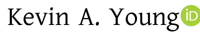
Latin American Research Review (2022), **57**, 504–514
doi:10.1017/lar.2022.25



BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

Beyond the Comandantes: Revolutions and Revolutionaries since 1959

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This essay reviews the following works:

The Revolution from Within: Cuba, 1959–1980. Edited by Michael J. Bustamante and Jennifer L. Lambe. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019. Pp. viii + 332. $28.95 paperback. ISBN: 9781478002963.

The Guerrilla Legacy of the Cuban Revolution. By Anna Clayfield. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2019. Pp. xii + 204. $85.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9781683400899.

Exile within Exiles: Herbert Daniel, Gay Brazilian Revolutionary. By James N. Green. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018. Pp. xv + 322. $27.95 paperback. ISBN: 9781478000860.

Desafiando los poderes: Acción colectiva y frentes de masas en El Salvador (1948–1980). By Luis R. Huezo Mixco. San Salvador: Dirección Nacional de Investigaciones en Cultura y Arte de la Secretaría de Cultura de la Presidencia en colaboración con la Editorial Universidad Gerardo Barrios, 2017. Pp. 330. Paperback. ISBN: 9789996160509.

The Zapatista Movement and Mexico's Democratic Transition: Mobilization, Success, and Survival. By María Inclán. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018. Pp. xvi + 166. $78.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9780190869465.

Cuban Revolution in America: Havana and the Making of a United States Left, 1968–1992. By Teishan A. Latner. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018. Pp. xiv + 351. $39.95 hardcover. ISBN: 9781469635460.

Beyond the Vanguard: Everyday Revolutionaries in Allende's Chile. By Marian E. Schlotterbeck. Oakland: University of California Press, 2018. Pp. xiv + 234. $34.85 paperback. ISBN: 9780520298064.

La revolución cubana en nuestra América: El internacionalismo anónimo. By Luis Suárez Salazar and Dirk Kruijt. Havana: Ruth Casa Editorial, 2015. $10.20 e-book. ISBN: 9789962703167.

The spread of "history from below" in the late twentieth century was, paradoxically, slow to reach studies of the Latin American Left. Research on revolutionary movements has tended to privilege the voices of formal leadership, and usually the top national leadership, of leftist organizations. There are many reasons: the death of many of the protagonists; the reticence of many Left veterans to speak openly given the trauma of state repression; the

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https://doi.org/10.1017/lar.2022.25 Published online by Cambridge University Press

converse tendency of top leaders to hog the spotlight; the inaccessibility of important archives, usually at the behest of military and police forces; and the assumptions of researchers about who is important.

There have always been exceptions to the pattern, however, and more appear each year. Recent studies of the Left have begun to piece together a more robust picture of revolutionary movements both armed and unarmed. They have made clear that the Left is far more than the comandantes who have commanded so much attention from external observers. When top leaders are decentered, revolution appears as a complex process involving many important actors. Internal conflicts over strategies, structures, and values take on new importance, mediated by factors like race, nation, gender, sexuality, friendship, love, youth, religion, and personal transformation. The books on this list feature diverse politics, methodologies, and conclusions. Yet all represent attempts to study revolutions and revolutionaries in innovative ways, often by looking at more than just the famous leaders.

Marian Schlotterbeck's *Beyond the Vanguard* best exemplifies this approach. The book adds to a burgeoning scholarship on the Chilean Left in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It focuses on the Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR), the radical Left organization that never joined Salvador Allende's Unidad Popular (UP) coalition and instead sought to accelerate revolutionary change from outside. Schlotterbeck's approach is refreshing in several ways. Whereas most studies of the UP period are Santiago-centric, she focuses on Concepción Province, where MIR members were heavily concentrated. And she looks not just at MIR leaders like Miguel Enríquez but at the organization's several thousand organizers.

