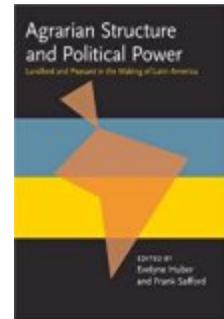


# H-Net Reviews

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Evelyne Huber, Frank Safford, eds. *Agrarian Structure and Political Power: Landlord and Peasant in the Making of Latin America*. Pittsburgh, Penn.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995. viii + 242 pp. \$22.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8229-5564-1; \$49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8229-3880-4.

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This volume resulted from the cooperative endeavor of the editors, Frank R. Safford, professor of history at Northwestern University, and Evelyne Huber, professor of political science and director of the Institute of Latin American Studies at the University of North Carolina, along with a distinguished group of five other Latin Americanists, mostly historians, from four more American colleges and universities. The contributors met in spring 1990 to discuss papers concerning the influence of agrarian structures on Spanish America's political systems. Some of these papers became the basis of the present volume, an important addition to the historical literature on social structures and political development in Latin America.

The volume intends to examine, in particular, the applicability to Spanish American countries of the theoretical framework springing from Barrington Moore's *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*. Moore's work, now a classic, studies the role of agrarian class relations and class-state coalitions in determining a variety of political outcomes, whether it be democratic or totalitarian, as several societies (England, France, the United States, China, Japan, India, and Germany) moved from the preindustrial to the modern world. Capitalist democracy, capitalist fascism, and communism were, according to Moore, the result of the diverse strength of, and balance of forces and alliances between, landlords, the bourgeoisie, peasants, and the state in different historical instances. There were instances where landlords were overpowered by the bourgeoisie; others where landlords kept the upper hand; and yet others where peasants managed to overpower both of these groups. The discussion of such instances, matched by an account of the relative development of agrarian forces and relations in each of the societies that

he examined, led Moore to identify the three paths to the modern industrial world mentioned above. While doing so, he emphasized the unique conditions that made it possible for modernization leading to industrialization to take place along a liberal democratic avenue.

As there has traditionally been academic concern over the allegedly semi-feudal (my words) nature of Latin American societies and the undemocratic tendency of its polities, the authors of this volume considered it appropriate to follow on Moore's footsteps and to look for the political consequences of agrarian class relations in this region. They were, however, aware that Moore's model could not be transferred automatically, but needed significant modifications to adapt it to the particular conditions of Latin America. Some modifications had to do with factoring in the weight of external forces in shaping Latin America's states and societies, considering the relative strength of Latin America's bourgeoisies, and agreeing that the endpoint of their analysis could not be specific and time-bound authoritarian or democratic "regimes," but the predominance of democratic or authoritarian "trajectories" (p. 7). With this in mind they set out to analyze the cases of Mexico, Peru, Argentina, Chile, Colombia, and Costa Rica, a mixed bag of countries ranging from the most authoritarian to the most democratic of trajectories.

Arnold J. Bauer, from the University of California, Davis, discusses the Chilean case from the 1870s to the 1970s and, though ultimately he considers it as part of a democratic "trajectory," he finds that it does not fit either Moore's authoritarian nor his democratic path. Moore's hypotheses, therefore, are of little relevance to the Chilean experience. In Chile it was difficult, for in-

stance, to define what the “peasantry” was. There were not peasant villages as such, nor was there a “deeply rooted, sedentary, native farming community” (p. 23). Instead there were “inquilinos,” a sort of service tenants made up of floating migrant families who eventually settled in large estates, but were capable of participating in a relatively free labor market. Nor was it possible in Chile to tell the landlord group apart from the bourgeoisie. There was a unified “oligarchy.” Furthermore, the landlord segment of this unified oligarchy, which was dominant, did not require reliance on compulsory labor, nor was it openly anti-democratic but favored the enfranchisement of some popular groups. Conversely, the Chilean “bourgeoisie” did not necessarily favor parliamentary democracy but fought to restrict political participation. The Chilean road to democracy was, therefore, atypical and, if anything, could only be understood as a reflection of the “multiplicity of historical times” characteristic of peripheral capitalist societies (p. 22).

