

RESPONSE *

Marcello Carmagnani
University of Turin

The way in which individual historians conceive of their craft is clearly shown when they evaluate historiographic results. If, as in my case, one thinks that history should lead to a critical reflection of the society studied, the result will be a historiographic review that presents problems, debates them, and adopts a certain position. Obviously, this way of approaching a historiographic review (which will not necessarily please everyone) has the merit of opening debate, as is shown by the stimulating comments of Professors Martin, MacLeod, and Kicza, a debate that this reply in no way attempts to close.

Rereading the well-founded criticisms formulated by my colleagues convinces me that they certainly have understood the spirit that inspired my analysis. They have understood that my objective was not so much to evaluate the contribution made by each scholar in particular, but rather to reconstruct the context in which scholars continue to develop their studies on the social history of New Spain.

This kind of approach has allowed me to look at the most studied topics as well as the least studied and to verify whether historians have succeeded in achieving a vision of the society of New Spain distinct from that of the 1960s. To make this assessment, I utilized one possible means at my disposal, periodization, which is understood more as a tool for reflection than for systematization. Thus it is of little importance if the periodization used is partly new and partly very traditional, as was justly emphasized by Professor MacLeod. It was used to accentuate the social process rather than the structural character of colonial society.

The only idea present in this tool for reflection that I called periodization is that it has been constructed in light of the tension, which exists at any historical moment, between continuity and discontinuity. As Professor MacLeod rightly noted, this tension should not be conceived of as “a dialectic contrast” but as the existence of a constant interaction among the new elements of a social, economic, political, and cultural nature, as well as the preexisting elements. It is this tension that

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underlies the different tendencies recognizable in the social process of New Spain from conquest to independence.

It is in light of these considerations that the importance of the remarks made by Professors MacLeod and Martin can be understood. The latter points out the need for a better characterization of what should be understood by the restructuring, consolidation, and expansion of the society of New Spain. I fully agree with her, provided that any characterization used is understood to be a purely provisional guideline. Without doubt, Professor Martin's characterization of the period 1650–1740 as "one of major adjustments in patterns of settlement and resource use" is more effective, clear, and synthetic than the one I provided for this period.

Professor Martin also brings up the significant necessity of revising the idea that the colonial social process was exhausted during the decade between 1810 and 1820. Actually, I know of no study that shows the ties, which seem to me to be deep ones, between the last colonial period and the first independent period.

Why do I insist on the need to reemphasize the diachronic dimension in analyses that relate to the society of New Spain? One element, if not the main one, of the renewal of studies on the society of New Spain was the structuralist approach. By insisting on this kind of analysis, however, one runs the risk of representing the society of 1600 as structurally identical to those of 1700 and 1800. Only by replacing structural analysis with a new approach strongly anchored in the procedural kind of diachrony will historians succeed in comprehending the trends of social change.

It is this reemphasis on diachrony, as Professor MacLeod points out, that will soon prevent any social analysis from overlooking the relationship of a society to its economy, politics, and culture. Only thus will historians be able to see the social processes in their entirety. Obviously, this reencounter with the diachronic dimension does not mean that we are returning to a history of facts or to description for its own sake, but rather to a new effort to define the tendencies of intermediate duration, the infrasecular ones.

Reflecting on periodization necessarily causes one to review the elements that emerge as structurally characteristic of the society of New Spain. Professor Kicza has rightly noted that my article "has an emphasis on the rural, the agrarian, and the indigenous" that he attributes to my "skepticism about the centrality of urbanism and the extent of a market-based economy in colonial Mexico." According to Professor Kicza's view, the result is two opposing interpretative lines. I personally consider both ways of characterizing the society of New Spain to be marked by confusion arising from the idea that if the form is rural, market forces cannot apply, while they can apply to an urban-based society.

Historiographic research has demonstrated the existence of prices and their fluctuations. But how correct is it to conclude that prices indicate the existence of market forces? To my knowledge, no study has documented the existence of a self-regulated market of productive factors, the only way to prove the existence of a true price system. If on the other hand, we define *market forces* more broadly and identify them with commercialization, then it becomes difficult to maintain that a rural society would not also be penetrated by market forces.

Independently of these considerations, the characterization of the society of New Spain based on market forces seems to me, all things considered, to be a partial characterization. Any characterization should be able to give due emphasis to specifically social variables and to the interrelationships between society and the economy and between society and politics. In saying this, I mean that historians cannot stop trying to characterize, albeit hypothetically, the society of New Spain because only thus can we formulate the hypotheses of our future research.