Dozens of oral histories with the survivors capture the sense of empowerment that so many Chileans felt during the Allende period. While leaders in Santiago were naturally preoccupied with national political strategy, in Concepción the Left was more focused "on changing local power relations through the creation of democratic, participatory spaces" (164). It was in those spaces that the Left proved most dynamic. When 140 grassroots groups convened a popular assembly in Concepción in July 1972, official representatives from leftist parties initially dominated the speakers list. However, that plan gave way to a more fluid debate after chants of "Let the people speak!" pushed event organizers to open the microphones to the rank and file. Schlotterbeck analyzes the incident as a microcosm of the larger dynamic within the MIR and the Left broadly. Grassroots initiative was central in the land takeovers of late 1971, in the popular mobilization against the capitalist strike of October 1972, and in local actions like the January 1973 community seizure of a bakery. The demand for a deepening of the revolutionary process came not just from visible leaders but from everyday Chileans, many but not all of whom joined the MIR.

The MIR's success stemmed largely from its capacity to nurture those initiatives. Rather than just issuing directives, "political militants listened to local people, validated their concerns, encouraged their participation, and fostered the ability to act using the inner strength they already possessed" (109). MIR organizers in Concepción gained a reputation for defending democracy within popular organizations at a time when UP leaders, particularly those from the Communist Party, were seeking to carry out a gradual revolution from above. And while many Latin American leftists continued to prioritize the formal proletariat, the MIR sought to organize workers, peasants, students, and shantytown residents all together. Schlotterbeck's oral histories reveal details of how the MIR did its recruitment and built its base, with a nitty-gritty quality rarely found in academic studies. Neighborhood soccer games were a key venue for interaction among MIR student organizers and other constituencies. Formal outreach efforts included community housing surveys and political education classes offered on the University of Concepción campus. Students majoring in architecture and engineering helped *pobladores* plan housing and infrastructure after an urban land takeover, while medical students offered free exams.

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By building personal relationships based on trust and respect, the mainly middle-class students who formed the initial core of the MIR were able to recruit working-class people, who in turn played important roles in the organization.

Conversely, the MIR's biggest weakness was its failure to apply the spirit of these interactions in the upper levels of its organization. Organizers' "vision of power rooted in decentralized participatory democracy attracted many supporters to the MIR, yet it also existed in constant tension with the MIR's own notion of its role as a vanguard party" (121). The lack of a more robust internal democracy had serious practical consequences. Schlotterbeck shows that the national leaders' growing distance from the grassroots led to an unduly optimistic reading of the balance of forces in Chile. The "closed party structure" prevented the airing of "more honest assessments of the MIR's real capacity on the ground to resist a coup" (136). Perhaps as a result, the MIR's military preparations were weak and haphazard (contrary to both the Right's allegations and MIR leaders' own militant rhetoric). A more democratic structure in the MIR might not have prevented the destruction of Chilean democracy on September 11, but it would have improved the organization's ability to protect its members and mass constituencies.

James Green's *Exile within Exiles* also makes heavy use of oral histories. It tells the story of Herbert Eustáquio de Carvalho (alias Herbert Daniel), a fascinating figure from Belo Horizonte who played diverse roles in Brazil's Left from the late 1960s until his death in 1992. Green describes the book as "recuperative biography," which "focuses on a person who was important but has not been recognized as such" (5). He also uses Daniel's life to shed light on the Brazilian military dictatorship, the evolution of the Brazilian Left, and sexual nonconformity in Brazil in the late twentieth century, positing that "by examining a person at the margins" we can learn much about the center (6). Relying primarily on interviews with those who knew Daniel and on Daniel's own published writings, Green reconstructs his subject's days as a medical student, his incorporation into the armed Left, his seven years of exile in Portugal and France, and his unarmed work as a writer, electoral campaigner, and HIV activist after returning to Brazil in 1981.