Tulio Halperin Donghi, professor of history at the University of California, Berkeley, deals with Argentina from the 1820s to 1930. He does not engage Moore’s analysis in a very explicit way, but nonetheless seems to find Moore’s scheme inapplicable to the Argentine case. In this country’s pampas, the peasants, central actors within Moore’s theoretical framework, could not be found; and a particular, somewhat uncommon, state elite (“impecunious” elites from the Interior who crowded federal political, military and administrative offices,” p. 41) rose to power in ways that Moore did not account for. Halperin goes on to detail an atmosphere of state (“political power elite”)-landlord tensions from the 1820s to the 1880s over both economic resources and manpower. Such tensions receded in the prosperous and peaceful 1880s-1920s period, but surfaced again as a result of the Depression. Contrary to the Chilean case, Halperin finds that Argentine landlords did favor coercive labor relations, though they were not intent on using the state for labor-repressive purposes. Moreover, as they felt secure in their economic position, the agrarian export model being the dominant one during most of this period, they willingly accepted democratic regimes. They would turn increasingly authoritarian as the political reforms of the 1910s brought about the soon-to-become inconvenient participation of wider, non-elite, sections of Argentine society, and as the crash of 1929 shook the economic foundations of the landholders’ prosperity.

Florencia Mallon, from the University of Wisconsin, Madison, provides a comparative essay touching on Mesoamerica and the Andes. Focusing on Morelos, Mex-

ico, and Cajamarca, Peru, she examines landlord-peasant and landlord-state relations during the last half of the nineteenth century. She considers that to be applicable to the Latin American experience, one would need to add to Moore’s theses the consideration of “contingent, on-the-ground variations in labor relations, class conflict and alliance, and the composition of the power blocs emerging during periods of state formation” (p. 68). Furthermore, she argues that the role of evolving “regional political cultures” (and their “interactions and negotiations”) in the process of state formation ought to be factored in if one is to account for Latin American democracy or authoritarianism (pp. 68-69). More specifically, she underlines the importance of the popular classes in shaping such regional cultures and, because of this, the nation-state itself. That Mexico adopted an authoritarian inclusionary system, whereas Peru followed an authoritarian exclusionary path is, therefore, not solely the result of the designs of landlords and other sectors of the dominant classes but also the product of how they interacted in particular historical instances with popular classes and movements. To be sure, much as Moore had argued, she does concede that landlords favored authoritarian solutions in both places.

Frank Safford addresses the Colombian case. He starts by pointing out the numerous reasons that make Moore’s analysis difficult to apply to this and other Latin American cases. He explains, for instance, that Moore’s theses may only be relevant to Latin America after the emergence of independent states in the region. However, he goes on to say that even after independence, such theses seem not to be relevant, for most Latin American nations followed a republican form of government rather than a monarchical one, which is the one Moore had dealt with while discussing Europe and Asia. In addition, many of the newly constituted states were too weak, their populations too sparse and scattered, their territory too fragmented and internal transportation difficult and costly, all of which made them unable to offer landowners any help in coercing rural labor into production.

In his opinion, the question to be asked is not “how agrarian systems affected governmental forms, but rather, how agrarian systems may have affected the actual exercise of power” (p. 112). And his answer seems to depend upon the particular historical moment facing the Colombian state. Before the 1880s the dominant classes were based mainly on commercial rather than landholding activities; in the 1880s-1920s period, as they rose to prominence, landlords sided with local authorities to achieve the repression of unruly tenant farmers and agri-

cultural workers, this in spite of some formal pro-peasant policies of the central state, which was a very weak one. This was also the case during the 1930s, a period of intense agrarian confrontation. Overall, Safford's conclusions seem to agree with those of Mallon in the sense that the regional dimension was decisive in the shape of Colombian politics. Authoritarianism was a reality at the local level, in spite of the self-proclaimed democratic character of national politics. Much like Moore and Mallon, Safford seems also to believe that Colombian landlords displayed authoritarian proclivities.

