

The revolutionary imaginations of greater Mexico: Chicana/o radicalism, solidarity politics, and Latin American social movements

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Despite an unwieldy title, *The Revolutionary Imaginations of Greater Mexico: Chicana/o Radicalism, Solidarity Politics, and Latin American Social Movements* offers a novel interpretation of Chicana/o political and cultural history. Tracking a broad range of left-wing activities during the 1970s, Alan Eladio Gómez focuses on the avowedly internationalist sentiments that animated Mexican-descended radicals in the United States in order to “help reimagine [a] transnational and transcultural mapping of the Chicana/o movement” (p. 7). Dense and sometimes irrelevant theoretical material threatens to overwhelm the narrative early, before the book’s true strengths—compelling argumentation and deep dives into multiple venues of anticapitalist Chicana/o struggle on both sides of the border—shine through in later chapters. The result is an informative and provocative, if flawed, transnational examination of an influential political movement, one that holds relevance for both academics and activists.

Revolutionary Imaginations begins with an introduction that lays out a complex theoretical apparatus built around jargon-heavy definitions of terms like “solidarity,” “insurgent feminism,” “Third World,” and “Imagination.” The first chapter retains the emphasis on theory, while also tracing the prehistory of the Chicana/o Left through radical organizations and mass movements in Mexico and the US Southwest during the first two-thirds of the twentieth century. For some readers not already familiar with the contours of autonomist Marxism, it may be worth setting these initial sections to the side, at least at first, although each contains valuable material. The remaining chapters are well sourced, well argued, and largely stand on their own.

Beginning with chapter 2, Gómez excavates a history of struggle inside the Chicana/o Movement. He is at pains to distinguish the Chicana/o Left from the

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broader movement, noting that the former “emerged from and within the *movimiento*, but also had longer roots in twentieth century leftist politics” (27). He presents disagreements over liberal anticommunism as crucial to this division, with more moderate wings of the Chicana/o Movement distancing themselves from socialist tendencies and supporting, on ethno-nationalist grounds, the vaguely progressive posturing of Mexican president Luis Echeverría Álvarez (1970–1976). The Chicana/o Left, by contrast, repudiated Echeverría in the strongest terms: not only had he presided (as Mexico’s secretary of the interior) over the 1968 Tlatelolco Massacre, but as president he also collaborated with Richard Nixon to repress radical dissent in both countries. In turn, as Gómez demonstrates, grassroots Chicana/o militants like Mario Cantú and Olga Talamante “were intentional and adamant about making connections to the people of Mexico rather than politicians” (p. 62). Rejecting both anticommunism and the border itself as deceptive fictions designed to divide people in struggle, the Chicana/o Left presented an appealing alternative to more conservative forms of cultural nationalism.

Having laid this groundwork, Gómez turns, in chapters 3 and 4, to a nuanced assessment of *teatro popular* (popular theater) as an arena where Chicana/o radicals developed both anticapitalist politics and transnational connections with leftists from Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America. The focus in these chapters on questions of culture, art, and aesthetics offers another angle from which to view the distinction between the Chicana/o Left and the broader movement, as *teatristas* debated whether or not to accept political and financial support from Echeverría’s government. Gómez neatly balances a political analysis of divergent worldviews, particularly indigenist and Marxist-Leninist, with a careful attentiveness to the style and content of the performances themselves. Here, as throughout the book, the majority of the international connections Gómez tracks are limited to Mexico, making the subtitle’s reference to Latin America as a whole somewhat misleading.

Chapter 5 contextualizes Chicana/o participation in efforts to foment guerrilla warfare in Mexico. While the narrative focuses on Chicanos (mostly men, including former prisoners radicalized inside) who provided material assistance to armed Mexican revolutionaries, the interpretive emphasis, as in other chapters of the book, is largely on ways in which Mexican movements influenced the political development of the Chicana/o Left. In similar fashion, chapter 6 examines a wildcat strike by undocumented Mexican immigrant women at a factory in the Bay Area, focusing on the solidarity efforts of local Chicana feminists, particularly Magdalena Mora, who wrote extensively about the strike and its aftermath. An epilogue skillfully draws contemporary lessons by linking the legacy of the 1970s Chicana/o Left to the experience of Zapatista solidarity efforts over the past two decades, providing a frame of reference that will be particularly useful for organizers today.

As indicated earlier, however, *Revolutionary Imaginations* is not without its flaws. In particular, Gómez never successfully bridges the gap between theory and practice, between his ultra-left interpretive apparatus and his well-sourced social history of underexamined grassroots movements. For instance, in the introduction he highlights the Italian autonomist Marxist concept of the “social factory,” which he defines, following Mario Tronti and others, as “a way to critically analyze and



map how capitalist social relations have attempted to colonize all of life, that is, the time and space when not at work, as well as how people have refused these impositions and in turn created new forms and practices of political organizing” (p. 14). While this definition seems capacious enough to help us understand most of the organizing work described in the book, Gómez returns to the term only in the very last chapter. Ironically, this is the only portion of the book that focuses on traditional forms of labor struggle, in the context of an *actual* rather than metaphoric factory. The result is a missed opportunity, as a more successful imbrication of the theory and the practice laid out in *Revolutionary Imaginations* could help reshape both historical understandings and present-day social struggles.

Regardless, Gómez has contributed substantially to our understanding of the transnational Chicana/o Left, and to broader currents in the emergence of Latina/o identity during the 1970s. *Revolutionary Imaginations* also deftly unpacks the complexities of transnational identity construction, repeatedly highlighting the importance of gender and ethnicity. It will be of use both in Trump-era social movements and in graduate and advanced undergraduate courses, especially history and Latina/o studies offerings that focus on social movements, borderlands, and/or cultural studies.

