly argued “case study of how, why, and with what results subaltern groups may decide to drop the ‘weapons of the weak’ and take up rifles, rocks, or bows and arrows against those forces ... perceived as threatening their families, communities, and ways of life” (124). Between the campaign to “civilize the backward Indian” and capitalize agriculture based in part on mestizo takeovers of Indian land, the government's modernization campaign managed to alienate (or to galvanize) nearly everyone in the strategically situated Gran Nayar region, the bridge between the rebel Catholic strongholds of northern Jalisco and southern Zacatecas and Durango. Indigenous participation in the rebellion was widespread, but, as noted above, Morris disputes Jean Meyer's claim that it expressed a voluntarist groundswell of popular Catholicism. He argues that Meyer reproduces a misreading of Indigenous ritual values of the period—a rather different kind of religiosity, even if it dons a saintly mask (160)—and underestimates the extent of forced recruitment of troops, often child soldiers (132).

Instead, Morris supports Alan Knight's conclusion that Cristero support depended on how different social groups perceived agrarianism and federal education—the two often contradictory faces of the state in the Sierra. In any case, Indigenous participation remained independent of “the influence of both orthodox Catholicism and revolutionary nationalism” (120, 123, 160). That is, “the Clausewitzian ‘facts on the ground’ pitted cacique against cacique, community against community, and [above all] faction against faction.” Factionalism reflected deep histories (123) and “preexisting sentiments” (161), especially what Paul Friedrich also characterized as “the conceptions of kinship through which caciques harnessed support, as well as the charismatic power that helped them to hold their factional groupings together” (173). Morris acknowledges that Meyer understood the key role of *caciquismo* in determining people's allegiances and levels of participation (161), but adds that “economic rivalries, mainly centred around cattle ownership, inflected the political conflicts that were the primary motive for the participation of the Gran Nayar's population in the *cristiada*.” At the same time, since all sides were poor, class competition cannot explain people's particular allegiances as convincingly as

adherence to kinship networks does. Moreover, cattle were “life symbols” (in Friedrich’s term) whose value went beyond protein and money (152–153) to include prestige (164). I would add that cattle are also a metonym of the powers of feminine underworld fertility that undergirds all land, maize, and kinship, a relation that the Wixárika ritual figure of the cross-dressed wakeru (cowboy) embodies.

Overall, Morris’s multifactorial, Thucydidean explanation for people’s political action (or lack thereof) resonates strongly with Friedrich’s *Agrarian Revolt in a Mexican Village* (1977) when he points to

- (1) the influence of religious (although not necessarily Catholic) belief,
- (2) the local dynamics of caciquismo, (3) intracommunal factional tensions, (4) intercommunal agrarian conflicts, (5) the search for security in the context of generalized violence, and (6) simple, unabashed coercion (172)

crossed with the aforementioned Clausewitzian contingencies that belie many actors’ pretenses to ideological consistency over time. I think Pablo would be pleased with Morris’s analysis, however much his Naranja informants believed in the agrarian reform that Gran Nayar communities often saw as a trap.

Next in the book, Chapter 5, “Boarding Schools, Factional Feuds, and Unlikely Alliances During the Maximato, 1929–1934” is a remix of Chapter 3, thanks to the government’s repetition of its mistakes during the previous postbellum period of state-building. That is, the scene was dominated by intensified economic modernization (through land reform), caciquismo (rooted in *defensas sociales*, but with ex-Cristeros now representing the state), and cultural assimilation (as boarding schools were now installed in the Sierra and rebranded as “socialist education”) (176–177). Morris pulls no punches, as in parts of Campeche and Oaxaca, the “overwhelming ethnocentrism of SEP policy and its representatives’ faith in the superiority of mestizo Mexican culture over long-standing Indian lifeways” (197) were abetted by land-hungry local caciques and mestizo settlers. These policies,

despite paying lip service to an idealized model of the “noble Indian,” actively sought to destroy the bases of Indigenous political and cultural autonomy...in often-violent efforts to overthrow traditional civil-religious hierarchies and suppress “superstition,” Indigenous languages, the use of alcohol, and traditional agricultural techniques...that had long regulated local social, political, economic, and religious life (178).

Consequently, the low success rate of the SEP's literacy programs may have reflected local suspicions that bilingualism led to divided loyalties as much as the incompetence of poorly trained teachers (190). Morris is also sensitive to why people distrusted agrarian reform, as Daniel Nugent and Ana Alonso (1994) found that former revolutionaries in Chihuahua refused to accept "grants" (dotaciones) of land that had always been theirs but would now be controlled by bankers and other administrators (188). In short, given that "earlier Liberal projects to create 'Mexican individuals' from Indigenous corporate communities influenced Maximato-era Indigenous policy, it is perhaps not surprising that state-building efforts in the Gran Nayar in this period further fractured communities already riven by political conflicts and clan rivalries" (212–213).

This inevitably led to the outbreak of further violence in early 1934, just as the Lázaro Cárdenas government took power and began to implement more systematic programs of reform. This is the subject of Chapter 6, "Cardenismo and the Second Cristero Rebellion in the Gran Nayar, 1935–1940," which again focuses on how Indigenous people saw "socialist education" taking their children and mestizo ranchers taking their land, although most of the violence was internal rather than inter-ethnic (14). What is most striking to people who have done fieldwork in the area is that this chapter points to precedents from over 80 years ago for many of the current patterns of political conflict in the Sierra, such as the deep skepticism of schools and the tendency of traditionalists to shun Indigenous cosmopolitans allied with the one-party state and its corrupt corporatist apparatus (217). Key to this mix was a growing wave of mestizo immigrants who sought to fence off communal lands into private cattle ranches, confirming Phil Weigand's observation (personal communication) that the introduction of barbed wire and cattle vaccines was a historical watershed in the Sierra because of its capacity to consolidate capital. The mestizo influx provoked a flood of Indigenous petitions for land restitution, which the government generally downgraded to ejido "grants" with all the compromises of local autonomy that this entailed. In any case, capitalist agriculture and infrastructure (roads, sawmills, etc.) advanced with mestizo immigration and the federal loans that lubricated it (224–225). This led to a "legitimation crisis" for many traditional cargo-holders but the SEP, which spearheaded many of these changes, blamed the social tensions on "backward" Indians.

