

Christy Thornton: Revolution in Development: Mexico and the Governance of the Global Economy, Oakland: University of California Press, 2021, 301 pp.

Reviewed by
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Within global economic governance, the agency of the Latin American peripheries appears mostly reduced, on the one hand, to reproducing the prescriptions of hegemonic countries or, on the other hand, to combating their demands – mostly unsuccessfully – through systemic ruptures. Thus, in the twentieth century, the image of Latin America as a “backyard” was challenged by that of heroic emancipatory struggles. However, there were other ways by which Latin Americans established their positions, negotiated sovereignty, and disputed power within international society, and that is where Christy Thornton’s book comes in, focusing on Mexico’s “Revolution in Development”. Thornton analyses Mexico’s long and tumultuous post-revolution period of more than six decades, showing how Mexican politicians, officials, and experts negotiated representation and redistribution in the international arena. Maintaining intense ties with the United States while at the same time seeking alliances with other peripheries, they have attempted to establish their own agenda for development. The Mexican “Revolution in Development” implies complex balances between undertaking

nationalization, dealing with debt negotiations and default, obtaining reaccess to credit and investments, achieving industrialization, and attempting regional leadership. The author focuses on strategies of how these activities were contested within the major organizations of pre- and post-war international society. In eight chapters, arranged chronologically, Thornton presents different scenarios, arguments, and struggles, showing Mexico’s agency, with some successes and many failures, which has until now been little analysed in the historiography of global economic governance.

The first chapter, “Recognition and Representation”, covers the period between 1918 and 1923 and the construction of the League of Nations and the Pan-American Union around the disputes for the recognition of Mexico and equal conditions among member countries. Thornton shows how Mexican officials managed to negotiate in their favour with other Latin American delegations regarding the voice and vote of the Latin American countries. The second chapter focuses on the controversies around debt in the framework of the Great Depression and the struggles for redistribution, analysing the emergence of a theoretical framework for Mexican demands regarding a new international system of credit. The crucial setting is the inter-American conference in Montevideo in 1933 and the pioneering interventions of José Manuel Puig, to which Thornton returns in other chapters. “A Solidarity of Interests”, the third chapter, focuses on the Mexican advocacy, along with other Latin American countries, for the creation of an inter-American bank that should be able to solve the serious credit, imbalance,

and investment problems of small countries. Thornton documents the projects, discussions, and arguments of Mexican officials and economists that, even though they were not able to be immediately implemented, configured agendas and influenced subsequent decisions.

The fourth chapter, "Voice and Vote", is centred around Bretton Woods and shows the accumulation of negotiations and arguments that resulted in the Mexico's hitherto little-known leadership in the re-organization of the post-war world order. Thornton looks at the personal and public negotiations between the American, British, and Mexican officials in prior meetings, as well as the importance of Mexico's leadership within the commission on international financial cooperation, led by the Mexican minister Eduardo Suárez, who argued for the reciprocal nature of international financial transactions and the shared responsibility in the creation of economic imbalance. Based on arguments about the sovereignty of small countries, Mexico fought for equal treatment and fair representation as well as economic development of the less industrialized countries, attaching the development agenda to the agenda of reconstruction.

The fifth chapter focuses on the 1945 Chapultepec conference, where Mexico managed to position the agenda around development and industrialization within the framework of the creation of the United Nations. The sixth chapter focuses on the negotiations around the International Trade Organization and the attempts to modify a charter designed by the centres of international trade based on universal free trade rules. The introduction of numerous amendments by Mexico, as well

as other Third World countries, reveals the attempts, most of them unsuccessful, to resist the proposals of the United States and Central Europe.

The seventh chapter describes the ambiguities of Mexico's relationship with the United States and the non-aligned countries during the Cold War, marked by some attempted rapprochements but without putting into play the source of credits that had made the country's "economic miracle" possible. The author argues that during the 1950s and 1960s Mexico became a "follower rather than a leader". Even in the negotiations for the creation of the Inter-American Development Bank, an idea that Mexicans had previously embraced, Mexican officials were not involved. Likewise, they maintained a tense relationship with the leaders of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and other new institutions led by Latin American peers. The Mexican officials sought to defend the advantages they saw in access to credit, without the accompanying initiatives for which they had previously fought.

The final chapter describes the double position of Mexico under the presidency of Luis Echeverría Álvarez regarding the creation of a Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States, announced in Santiago de Chile in 1972 and negotiated by the Mexicans for three consecutive years, while at the same time maintaining an anti-communist agenda and an alternative leadership to the most radicalized countries of the Third World. The Mexican interventions contained crucial points around permanent sovereignty over natural resources, nationalization, and the regulation of multinational corporations. Despite the

opposition of the central industrial countries, 120 countries voted in favour of the “Mexican” charter.

In well-articulated and concise chapters and drawing on meticulous archival work, Thornton manages to relate the different levels of negotiation and agency of Mexican officials in the international arena, from the most local and personal instances to the changing national and geopolitical contexts. This book also explores Mexico’s difficult position in assuming a developmentalist strategy, with attempts to provide leadership for the Global South, while at the same time maintaining US support in the form of credit. The arguments of the Mexican officials in some scenarios are surprising, predefining what was later institutionalized as the theory of the unequal terms of trade and dependency and showing the plural genesis of counter-hegemonic narratives and practices. According to Thornton, the post-revolutionary Mexican position was not a radical one, but rather an attempt to rewrite the rules of the game. However, this strategy was abandoned by Mexico and other actors in the 1980s. In her conclusion, Thornton correctly warns that it is very possible that a similar story can be described for other peripheral elites in the same period. This innovative magnifying glass focuses on the arguments and negotiations of global peripheral actors, many of which failed and with victories little recognized by historiography. The implications of this perspective are related to the current attempts of the academic community in the Global North to provincialize and decentralize the narratives of globalization processes, while at the same time opening interesting bridges with current affairs. As Thornton points out in the

introduction to the book, the echoes of these less-known Mexican struggles and arguments on debt, credit, redistribution, sovereignty, and unequal representation and recognition can still be heard today.

Lucy Delap: *Feminisms: A Global History*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020, 379 pp.

Reviewed by
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This magnificent history widens the entire field of feminist studies and employs a uniquely creative format to do so. Lucy Delap, eager to overcome the exclusively white and Euro-American sources of previous accounts, has used persons and sources from throughout the world to narrate this saga. Employing a thematic approach rather than a chronological one, she is able to overcome the limitations and biases of past histories. This tactic also enables her to show the connections and influences among both disparate regions and time periods. She accurately surveys the last 250 years of women’s activism. *Feminisms: A Global History* successfully remakes an entire field of study.

The range of Delap’s scholarship is astonishing. She begins by citing an unnamed “lady of Africa” claiming feminism in 1886. In her first few chapters, she goes on to portray feminists from India, Brazil, China, Algeria, Trinidad, Japan, Burma, and Nigeria. And she does not just men-