At least two things make Daniel's trajectory especially interesting. First, his homosexuality set him apart from other Brazilian revolutionaries. The hostility of most leftists to nonnormative sexualities led him to stay closeted and celibate during five years of clandestine life. Only after entering foreign exile in 1974 did he really process this experience. Daniel's processing is the second and perhaps most interesting part of the story. He developed trenchant critiques of the Left's problems, including the dominant leftist position of silence (or worse) on matters of sexuality, gender, race, and the environment. When he ran for the Rio de Janeiro state assembly after the fall of the dictatorship, his campaign advocated a movement "that unites all those who are exploited and repressed" and declared that "there is no democracy if it stops at the factory gate or at the edge of the bed" (quoted, 229–230). As these slogans suggest, Daniel never abandoned the Left: he sought to enrich it. Green's intimate narrative shows that Daniel was continuously growing as a person and revolutionary before his life was cut short by AIDS.

Herbert Daniel and his comrades were among the many Latin Americans who tried unsuccessfully to apply the Cubans' *foco* model of revolution, in which a small band of guerrillas ignites a rural insurgency. Variations on this strategy were widely employed in the 1960s and early 1970s. In contrast, the Chilean MIR placed more emphasis on mass political organizing. Whether seeking to mimic the Cubans' strategy or to avoid the problems it encountered, revolutionaries elsewhere studied Cuba closely. Academics have been no less interested in the Cuban Revolution, albeit usually for different reasons. Much recent research has addressed the revolution's global connections and reverberations as well as its domestic dynamics. It is thus unsurprising that four out of eight books on the list are about Cuba.

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Cuban internationalism in Latin America and the Caribbean is the topic of Luis Suárez Salazar and Dirk Kruijt's e-book *La revolución cubana en nuestra América*. Cuba's overseas work has been far ranging. Between the 1960s and 1980s it included material support for many clandestine armed movements in the region. It has also involved nonmilitary elements like education, news broadcasting, and especially medical services. As its subtitle suggests, the book aims to shine a light on the sacrifices of Cuban internationalists, who have been mostly "anonymous" due to the sensitive nature of their work. The volume consists of testimonies from thirty-four people, most of whom served as high- or middle-level officials in charge of Cuba's internationalist initiatives. Though it prioritizes officials over rank-and-file revolutionaries, its focus on leaders other than the Castro brothers and Che Guevara makes it a unique collection.

The subjects stress the moral impulse behind the Cuban government's overseas activity. They point out that Cuba sometimes supported liberation movements even when this support threatened to upset economic or geopolitical relationships. They give less attention to the pragmatic dimensions of Cuban policy, as seen, for example, in the withholding of support for armed movements in the United States or in countries like Mexico that maintained relations with Cuba. Nonetheless, their view that revolutionary ideals were a major force behind Cuban policy is supported by the archival record.[1]

The testimonies also align with other scholarly findings. The interviewees stress the intimate involvement of Fidel, Che, and intelligence chief Manuel Piñeiro in Cuba's foreign campaigns. They underscore Cuba's efforts to unify leftists within each country. And they insist that when dealing with revolutionary movements "we never imposed our will or set any conditions, although we sometimes thought they were making the wrong decisions" (Fernando Ravelo Renedo, location 2466).[2] Cuba was an important source of support and advice, but it was not the reason why revolutionary movements emerged. It could not simply "export revolution," as imperial propaganda alleged. "Revolutions aren't like a box of cigars that is produced and then sold on the national market or exported," quips Giraldo Mazola Collazo, the first president of the Instituto Cubano de Amistad con los Pueblos (location 505).

The book's main value lies in its eyewitness accounts, many of which are quite lengthy (if printed the book would likely be over 1,000 pages). Some of the stories are riveting, such as Ulises Estrada's recounting of the siege of the Cuban embassy during the coup in Chile, or Percy Alvarado Godoy's tales of infiltrating Cuban-American terrorist groups in Florida. This is not the place to find critical analysis of Cuba's strategy or deep insight into tensions within the state. But the testimonies will be valuable sources for students and scholars, especially if consulted in conjunction with documents from foreign relations archives.

