Ultimately, however, Salsberg’s reluctance to break with Stalinism hangs like a sword of Damocles over this biography: “He was, above all other aspects of his identity, a loyal communist, a Stalinist really, who, despite mounting personal angst which he expressed to close friends, chose to believe what the Soviets told him … until the autumn of 1956.” (p. 116). Tulchinsky espouses Trotskyist Maurice Spector’s view that Salsberg remained faithful to Stalin in spite of the purges of the late 1930s, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the postwar anti-Semitism that culminated in the Doctors’ plot and the execution of Czech Communist Rudolph Slánský apparently at Moscow’s instigation. The historian is perhaps holding his subject to an impossibly high standard of perceptiveness and ethics. Given the highly polarized nature of information on the Soviet Union, it was extremely difficult for an independent mind to get an accurate picture of internal developments there. The testimonies of the few North American Finns who made it out of Soviet Karelia in the late thirties simply became fodder in a ruthless ideological war. Embraced by the Right for revealing the true nature of Communism, they were disparaged by the Left as class traitors. When in the late forties Salsberg bemoaned the disappearance of Jewish institutions and publications in the Soviet Union, he seemed unaware that Korenizatsiya (the Nationalities Policy) had been a dead letter for at least a decade. In the end his personal evolution regarding the Soviet Union followed that of many North American Jewish Communists: alarm at the decline of Jewish life, shock at the resurgence of anti-Semitism, and strongly expressed private criticism of official tolerance of these phenomena. Nikita Krushchev’s inaugural address to the Twentieth Party Congress on the errors of Stalinism precipitated the final break. Salsberg may well have been “a flawed man” (p. 118), but many more were more deeply flawed.

Because he spent the rest of his life as a kind of secular rabbi to Toronto’s progressive Jews, it would be a pity if all we were to retain of his public persona were the image of the Stalinist. Ultimately, is it not the good that men do that should live after them?

Roberto Perin
Glendon College
York University

Walker, Louise E. – *Waking from the Dream: Mexico Middle Class after 1968.*

Until recently, historians treated the middle class as a self-evident reality, an inevitable consequence of the modernization process that manifested the same characteristics, values, practices, and meanings in all time periods and geographic locations. As a result, historical research on Latin American societies has conceptualized political, cultural, and social relations in terms of polar opposites:
workers and employers, elites and masses, subalterns and elites. This book, as part of a recent growing body of scholarship on this topic, challenges this shared assumption by historicizing the making of the middle classes in Mexico City after 1968.

Louise Walker presents an evocative and highly informative study of the middle classes during several decades of economic and political crisis and upheaval in Mexico. And although scholars continue to discuss whether PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) ruled through stability and/or violence, what she is after is a history of the belief in, and not the accuracy of, the so-called economic miracle closely associated with the middle classes. She thus describes how a mid-century pact emerged through which the middle classes, as representation of modern and developed Mexico, helped shaped a certain perceived political stability and economic legitimacy for PRI rule. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, this perceived stability began to vanish precisely because the so-called economic miracle became a nightmare for most members of the middle classes. The author shows how “the most consequential struggles over the future of the PRI system took place among the middle classes.” (p. 2) And in order to understand this crucial participation, she proposes to analyze “the leftist students who took to the streets to protest the authoritarianism of the PRI…alongside conservative housewives enraged at the rising cost of living, alienated engineers suffering ennui, consumers falling into debt to support their lifestyle, yuppies who believed the world was their oyster, and angry homeowners struggling to defend their privileged access to housing.” (p. 2) As a result, we see how these middle classes shaped the PRI crisis, the end of the perceived miracle as well as how the PRI and the middle classes “negotiated” the historical transition from a state-led development to a neoliberal and market-driven society.

Methodologically, Walker defines the middle classes as a set of material conditions, a state of mind, and a political discourse. And, like most studies on the topic, the author relies on E.P Thompson to understand the formation of the middle class as a process of endless remaking of class identities and boundaries. She focuses on how individuals and groups struggled to “erect, maintain, break down, cross over, or ensconce themselves within class boundaries.” (p. 4) But perhaps the most important research innovation in this book is what we might call a cultural history of political economy. After at least two decades of cultural history, Walker proposes a timely research agenda. But she is not interested in returning to a traditional economic history but rather an integration of a history of structural economic changes with the very cultural repercussions of those economic changes in everyday lives. She thus argues that economic crises are simultaneously cultural and political crises. And, given the “precariousness” of middle class privilege the very economic instability proved to be particularly threatening for the middle class and their search to maintain and reconfigure class boundaries.

