

llions of women seem to be taking charge of their lives. Yet, as Edmonds readily acknowledges, these women are embedded in a myriad of cultural systems and codes that place a specific set of values on female beauty and what a woman's body should be. The cultural imagery promoted by television, movies, and advertisement has set high standards. Becoming more beautiful also provides the hope of upward social mobility, whether through finding a more prosperous mate or by being chosen as a fashion model. Just as soccer has offered many boys and young men the dream of a possible path to fame and fortune, with just enough examples to fuel the fantasy, the imagined transformative power of the scalpel feeds many poor young women's aspirations for glamour and wealth, if they can only "fix" their breasts or another part of their bodies in just the right way.

The author closely examines the contradictory crosscurrents about race in Brazil that influence the sense of self among many of African descent. Changing the shape of a nose seems to imply unease with one's genetic past. At the same time, a new consumer market for people of color has redefined traditional esthetics that valued European and lighter skin over African, Indian, mixed race, and darker skin. Although black activists may criticize many of the everyday practices of ordinary Brazilians of humble origins for becoming enmeshed in consumer culture or Eurocentric beauty standards, the author is interested in describing and analyzing the complexities of Brazilian society rather than judging them.

Similarly, noted changes in sexual practices in recent decades and the increasing eroticization of the female body have placed added pressures on women to conform to patterns of sexualized beauty in order to maintain a youthful appearance and remain appealing. In some cases, the goal is to retain a partner or attract a new one. In other cases, as the author convincingly demonstrates, it is merely for middle-aged women to feel good about themselves. This study acknowledges the diverse cultural signals at play as women make the decision to undergo surgery. In the process, Edmonds has produced a stunning study about Rio de Janeiro that has echoes for Brazil as a whole.

**James N. Green**

*Brown University*

ROSA-LINDA FREGOSO and CYNTHIA BEJARANO (eds.): *Terrorizing Women: Femicide in the Americas*. Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2010.

In 2001, I first watched Lourdes Portillo's documentary *Missing Young Women (Señorita Extraviada)* and have been haunted by some of the scenes in the film ever since. Viewers learned that in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, men kill

women, take body parts as trophies, and then dump their victims like garbage along highways, or in remote desert locations. Unknown sadistic assailants have left a trail of victims, many of them young women who recently migrated to the region to be employed in the border industries, the Maquiladoras. Their families have, even today, no clear information about the circumstances of the crimes, and have not been able to find closure.

In *Terrorizing Women*, scholars and activists bring new attention to past and present violence against women, also responding to the horrific dimension of death: diagnostic researchers place the number of girls and women murdered in Mexico during the years between 1999 and 2005 at more than six thousand (p. xvii). The authors reveal that the causes of gender-based violence are deeply rooted in the needs of the global capitalist marketplace, in legal systems that assign unequal citizenship rights to women and men, and in patriarchal cultures that tolerate violence against women. The case studies presented in this volume add a new sense of urgency to address the political, economic, and social relations that turn young women “into sexually fetishized commodities” near the Mexican border, and in other regions in the Americas (p. 60).

Editors Rosa-Linda Fregoso and Cynthia Bejarano present studies by authors of academic, legal, and activist backgrounds who analyze the murders in Ciudad Juárez, and also address histories of sadistic violence and assassinations of women in such countries as Argentina, Costa Rica, Guatemala, and Peru. Marta Fontenla provides evidence from La Plata, where gender- and class-based discrimination makes some lives more valuable than others so that women prostitutes can be killed or can disappear without any legal consequences for the killers. Monserrat Sagot and Ana Carcedo show that, in Costa Rica, many women become victims of “dangerous relations,” of aggression in their own homes. And Angélica Cházaro and others report that assassinations and sexual violence against women in Guatemala have long reached the dimensions and degrees of cruelty of the more widely publicized cases in Mexico. The key term that brings together these case studies is *feminicide*, defined as “the assassination of a woman committed by a man, where one finds all the elements of the relationship of inequality between the sexes: the gender superiority of man over the gender subordination of woman, misogyny, control, and sexism” (p. 69). We can find some of the root causes of feminicide in gender-based discrimination tolerated by masculinized states, but also in the denationalization of the rights of women migrant workers in the global economy.