Teishan A. Latner's *Cuban Revolution in America* shifts the focus to relations between Cuba and the domestic US Left. By the 1960s the Soviet Union had ceased to be a positive model for most US leftists, and by the 1970s the Chinese revolution would lose much of its luster as well. Cuba on the other hand was a multiracial Third World revolution, led by young people, and in a region long dominated by US empire—a sign that revolution was possible even in unlikely places. Latner argues that from the 1960s through the 1990s the Cuban Revolution was "the most consistent foreign influence on U.S. leftism" (21). The nature of that influence is not entirely clear from the book. My reading is that

[1] See especially the meticulous research of Piero Gleijeses: *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959–1976* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), and *Visions of Freedom: Havana, Washington, Pretoria, and the Struggle for Southern Africa, 1976–1991* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

[2] For corroboration of this last point, see, for instance, Michal Zourek, "Czechoslovakia and Latin America's Guerrilla Insurgencies: Secret Services, Training Networks, Mobility, and Transportation," in *Toward a Global History of Latin America's Revolutionary Left*, ed. Tanya Harmer and Alberto Martín Álvarez (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2021), 46–47.

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Cuba mainly served as a source of broad inspiration and moral support. I did not get the sense that the US Left was drawn to the particulars of Cuban socialist economics, for example. With very rare exceptions Cuba provided no material aid to US-based activists.

Case studies examine different sites of encounter between US and Cuban revolutionaries. Two chapters address the Venceremos Brigade, which has sent thousands of US residents to Cuba since 1969. Early participants harvested sugar cane and did other forms of labor in addition to learning about revolutionary Cuba. Once back, they continued their solidarity work by educating the public, agitating for changes in US policy, and otherwise building the domestic Left. These activities triggered systematic surveillance and harassment by the FBI and CIA, which likely continues in the present (as of 2009 there some 23,000 pages of FBI files on the Brigade, most of which remain classified). Another chapter explores the delegations organized by the Antonio Maceo Brigade, an organization formed in 1977 by progressive Cuban Americans who belie images of the exile community as a reactionary monolith. Two chapters address the scores of US leftists who sought political asylum in Cuba beginning in the 1960s. Latner traces the lives of several Black asylees including Assata Shakur and Nehanda Abiodun, in the latter case drawing upon extensive personal interviews.

Tensions sometimes emerged in these exchanges, as other research has also shown. There were disagreements over antiracist strategy, with many US leftists dismayed by the Cuban government's opposition to race-specific organizing in Cuba. Some in the US Left romanticized the revolution or justified its faults, as when the Brigade's national leadership defended the antigay policies of the late 1960s. Latner deftly analyzes these problems without losing sight of the empowering impacts or the participants' capacity for critical reflection and growth. The Cuban government itself changed in important ways, in part as a result of interaction with foreign leftists: notably, it partially relaxed its opposition to race-based movements and eventually adopted a far more progressive stance on sexuality. These changes reflect some of the ways that rank-and-file revolutionaries, both Cuban and foreign, shaped the revolution.

As for Cuba's motives in engaging with the US Left, Latner agrees they were both moral and pragmatic. For example, Cuba "sought to cultivate support in African American communities in its northern neighbor as a matter of both genuine antiracist solidarity and strategic geopolitics" (22). The principled drive in Cuban policy is evident in its willingness to grant asylum requests to people like Shakur and Abiodun despite the risk of US retaliation. Solidarity served a pragmatic purpose in that it promoted US movements that could restrain the external aggressor. Cubans' pragmatism also manifested in their consistent opposition to armed struggle in the United States, which they viewed as reckless and naïve in that context.

Cuba's domestic history takes center stage in Anna Clayfield's *Guerrilla Legacy of the Cuban Revolution*. Clayfield argues that the ethos of the guerrilla, or *guerrillerismo*, is essential for understanding the survival of the revolutionary government. Since 1959 Cuban officials have evoked the history of the guerrilla struggle in the Sierra Maestra, locating it within a longer tradition of anti-imperialist resistance extending back to Indigenous rebels and nineteenth-century independence fighters. In the face of counterrevolutionary threats, this historical narrative has served to demonstrate "the strength of the Cuban people and their historically proven ability to overcome seemingly unbeatable odds" (104), a message that aligns with Che Guevara's emphasis on creating the subjective conditions for revolution. Clayfield's discursive analysis of numerous speeches, newspaper articles, and textbooks over a sixty-year period reveals that *guerrillerismo* has been a consistent strategy for rallying citizens in times of difficulty. The partial exception was the "Sovietization" in the 1970s and early 1980s, which involved greater bureaucracy, reliance on markets, and cultural repression. During that period guerrilla imagery receded from government discourse. It was revived to inspire Cubans for the 1986 "Rectification"

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campaign that addressed the problems of Sovietization, and later for the severe economic challenges of the post-Soviet era.