The book is divided into three main parts, and each part is composed of two chapters. The first part, Upheavals, focuses on the political formation of the middle class and describes the discontent with the PRI rule—from politically
moderate students to radical urban guerrillas to the conservative middle classes worried about their economic situation. The second part, the Debt Economy, discusses the short oil boom from 1977 to 1981 and examines how that boom was accompanied by a political discourse centered on the economic hopes in the formation of a middle class. This part also studies the effects of inflation and the economic rallying by the middle class with the PRI to achieve more consumer credit, consumer rights, and what was considered fair taxation. For this reader, these two chapters are the best of the book precisely because they offer a very good example of the research agenda laid out in the introduction. She describes the consolidation of a debt economy both at the level of policy making as well as the everyday experiences in middle class households. She demonstrates quite well how members of the middle classes fought for consumer credit as a way to alleviate the effects of inflation on the belief that the middle class needed to consume to maintain its class distinction. The third part, Fault Lines of Neoliberalism, tells the story of the social and political consequences of the 1980s crisis and the economic and cultural transition to a neoliberal paradigm. Walker seeks to present how, after the so-called lost decade, the middle class split into two camps: some members strongly supported neoliberalism while others became its vehement critics. In these chapters it is not entirely clear why the middle classes supported or rejected the consolidation of neoliberal policies, because Walker has a tendency to rely on sources that speak about the middle class as a potential source of legitimacy or dissent. We do see the creation of new economic subjects—for example the middle class yuppy—but it is not clear how such a new identity was appropriated by middle class themselves to define their (anti) neoliberal selves.

Walker’s study provokes some questions. She calls upon scholars, particularly Mexicanists, to move beyond heroic and glorified narratives of what she calls the rebel generation of the 1960s and 1970s. She proposes that it is time to write a “history …that critically analyses [leftist students, urban guerrillas, and countercultural hippies] as historical actors in a historical moment.” (p. 44) I think this is an important research proposal. But in the book such an invitation is not elaborated to its full potential precisely because her analysis has a strong tendency to explain the formation of the middle classes through a national narrative of crisis. Thus she does miss an important opportunity to engage critically with recent interpretations on the role of Latin America in the Cold War. The task, I would argue, is not only to de-center the study of 1968 away from students as the only historical actors. Rather, the critical study of the “rebel generation” should help us question what has recently become a dominant narrative to understand the second half of the twentieth century in Latin America—an interpretation that explains Cold War politics as a dialectical struggle between revolution and counter-revolution. And in order to do so, it is not only necessary to study conservative segments of the middle class alongside the more radical ones, as Walker does, but also to examine those different segments of the middle class against each other as a way to explain why neoliberal rule gained a measure of legitimacy among certain non-elite groups.
These questions are among the many stimulated by *Waking from the Dream*, which invites critical conversations about the middle class in Latin America, histories of neoliberalism, and class formation. Now that we are rethinking the second half of the twentieth century in Latin America, undergraduate and graduate students alike would be wise to read carefully this book.

Ricardo López
*Western Washington University*


In general, the study of royal mistresses is undertaken separately from that of queens, but that approach, as Kathleen Wellman’s book demonstrates, has the inconvenience of separating the part from the whole, ignoring the relationships established by the individuals concerned. It thus makes perfect sense to study queens and mistresses jointly, especially in France, where the status of the latter seems to have been so important as to make their influence almost indistinguishable in terms of power. The author has analysed these women in the Renaissance, understood as a broad period, ranging from 1444—when Charles VII designated his first official mistress, Agnès Sorel—to 1599, when Gabrielle d’Estrées died before she could marry Henry IV. This means many queens and mistresses have been studied in detail, and sometimes also other women who were neither, such as Louise of Savoy whose role as regent and political partner to her son Francis I the author explores. Such an achievement requires the mastery of a multitude of characters, episodes, and political circumstances over a range of a century and a half, which the author dominates effortlessly. The quantity of cases displayed was not feasible through the reading or re-reading of manuscript sources; Wellman relies mainly on bibliography and printed materials, such as chronicles, travel accounts, ambassadors’ reports, *memoirs*, letters, etc. However, the reader is not informed either about their authors or the context in which they were writing, making the discussion of the weaknesses and strengths of the primary sources generally absent in the book. However, this is a minor fault within the book’s many virtues, as it is the first comprehensive study of a subject that attracts a great deal of attention, and is certainly in need of fresh approaches.

Recent historiography on queenship has emphasized the role of women as political actors and cultural agents, and it is now clear to historians that the political and cultural history of Early Modern Europe can no longer ignore them. However, queens and mistresses always related to royal male figures; their role was exerted always in relation to a man, and they exerted power rather informally, except in specific circumstances (such as regency in the case of queens). Also, as the author makes perfectly clear, the status of mistresses was more fragile than that of queens, as they did not have legal rights, and as such, their influence ceased