

It is too early to definitively assess the importance of public safety taxes, but the extraordinary gravity of the public security crisis gripping much of Latin America makes this a timely and important topic. In *Contemporary State Building*, Flores-Macías has given us a compelling account of their origins as well as some preliminary evidence regarding their effects and permanence. The book should be a priority for scholars, students and policy-makers interested in taxation, public security and state-building in Latin America and beyond.

doi:10.1017/S0022216X23000470

Bradley Skopyk, *Colonial Cataclysms: Climate, Landscape, and Memory in Mexico's Little Ice Age*
University of Arizona Press, 2020, pp. xv + 313

Cynthia Radding

University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

Colonial Cataclysms has advanced the field of environmental history in significant ways through the author's blending of interdisciplinary skills in language, climate science, archaeology and archival research. Bradley Skopyk's study is focused on the central valleys of Mexico, an area deeply imbued with Mesoamerican cultures that are rooted in the millennial development of agriculture and in the complex political and spiritual dimensions of power and historical memory. While centred squarely in the Mexican colonial context, this study provides a model for *longue durée* environmental histories applied to other world regions in Latin America and beyond.

The reference to 'Mexico's Little Ice Age' in the subtitle provides a clue to the central thesis of Skopyk's work. His research highlights what he calls the 'Colonial Mexican Pluvial', which he characterises as 'an extreme wet/cold climate phase that dominated central Mexico, peaking in three thirty-year waves around 1550, 1580, and 1610' (p. 11). The Pluvial exhibited pronounced oscillations from drought to humidity, but with overall wet and cold climatic conditions during the first century of Spanish imperialism, due in part to global phenomena of increased volcanic activity and concomitant reduced exposure to sunlight, which inflicted long-term conditions on the agricultural cycles of central Mesoamerica during the long seventeenth century. Skopyk's research counters what he sees as the overweening influence of New Spain's polymath, Joseph Antonio Alzate y Ramírez (1737–99) – cartographer, scientist and priest – on his contemporaries and on modern historians of climate and the environment. Alzate y Ramírez's observations were deeply influenced by the recurring droughts of the latter eighteenth century in 1779/80, 1785/86 and 1789/90. He posited that the major chronic problem facing Mexico was drought, linking the desiccation of streams and

wetlands as well as repeated cycles of severely reduced rainfall to deforestation and what he saw as poor management of soils and natural vegetation. Skopyk reframes this periodisation of climate change and the geomorphic transformation of ecological conditions through soil sedimentation, shifts in surface and underground water flows, and vegetational changes for both the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In the narrative that he constructs, the very real hardships observed during the eighteenth-century droughts cannot be explained without a full comprehension of the Mexican Pluvial of the preceding century that produced widespread flooding, left soils water-saturated and – combined with frost and shortened growing seasons – imperilled traditional Mesoamerican crops and systems of water management.

While underscoring the dual climatic and geomorphic ‘cataclysms’ that marked the Colonial Mexican Pluvial within the natural and social histories of colonial New Spain, Skopyk argues just as decisively for the interplay of human (cultural) and climatic (natural) forces in the broad arc of environmental change. Diverse colonial actors including imperial administrators, ecclesiastical and religious authorities, Hispanic *vecinos*, and Indigenous communities take the stage in this historical drama. Indigenous farmers experimented with new crops, livestock and ecological strategies to provide for their own sustenance and to produce for local and global markets. Hispanic elites, Indigenous nobility, village officers and peasant commoners observed environmental changes and interpreted them according to their local knowledge bases and the significance that nature held for their material survival and spiritual cosmologies. Throughout this study, Skopyk emphasises Indigenous capacities for adaptation and innovation in watersheds of central Mexico: the Zahuapan river basin of Tlaxcala, and the Valley of Teotihuacan, both with deep pre-contact and colonial histories of settlement, conflict and ecological adaptation.

The organisation of the book is both chronological and thematic, divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 develops the concept of the Colonial Mexican Pluvial through its ‘hydrographic archive’; Chapter 2, on ‘managing the ecological revolution in early colonial Tlaxcala’, revisits the debates around the impact of Old World livestock on Mesoamerican grasslands that swirled around the environmental history by his mentor, Elinor Melville, *A Plague of Sheep* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), and the classic works of previous generations by Charles Gibson, Alfred Crosby and Sherburne F. Cook, among others. Chapters 3, ‘A Drunken Landscape’, and 4, ‘Embedded Lives’, turn to the colonial-era innovations set in motion by Tlaxcalan villagers and Hispanic landowners to plant maguey (*Agave salmiana*) for the production of pulque, responding to growing demand for this pungent alcoholic beverage in local and regional urban markets and to changing soil and atmospheric conditions in central Mexico. During the extended cold and wet years of the seventeenth-century Mexican Pluvial, which imperilled maize harvests and led to the demise of the cochineal artisan dye industry in Tlaxcala, Indigenous peasants created *metepantli* rows of maguey plants on the ridges of once irrigated milpas ‘through a process of infilling and conversion of existing field systems rather than expanding into unused lands’ (p. 114). While this well-documented practice illustrated the ingenuity of Indigenous adaptations to changing climatic and edaphic conditions, Skopyk argues that it led to

destructive consequences of silting and sedimentation during the ensuing decades of alternating drought and pluviosity in the eighteenth century. Chapter 5, 'Memories of a Devious Landscape', links the construction of stories about the past to long-term environmental transformations, through a detailed, critical comparison of historical documents produced by both Hispanic and Indigenous colonial actors. The chapter weaves backward in time from a 1761 inspection by the Commissioner of the Holy Office of the Inquisition through the estates and villages surrounding the Zahuapan river basin. Skopyk reaffirms his broad storyline in the general conclusion, bringing together climate change, soil sedimentation, stream silting and agroecological adaptation.

Colonial Cataclysms rests on a sophisticated methodology of empirical research through extensive archival work, climate databases, published archaeological reports and direct field observation. His archival research yielded a rich corpus of documents in both Spanish and Nahuatl as well as colonial maps and Indigenous-authored images. His thesis regarding the Colonial Mexican Pluvial is strengthened by his knowledgeable references to the North American and Mexican Drought Atlases, the Palmer Drought Severity Index, dendrochronology, and the hemispheric phenomena of the Intertropical Convergence Zone and the El Niño/Southern Oscillation. The data summarised in Appendices A and B further substantiate the narratives and analyses presented throughout the book.

doi:10.1017/S0022216X23000482

Katerina Hatzikidi and Eduardo Dullo (eds.), *A Horizon of (Im)possibilities: A Chronicle of Brazil's Conservative Turn*

University of London Press, 2021, pp. xxii + 228

Odilon Caldeira Neto

Universidade Federal de Juiz de Fora

No Brasil, o avanço de setores conservadores e extremistas de direita mobilizou uma já extensa bibliografia. Em linhas gerais, o esforço coletivo de análise tem rendido bons frutos, como pode ser averiguado em *A Horizon of (Im)possibilities: A Chronicle of Brazil's Conservative Turn*. O livro traz importantes contribuições para o campo de estudos, aspectos que são delineados desde a introdução.

Uma característica positiva da coletânea, explícita desde as páginas iniciais, é a recusa em cair em reducionismos, que tendem a sintetizar o caso brasileiro mais recente, como uma espécie de mimetismo do avanço das direitas globais. Isto é, seria o bolsonarismo o trumpismo em verde e amarelo?

A recusa em reduzir o Brasil aos Estados Unidos não exclui, claro, a preocupação com o trânsito transnacional. Mas as perguntas fundamentais da coletânea podem