One wonders about the audience's response. To what degree have Cubans been persuaded by the exhortations? Official rhetoric provides indirect clues. It reflects how "the Revolution's leaders have had to seek popular legitimacy" rather than simply coercing the population into compliance (5). Nonetheless, Clayfield's analysis is admittedly comandante-centric. She leaves it to other scholars to excavate the experiences and consciousness of Cuban citizens.

Michael Bustamante and Jennifer Lambe's edited volume *The Revolution from Within* takes up this task, inquiring into "the Revolution's lived meanings, diverse subjects, and internal complexities" (6). Contributions from thirteen scholars address wide-ranging themes of culture, politics, science, consumption, and memory during the first two decades after 1959. The editors' introduction grapples thoughtfully with the challenges of conducting independent research on the post-1959 years, given a polarized ideological climate and the continued closure of most Cuban archives. This latter problem is explored in a chapter by the former Cuban archivist Jorge Macle Cruz, who attributes it to a combination of political reasons and practical obstacles such as lack of resources. Other contributors mitigate the problem through creative use of sources, including the Cuban press, state cultural archives, films, and the files of foreign journalists and travelers.

One highlight is the chapter by Reinaldo Funes Monzote. It profiles the work of geographer Antonio Núñez Jiménez, who was the first director of both the Agrarian Reform Institute and the Cuban Academy of Sciences. Núñez Jiménez rejected geographic determinism, which associated civilization with temperate climates, and developed an internationalist vision for tropical science. In Cuba he spearheaded innovative plans for reforestation, agricultural production, erosion control, and freshwater management. The chapter is a valuable contribution to the history of revolutionary science.

The volume's attempt to tell the revolution's history "from within" involved a conscious decision to sideline the United States. The lone mention of the US embargo comes in a relative clause in an afterword. Aside from a handful of allusions to the Bay of Pigs, there is no hint of the US-sponsored terrorist campaigns of the 1960s and 1970s that killed hundreds of civilians.[3] Lambe's afterword justifies this omission by the need to counter "the historical politics of imperial obviousness" with "a Cuba-centric account" that highlights Cuban "agency" (306, 313). Another afterword by Alejandro de la Fuente echoes the familiar charge that studies of empire and global power structures "tend to exclude 'local human agency' from the story" (quoting Stuart Schwartz, 297).

Centering Cubans is a laudable goal, but there are several problems with the book's approach to doing so. For one, statements like these oversimplify existing scholarship. Numerous studies of the Cuban Revolution focus on domestic history. Some integrate both US imperialism and "local agency" into their explanations of change.[4] The same is true of other Latin American revolutions. The common claim that critics of imperialism see the United States as omnipotent is something of a straw man.

Second, the book's virtual silence on empire leads to some dubious interpretations. The chapter on material consumption describes "scarcity" but never mentions the embargo;

[3] I found two passing references to counterrevolutionary terrorism; US sponsorship is unmentioned. On the terror campaigns, see Keith Bolender, *Voices from the Other Side: An Oral History of Terrorism against Cuba* (London: Pluto, 2010), and Lars Schoultz, *That Infernal Little Cuban Republic: The United States and the Cuban Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), esp. 170–212.

[4] See, for instance, Aviva Chomsky, *A History of the Cuban Revolution*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), or Louis A. Pérez Jr., *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*, 5th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014). On the current list, Latner's *Cuban Revolution in America* is a good example.

