

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.

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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

political history of the isthmus, drawing attention to the interconnectedness of the societies and actors across time. The nation states in this study include all seven Central American entities. Primary emphasis is given to the five states that gained their independence in the 1820s: Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. Panama and Belize provide further evidence of the transnational essence of Central America, but their unique histories make them somewhat peripheral to the central analysis. Regardless of the cases chosen, Roniger is able to confirm that the Central American reality is one in which territory is reflective of nonstate conditions, borders are porous, interactions are not state-specific, and identities are often collectively organized across the region. These transnational conditions are discussed theoretically in the opening chapters of the book. After a review of the literature, the author sets up the project by promoting Central America as a region that best illustrates transnationalism.

The clearest evidence of transnationalism provided by the author is focused in the historical period ranging from colonialism to the early 20th century and discussed in chapters three through seven. Early in this time period, Central America was without state borders. Instead, cities were the primary locus of economic and political power. After independence, the nascent states of Central America briefly unified. That unification was reflective of the institutions in the region during that time as elites moved somewhat freely between the various Central American societies and into positions of power in those various societies without discrimination. Even after the balkanization of Central America, elites from various countries continued to influence economic and political development in other isthmian countries, either by formal or informal means. As states began to construct national identities, the transnational connection remained strong. Roniger points to the indigenous societies in Central America as further evidence of the transnational character of the region. The indigenous societies and cultures spanned across borders and were thus transnational identities not limited to a single state.

Moving further away from the period of unification, the author demonstrates in chapter eight that efforts were made by various political elites to promote unification. While none of these efforts succeeded in unifying Central America, this recounting reinforces the argument made by Roniger that the states in the isthmus belong together culturally *and* institutionally. The cultural similarities across the region are repeatedly highlighted. Those similarities include the hierarchical structure of societal organization and the prevalence of political realities such as authoritarianism and intervention by the United States. As the analysis moves into the Cold War time period (chapter nine), overt efforts at unification seemingly disappear but transnationalism persists as states and societies continue to be influenced across borders. During the revolutionary period

in Central America, understanding the interaction of regional actors is essential as insurgent groups often found safety and support in neighboring countries that sought to influence the affairs of other countries on the isthmus. Also, many leaders of Central American states were instrumental in resolving some of the region's most protracted conflicts. Thus, even though the countries of Central America no longer sought unification in any form, they continued to influence each other in overt ways, capturing the essence of transnationalism in the region.

The final section of the book (chapters 10 through 14) focuses on the shared problems of the region and efforts at coordinating policies and practices in Central America through the use of international institutions. The revolutionary period initiated a wave of migration on the isthmus. The author explains how the flow of people, paired with the flow of illicit substances, presented each state on the isthmus with similar problems that transcended state borders and thus required transnational coordination. A series of efforts at coordination reflect those shared problems but also the developmental separation of the states over time. For instance, Costa Rica is repeatedly singled out as unwilling to participate in isthmian institutions. This seems to signal the unique position now held by that more developed nation. However, even in the face of that developmental separation, Roniger shows that the attitudes of individuals regarding state institutions and actors are similar and thus exemplify the numerous shared issues of Central American states today.

As globalization continues, there is reason to believe that all states will become increasingly interrelated. For Central America, fostering transnationalism follows the path of globalization while nurturing the existing connections among the states on the isthmus. In clearly written prose, Roniger advocates a transnational approach to studying the region. In short, if we ignore the shared histories of the isthmian states and the common problems they face today, it will be impossible to gain a complete understanding of the societies and institutions of Central America.

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GREG GRANDIN and GILBERT M. JOSEPH (eds.): *A Century of Revolutions: Insurgent and Counterinsurgent Violence during Latin America's Long Cold War*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010.

This volume of finely crafted essays was inspired by Arno Mayer's *Furies: Violence and Terror in the French and Russian Revolutions* (2000). In his book Mayer posits that the terror associated with those revolutions sprung from the social conflict between the old and the new orders and not from the revolutions