

themselves. In some sense, for the researcher at least, for all practical purposes modern information technologies have eliminated both physical and temporal distance.

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jhg.2014.11.012>

Robert W. Patch, *Indians and the Political Economy of Colonial Central America, 1670–1810*. Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 2013, 272 pages, US\$36.95 hardcover.

Revisionist histories are a genre all their own. When enough of them are struck and circulate, afforded critical acceptance, not mere credence, then – or so goes the thinking of Thomas S. Kuhn (*The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 1962) – the time is ripe for a paradigm shift. The field of Latin American colonial history, to which Robert W. Patch (*Maya and Spaniard in Yucatán, 1648–1812*, 1993; *Maya Revolt and Revolution in the Eighteenth Century*, 2002) is already a distinguished contributor, has had several notable paradigm shifts as it has developed and matured, as any healthy social science (again a nod to Kuhn) manifestly should. Patch's latest book seeks to align itself with the recent work of María de los Ángeles Romero Frizzi (*Economía y vida de los españoles en la Mixteca Alta, 1519–1720*, 1900), Arij Ouweneel (*Shadows over Anáhuac*, 1996), and Jeremy Baskes (*Indians, Merchants, and Markets*, 2000). In a Mexican context, what is now the state of Oaxaca in particular, these three scholars have investigated and written about the *repartimiento de mercancías* (also known as the *repartimiento de efectos*) in ways that move discussion of its operation (one concerning the forced sale, purchase, provision or manufacture of goods and commodities) away from a focus on harmful, negative impacts to something more benign, if not beneficial, to native welfare and indigenous status in the grand scheme of empire. The jury, at least in the judgment of this reviewer, is still out. Patch's assiduous research may add to the accumulation of evidence that views the *repartimiento* more favorably, but by the same token it leaves no doubt that the institution was abusive, illegal, opposed and railed against by Spaniards as well as Indians, and in the end dismantled entirely from colonial dealings because it was considered detrimental. Nonetheless, an alternative view of the unsavory practice is most assertively advanced.

An adroit introduction and the three chapters that follow it set the stage for two scenarios, as different one from the other as only Central America can conjure, that allow Patch to make his case, which he does with meticulous attention to detail. The first is from highland Guatemala, specifically *repartimiento* transactions among Maya communities in the district of Huehuetenango. The second case study involves Nicaragua, where the colonial regime had to contend with British meddling besides indigenous resistance, where lowland terrain predominates in the Caribbean-oriented east, and where native peoples were neither so populous or so successfully brought to heel as in near neighbor (but not adjacent) Guatemala. The archival sources that Patch draws upon for the former region span the years from 1765 to 1786, those for the latter region three times longer, from 1730 to 1790.

The Huehuetenango documents, culled from the most part from a lawsuit housed in the Archivo General de Indias in Seville, are especially rich. They allow Patch to tell 'A Tale of Two Juans' (p. 116), in which a newly arrived magistrate or *alcalde mayor* (Juan Búcaro)

connives with a resident merchant (Juan Montes de Oca) over the sale to Indians (whether they wanted them or not) of *repartimiento* items that included 'cotton, tools, mules, wheat, wool, and tiles' (p. 119). Búcaro's position, which he bought before he was named to it for the sum of some 5800 pesos, 'the fifth most expensive *alcaldía mayor* in the entire Spanish empire' (p. 122), came with an annual salary of a paltry 331 pesos, upon which Patch makes clear 'Búcaro was not going to get rich' (p. 119). Rather, Patch points out, like 'all other *alcaldes mayores*, he took up the post because of the prospect of economic gain resulting from *repartimientos*' (p. 119). Though operating costs must also be borne in mind, the partnership generated 'revenues totaling between 90,000 and 101,000 pesos in four and a half years of the company's existence,' which was brought to 'abrupt dissolution' (p. 122) because of 'a dispute between the two men' that not only 'got nasty' but turned 'malicious' (p. 137). Their falling out arose from Búcaro's refusal to comply with Montes de Oca's orders to 'hide their merchandise from the government' and 'not to pay the tribute (taxes) due the royal treasury,' a ploy that Búcaro 'feared the consequences of' because it 'was so obviously illegal' (p. 136).

The magistrate, meanwhile, incurred the wrath of local clergy 'by prohibiting the business activities carried out by members of the Church, because he believed the priests' loss would be his gain' (p. 132). Búcaro's days were numbered after the arrival in Guatemala of Pedro Cortés y Larraz, a stern archbishop who, listening to the complaints of his parish priests while at the same time lamenting their own less than model behavior, 'brought formal charges against the *alcalde mayor*,' allegations that the government official 'did not deny.' Búcaro, in fact, 'openly admitted having compelled the indigenous people to accept *repartimientos*,' justifying his actions by claiming that 'all magistrates were compelled to use force to ensure the Indians' participation in business' (p. 133). Patch is more concerned with demonstrating how 'Huehuetenango was brought into the world economy as an industrial producer' (p. 138) than with finding out how Indians so 'integrated' (p. 7) felt about their predicament. He contends that 'surviving documents do not often include the indigenous voice,' stating categorically that 'such sources do not provide much of an idea of what the Indians thought about the colonial regime that ruled over them and exploited them' (p. 11). Data are not abundant, but 'such sources' do exist, not in the Spanish archives that Patch has diligently consulted and trawled through but in one that, for some reason he best knows, escaped his purview: the Archivo General de Centro América (AGCA) in the heart of Guatemala City. Had Patch spent some time there, or gone online and consulted the AGCA's pertinent contents, he'd be better placed to 'include the indigenous voice' in his analysis. Perhaps his intimation that it will be 'left to a future monograph to combine both Spanish and Central American sources in a new whole providing an even broader understanding' (p. 10) is what we might expect him to deliver next.

There is much here for historical geographers, those interested in Spanish Central America most of all, to ponder, but an equal amount with which to take issue, if not dispute, concerning what (in essence) being under colonial rule meant for indigenous peoples and their struggles for survival.

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jhg.2014.11.008>