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scarcity is presented as one of "the material consequences of socialist policies" (María A. Cabrera Arús, 210). In another chapter, external aggression is implied to be simply a bogeyman conjured by the Cuban government "to invalidate internal opposition" (Abel Sierra Madero, 247). Lillian Guerra's chapter on the anti-Batista guerrilla campaign of 1956–1958 condemns the guerrillas for executing rapists and suspected spies, but it decontextualizes those decisions. Some of the relevant context is acknowledged obliquely, as when Guerra mentions "U.S.-supported bombing raids on civilian populations" (87) and Batista's torture and murder of the guerrilla Abel Santamaría. Yet this state violence is not deemed relevant to an analysis of guerrilla actions. Guerra instead emphasizes the guerrillas' "martial fury" (79). She also alleges that Fidel publicized "far-fetched, highly fictitious claims as evidence of Batista's savagery" (72), though the examples she gives are rather modest embellishments of Batista's real war crimes. In this rendering the rebel leaders appear bloodthirsty and shamelessly manipulative.

Scholars are not obliged to center empire, nor to condone revolutionaries' actions. But they must recognize that US aggression is a major cause of both economic problems and authoritarianism in Cuba. US officials themselves have often grasped that relationship. The embargo was, and is, intended "to bring about hunger, desperation, and overthrow of government."[5] They have also realized that their belligerence is likely to "result [in] intensified repression [of the] internal opposition."[6] As Louis Pérez once commented, "It should not come as a surprise, hence, that internal security has developed into an obsession in Cuba. It is the height of cynicism for the United States to condemn Cuba for the absence of civil liberties and political freedoms, on one hand, and, on the other, to have pursued policies variously employing assassination, subversion, sabotage and threatened invasions as means to topple the government."[7] This relationship is common sense for most Cuba-based scholars, though it often escapes notice among those not living under the boot of empire. The point is not just a political and moral one. Excising empire from the story blinds us to the causal interconnections between imperialism and "local" history. It not only risks missing the forest for the trees, it also limits our understanding of the trees themselves.

A further problem with the book's approach to "local human agency" is that agency is often subtly defined as resistance to the revolution's policies. Several chapters imply that most Cubans either disagreed with the Castro government or were duped into obedience by its "brilliant public relations" and the "messianic political religion" centered around Fidel (Lillian Guerra, 69, 88n2). Government policy itself is depicted rather flatly. There is little on the education, health, nutrition, and recreation programs that by most indications enjoyed wide support. The 1970s are mostly reduced to Sovietization. The book omits evidence that complicates that characterization, including the 1975 gender equity code that was created through a participatory process, or the fact that Cuba disobeyed the Soviets by assisting Angola's liberation struggle.[8]

More interviews with everyday Cubans, in Havana and across the island, might have produced a more complex picture. Few of the chapters make use of oral history despite its potential value in a country where key archives remain closed. Doing interviews with Cubans is difficult but not impossible, as the recent work of Elizabeth Dore, Daisy Rubiera

[5] Lester Mallory to Roy Rubottom, April 6, 1960, in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958–1960, Cuba, vol. 6* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1991), document 499.

[6] George W. Ball, "Circular Telegram from the Department of State to Certain Posts in the American Republics," July 21, 1962, in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961–1963, vol. 10* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1997), document 357 (though Ball warned against the US policy of supporting exile attacks).

[7] Louis A. Pérez Jr., "Fear and Loathing of Fidel Castro: Sources of US Policy toward Cuba," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 34, no. 2 (2002): 253.

[8] Margaret Randall, *Women in Cuba: Twenty Years Later* (New York: Smyrna, 1981), 37–41; Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, 381.

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Castillo, and other scholars and journalists attests.[9] Contributors could at least have used the many interviews that have been conducted and published by others. These include extensive interviews from the 1960s and 1970s by researchers such as Oscar Lewis, Elizabeth Martínez, Margaret Randall, and Maurice Zeitlin, who included transcripts or lengthy excerpts in their published work.

