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The author analyses the development of indigenism in three different historical periods up to the construction of modern states. Hence the book unravels some interesting parallels and differences between the processes of nation-building in Europe and Latin America. As it reflects how those processes, such as 'criollo nationalism', 'liberal centralism' and 'historical indigenism', have shaped discriminatory positions against the indigenous population, it highlights central metaphors such as 'segregationism', 'assimilationism', 'integrationism' and 'ethnicism' in national-state policies. The author also rightly points out dangerous 'ethnophagic' (his own term) tendencies, which have subtly but effectively imposed hegemonic values over diverse and multiple indigenous popular cultures.

In the second half of the book the author analyses different aspects of questions of autonomy and self-determination for the indigenous population and argues that autonomy is both a territorial embodiment and an association of people with specific demands and aspiration, as well as a politico-juridical regime which should aspire to the creation of pluriethnic regions within the context of the nation-state. So Polanco argues that autonomy cannot be understood as a dichotomy between centralism and decentralisation, but as a vital process of a 'socio-political transformation in a national scale' which consolidates national unity, solidarity and fraternity and equality among citizens and ethnic communities.

A weakness of the book is its romantic endorsement of the indigenous cause which overlooks, for instance, questions of internal hierarchies and gender inequalities within indigenous societies, especially in the pre- and post-conquest periods. Hence we are still left with a picture of a conflictual dichotomy between indigenous societies and the 'West' while it could have been interesting to dwell on the creation of consensus and dissensus within the indigenous societies themselves. Moreover, the author could have engaged in further discussion of autonomy as a socio-political transformation in a time of post-modern state/nation and globalisation. Nonetheless the book is concisely well-written, and it will be important reading for students and researchers in Latin American anthropology, political sciences and history and comparative history.

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VALENTINA NAPOLITANO

Sandra Kuntz Ficker and Paolo Riguzzi (eds.), *Ferrocarriles y vida económica en México (1850-1950)* (Zinacantepec, México: El Colegio Mexiquense, Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana Xochimilco, and Ferrocarriles Nacionales de México, 1996), pp. 383, pb.

This edited volume addresses several important questions in Mexican economic history. Why did the railways fail to generate significant backward linkages? What were the effects of government policy? And why did the railways' economic role decline after 1920?

Paolo Riguzzi takes on Gerschenkron's hypothesis that late industrialisers have an advantage. He argues that had Mexico began building railways in the 1830s, its own foundries could have produced rails and later followed the learning curve

into more advanced products. But by the 1870s, technology had advanced too far for railway construction to stimulate Mexico's existing industrial plant. Starting late made it harder to catch up later. Guillermo Guajardo attempts to flesh out Riguzzi's story, and take it through 1952. Unfortunately, Guajardo's chapter fails to measure up to the quality of Riguzzi's essay: its line of argument is confused, and poorly informed by economic theory.

Sandra Kuntz studies government policies, and concludes that they did little to favour exports. She finds that the price of railway transport as a percentage of the final price of domestically traded goods declined over time, and rate policies were economically rational. Arturo Grunstein convincingly argues that the federal buyout of the largest railroads in 1907 was not necessary to forestall a predatory private monopoly, and that regulated competition could have achieved the same goal at less cost. He concludes that most of the cost advantages of the new quasi-national company in fact derived from a fortuitous drop in the price of coal.

In the final chapter, Kuntz and Riguzzi document the slow increase in productivity after 1920 and the failure of the system to keep up with the growth of the economy. They carefully rule out competition from highways or deliberate government policy as causes. In a meticulous analysis, they attribute the decline to the politicisation of the national railways, the strength of the labour unions, and the indefinite status of the remaining private lines.

While the quality of the chapters is high, the volume could have benefited from a more rigorous application of economic theory. For example, Kuntz and Riguzzi base certain arguments on the railways' contribution to market integration, without ever clearly demonstrating the presence thereof. A similar point can be made about the price elasticity of demand for transport. The authors make several somewhat contradictory arguments based on implicit or explicit inferences about demand elasticity without directly calculating it.

Grunstein's essay raises several interesting topics in political economy and imperfect competition. Why did the government purchase the railways rather than continue to regulate them? Some of the evidence he presents indicates that the buyout might have been a back-ended subsidy to make up for years of low or negative profits. How intense was 'destructive competition' in the railway market? Using techniques from the industrial organisation literature to analyse data on profits, securities prices, and reinvestment would clarify both the competitive environment and investor expectations and shed light on the government's motivations.

These quibbles aside, the authors have produced a series of high-quality essays that greatly advance our knowledge about the effects of railroads on the shape and structure of the Mexican economy, remind us that John Coatsworth's seminal study by no means answered all our questions, and suggest many productive avenues for future research. This is a valuable and sorely needed contribution to the literature on Mexico's economic history.