Finally, to close the case studies, Lowell Gudmundson, who teaches history and chairs the Latin American Studies program at Mount Holyoke College, discusses Costa Rica's post-1830 democratic trajectory. He also draws some comparative conclusions applicable to other Central American countries. Relying on an extensive discussion of the available secondary literature, he shows that Costa Rica's ruling elites based their dominance on the control of commerce, coffee processing and exporting, and government, rather than land. They were not a group of labor-repressive landlords. Nor did they challenge the formation of a significant segment of medium and small farmers. This all contributed to the emergence and consolidation of democratic ways in the country, even more so than the actions of the commercial bourgeoisie. As for the rest of Central America, the cases of Panama and Nicaragua seem puzzling, for they also had strong trading and government groups and weak landed elites. Yet they followed authoritarian trajectories, which Gudmundson seems to attribute in part to the long-term effects of U.S. intervention and civil war. Both Guatemala's and El Salvador's dominant classes, on the other hand, did rely on coercive labor systems in agriculture. These two countries developed as well a "state-employed, dependent middle class, supportive of neofascist policies" (p. 167). Both landlords and the state were inclined to authoritarian ways and labor repression.

In sum, Gudmundson seems to believe that Moore's theses, which he shows to have been long popular among social scientists dealing with Central America, provide a wealth of useful ideas for comparative historical research in this region. Nonetheless, the intervention of significant variables other than the ones considered by Moore, ethnicity and foreign intervention in particular, ought to be factored in for any analysis of the region's political development to make sense.

As Safford argues in one of the concluding essays, the overall sense among the participants in the conference

leading to this volume (who, in addition to the volume's contributors, included John Coatsworth, Paul Gootenberg, and Mark D. Szuchman) is that Moore's scheme does not fit the Latin American experience, or fits it in very uneven ways. This is in part because most countries in the region do not have as enduring a political identity as did the nations Moore dealt with. In addition, Moore's clear-cut categories of analysis (for example, landowners, merchants, bourgeoisie) are blurry when it comes to Latin America; and agrarian patterns are not homogeneous but variegated across the region, and even within individual countries. Furthermore, Latin American landowners, contrary to Moore's analysis, have not been able to control the state, ordinarily in the hands of a very autonomous political elite, nor have they always been identified with authoritarian politics.

Evelyn Huber and John D. Stephens, professor of political science and sociology at the University of North Carolina, close the volume with an interesting comparative essay on agrarian structures and political power in Latin America and elsewhere. They expand the Latin American coverage by dealing with Paraguay, Brazil, Ecuador, Uruguay, Venezuela, Bolivia, and the Central American countries left out of Gudmundson's essay. They also dedicate short sections to the Caribbean, Japan, and the British settler colonies of Canada, New Zealand, the United States, and Australia, and discuss at length Western and Central European experiences. Their conclusion is that the anti-democratic leanings, and active role of large landowners in bringing about modern authoritarian rule, are evident in advanced capitalist countries. In Latin American and other peripheral countries, though, these authors identify different forms of authoritarian rule and a variety of paths to modern authoritarianism, in which landlords played diverse roles depending on the nature of challenges to their control of land and labor resources. In Latin America, landlords' attempts to enlist the support of the state in repressing labor were also different from the experiences analyzed by Moore. So was the formation of reactionary coalitions. Coalition building was a more complex phenomenon because of the presence of other significant actors, in particular foreign capital, and the diverse nature of both the bourgeoisie and the state itself. A country's position in the international economic and political system, they conclude, is paramount in determining its trajectory toward authoritarianism or democracy.

Although putting into question the extent to which it is applicable to Latin America, this anthology reiterates the general analytical value of Moore's *Social Origins of*

*Democracy and Dictatorship*. It also constitutes a fine exercise in comparative historical sociology, much needed in the Latin American historical field, still dominated by individual case studies. Country experts may challenge particular assertions relative to the individual cases treated in some of the sweeping comparative essays, but overall the essays and analyses are well grounded and insightful. To be sure, there are some minor flaws. At times the chapters become somewhat repetitive, and the treatment of Moore's theses by some of the authors is too thin or sounds a little too simplistic and lineal. Yet,

overall the volume provides abundant food for thought and provokes useful questions, which makes it suitable for advanced undergraduate courses and graduate seminars. It is a must for any institutional research library and a highly recommended addition to the collections of individual scholars.

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