Among the parallels Morris draws in this chapter with the Yaqui-Mayo (Yoeme-Yoreme) region of Sonora and Sinaloa, the most striking was Cárdenas's plan to redistribute a similarly large amount of land to the Indigenous

communities of the Gran Nayar as he had to the Yaquis in 1937. However, apart from his massive 421,139-hectare (one million-acre) restitution to the O'dam (now the largest Indigenous community in Mexico), government agents discarded this plan in favour of increased colonization, ranching, logging, and commercial agriculture (238–239). In the midst of the chaos, the Wixárika diaspora, which had been underway since the beginning of the Revolution, grew north into Durango and west into Nayarit, and the SEP established resettlement colonies there that are still on the map today. This created the context for Héctor Medina's important recent work (2020, 240–241) on community formation in the region.

Still, Morris concludes that overall, the indigenous communities won out: local resistance to state-building had disrupted SEP programs and blocked ... “antifanatic” policies that threatened local *costumbre*. At the same time ... the state had finally been forced to institute the agrarian reform that many communities had been demanding since before the revolution. Thus most Náayari, Wixárika, O'dam, and Mexicanero communities managed to safeguard their cultural autonomy and win for their landholdings a modicum of security, in defiance of the predictions of Lumholtz and other prerevolutionary anthropologists that they would “soon disappear by fusion with the great nation to whom they belong” (257).

A powerful epilogue summarizes and updates many of the book's central themes. Key among these is that the localist goal of cultural autonomy—not fixed ideological allegiances—is the main explanation for revolutionary violence. Indeed, Morris's plotting of documents across time and space shows how some actors embraced movements as diverse as the Delahuertistas in 1923 and the Cristeros in 1926, or moved from litigating for foreign mining companies to agitating for agrarian reform (115). Another, even bolder theme is the SEP's pernicious attempts at cultural assimilation through primary education. This “deepens our understanding of the success and failures of revolutionary education programs and agrarian reform in rural Mexico ... given that they remain central to the attempts of states to reshape societies around the world in line with dominant national cultures and elite ideologies.” Likewise, “the factional conflicts spawned by revolutionary violence, upheaval, and contentious government programs are still tangible in many communities today” (264). In this regard, it is strikingly relevant how Morris traces the deep cultural conservatism of places like the Wixárika community of Santa Catarina

Cuexcomatitlán, whose Mesoamerican ceremonialism has spawned many a doctoral dissertation and cultural revitalization project, to a violent about-face from its once-strong ties to the modernizing federal government after it betrayed them (265).

I am particularly interested in recent messianic responses to modernity. It is a theme that Morris does not address so directly for the more distant past, but one that contemporary elders continue to echo in their laments about the disappearance of traditional values and powers. At the same time, he follows ontological anthropologists who treat hybrid appropriations of modernity as “less a black-and-white choice between completely ‘Indian’ or becoming totally ‘mestizo’ and more about the extent to which they took on dual identities” (266). It is as if Indians were cosmopolitical liberals free to pick and choose identities like changes of wardrobe (and not hemmed in by structural racism). Another area of friction for the “free choice” argument would be the traditionalist distrust of mestizo-educated Indigenous people as potential traitors, which Morris himself documents (102). Instead—as Elizabeth Povinelli (2002) and Paula López Caballero (2017) have argued in different contexts—state recognition criteria often compel people to act as stereotypical autochthones in some contexts and as acculturated mestizos in others in order to escape bare life, even as they use their cunning to remain something *other*. In any case, most Mexican Indigenous people neither have nor need “local shamanic practices [that] encouraged individuals to assume multiple contradictory identities, [so] there were always a few individuals in each community who could act simultaneously as Indian and mestizo” (53) in order to do just that. Moreover, such cultural positionings are hardly a recent innovation: Claudio Lomnitz has pointed out that the original sense of ladino as being skilled in bilingual cultural intermediation dates back to the sixteenth century (2001, 43–44).

Instead, I would suggest that if the analogistic thinking inscribed in Mesoamerican art and ritual provides a weapon to the weak, it is the ability to recognize—often with biting wit—the fractal connections between power relationships in disparate contexts. In that regard, Nathaniel Morris’s sweeping book not only compares diverse regions and connects local and national scales; it also encompasses Indigenous people’s ability to do the same and to remain aware of such relationships for generations. As he shows, that awareness endures in deep currents of cultural memory and ongoing struggles for land and autonomy, even as the Mexican state devolves yet again into factional struggle and fractured sovereignties.

Notes

- 1 Daniele Inda's work (2021) also undercuts that primitivist trope, based on the evidence he's found of Wixárika and Náayari people's dynamic regional roles in the Colonial and Independence periods.
- 2 For specialists in the Mexican Revolution, Morris sheds much light on the role of *defensas sociales* (communal militias), especially in Chapter 2 (52–55). He continues to develop this topic, which is very relevant to the current fragmentation of authority in narco-era Mexico, in his subsequent research and writing.
- 3 Morris notes that this pattern did not apply everywhere in Mexico; instead of simply operating as grim theatres of the mission civilisatrice, sometimes schools became sites for airing collective grievances and for promoting female empowerment (119).

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