The strength of this volume is its presentation of evidence that links *feminicide* to gender systems that allow, or encourage, men to celebrate male privilege through acts of violence. Rita Laura Segato, for example, cites evidence from interviews of convicted rapists, aggressors, she notes, who all shared a collec-

tive gender imaginary that naturalized male control over women (p. 76). This evidence can be applied to the case studies in the book, as violence against women is often part of a set of confirmation rituals that enhances male power in social systems where masculinity has to be confirmed periodically. Gendered expectations regarding male performance may even encourage men to commit their crimes in the company of others to confirm their status. In this process, women become waste products of patriarchal requirements, disposable pieces of a system where women serve, primarily, to confirm power hierarchies among men. In light of the many dehumanizing acts by aggressors analyzed in the book, readers are encouraged to avoid coding women-victims simply as “the dead women of Juárez,” or the dead women in “other places.” We should remember that the dead women were people, that they belonged to family networks, had friends, and that many of them worked hard to make a living. Yet they also belonged to gender systems that made them vulnerable to violence and to the use of their bodies as commodities.

We also need to link abusive gender systems to economic causes. Alicia Schmidt Camacho powerfully demonstrates that economic globalization not only has attracted a new female labor force, but also that the success of some industries has depended on the vulnerability of women workers. In her chapter, “Ciudadana X,” she discusses the new uncertainty produced by the disarticulation of citizenship rights of poor migrant women, for example, in the denationalized space of the border industries of Ciudad Juárez. Some scholars rightly emphasize that citizenship stands for people’s rights to exert political agency as recognized members of a political community, with entitlements to protection that exceed the physical boundaries of the nation. Yet, citizenship rights are uncertain at best in border territories where violence rules and where state failure looms large. Neoliberal economic practice in border regions permits the conversion of poor migrant women into “disposable non-citizens,” who are valuable and much-desired workers precisely because of their lack of access to rights (p. 276).

Evidence of femicide presented in this book also provokes a re-visiting of old mechanisms put in place to protect human rights on global, national, and local levels. Histories of violence in Latin America have supplied new terms as ways to persecute specific violations. Concepts of “disappearance” and “the disappeared,” for example, originated when leaders of dictatorships in the Southern Cone killed and “disappeared” citizens they considered political subversives. In 1994, the Organization of American States (OAS) adopted the Inter-American Convention on Forced Disappearance of Persons, defining disappearance as “the act of depriving a person or persons of his or their freedom, in whatever way, perpetrated by agents of the state or by persons or groups of persons acting with the authorization, support, or acquiescence of the state,” and emphasizing that

states should be held accountable for human rights violations. In Mexico, a new National Commission on Femicide, for example, helps promote a human rights perspective to identify and prevent gender-based violence. In 2007, Chihuahua became the first Mexican state to approve the General Law of Women's Access to a Life Free from Violence (*Ley General de Acceso de las Mujeres a una Vida Libre de Violencia*). Members of the Commission intended to establish a precedent also by framing the new law around a positive language of women's rights, instead of adding legislation that, once again, threatens perpetrators. And individual women from different Mexican regions have become leaders of a movement, the Women Dressed in Black (*Mujeres de Negro*), which organizes protests and awareness-raising campaigns.

Despite its revealing insights regarding women's vulnerability, and despite the evidence it presents of women's agency and strategies of empowerment, this book left this reader, once again, frustrated by the powerlessness of the victims, the inability or lack of effort by officials to bring perpetrators to justice, and the prospect that current gender inequities will result in more gruesome murders. The authors' contributions, of course, may effectuate change in the long run, as they have capably presented some of the structures that we consider to be the root causes of the escalation of violence against women.

**Jadwiga E. Pieper Mooney**

*University of Arizona*

LUIS RONIGER: *Transnational Politics in Central America*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011.

Central American scholars choose one of two approaches for studying the isthmus. One is a broad region-based approach to analysis and the other is a state-centered approach that treats each Central American state as distinct from the others. The difference between these two approaches hinges on the perceived character of the people and institutions in Central America as either intrinsically shared or primarily unique to each state. In his book *Transnational Politics in Central America*, Luis Roniger sets out to help students of Central American politics and society make their decision about what approach to take by laying out the argument that the characteristics of Central American states and societies are influenced by one another and thus should be studied as a single system.

Roniger embraces the transnational essence of Central American societies "as the extension of human activities and institutions across nation-state boundaries, which creates political, sociological, and cultural dynamics not confined by state borders." To illustrate this reality to the reader, the author recounts the