Though the bulk of my comments on this volume have been critical, its weaknesses should not eclipse its merits. It illuminates some neglected pieces of Cuba's post-1959 history and makes innovative use of sources in its efforts to see the revolution through the eyes of Cuban citizens. If the book ultimately provides a very partial view of "the Revolution's lived meanings, diverse subjects, and internal complexities," it does raise a host of helpful questions, both methodological and political, that future researchers will need to confront.

The two books that engage most directly with social movement theory are Luis Huezo Mixco's *Desafiando los poderes* and María Inclán's *The Zapatista Movement and Mexico's Democratic Transition*. Both use political opportunity theory (also known as political process theory) to help explain movements' emergence and outcomes. Scholars in this tradition foreground the importance of state institutions in fostering or foreclosing opportunities for movements, an emphasis that sets them apart from other authors on this list.

Huezo Mixco's study of El Salvador explicitly applies this framework: "it is not people motivated by their individual interests who are the drivers of collective action" but rather "the presence of political opportunities" (139). His historical approach gives this argument an interesting twist. He covers three periods: the rise of labor organizing amid the authoritarian military rule of the late 1940s and 1950s, tepid reformism mixed with repression between 1961 and 1972, and the state's recourse to mass murder and overt electoral fraud in the 1970s. He argues that the relaxation of repression during the second period opened space for popular organizing and left behind durable organizations of workers, peasants, and students. When the state escalated its repression again in the 1970s, it could not extinguish those organizations and instead contributed to their radicalization, paving the way for armed insurgency by the end of the decade. This analysis largely parallels that of the sociologist Paul Almeida, whom Huezo Mixco frequently credits.[10] The book does include significant original research, drawn mostly from newspaper reports and CIA documents, though it focuses on urban El Salvador and particularly the capital region.

My reservation about the argument is that it underestimates the importance of popular movements, including the role of factors like strategy, recruitment and organizing practices, emotions, and culture in determining outcomes.[11] While "the presence of political opportunities" helps explain the trajectory of Salvadoran popular resistance, we also need to understand how Salvadoran organizers interpreted, harnessed, expanded, and even created those opportunities. Some of Huezo Mixco's own examples are revealing. The coups of the early 1960s that inaugurated the era of relative liberalization were largely a response to real or threatened popular unrest. The October 1960 overthrow of José María Lemus

[9] See especially the collaborative oral history project directed by Dore that was launched in 2004. For Dore's reflections on methodology, see "Cubans' Life Stories: The Pains and Pleasures of Living in a Communist Society," *Oral History* 40, no. 1 (2012): 35–46.

[10] Paul D. Almeida, *Waves of Protest: Popular Struggle in El Salvador, 1925–2005* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008). See also Charles D. Brockett, *Political Movements and Violence in Central America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005). For a review of some other recent works on El Salvador see Erik Ching, "The Popular Church and Revolutionary Insurgency in El Salvador," *Latin American Research Review* 53, no. 4 (2018): 876–885.

[11] For a critique of how political process theory tends to neglect such factors, see Jeff Goodwin and James M. Jasper, "Caught in a Winding, Snarling Vine: The Structural Bias of Political Process Theory," *Sociological Forum* 14, no. 1 (1999): 27–54. See also the recent review essay by Anna Krausova, "Latin American Social Movements: Bringing Strategy Back In," *Latin American Research Review* 55, no. 4 (2020): 839–849.

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"was inspired by the growing popular pressure to carry out social and economic reforms" (94), and the coup plotters of January 1961 likewise sought reforms in order to prevent the radical Left from gaining ground. The Alliance for Progress, which encouraged the government of Julio Adalberto Rivera to initiate reforms (and to create the country's death squad apparatus), was designed to prevent repeats of the Cuban Revolution, as Huezo Mixco observes. In other words, political opportunities did not simply spring from elite initiative. Mass movements helped create them.

In fact, Huezo Mixco is sometimes explicit in emphasizing movement initiative. He argues that collective action "created conditions of possibility for social transformations" (17). When narrating the movement upsurge of the 1970s he notes the role of "cultural learning" and "creativity" in the development of movement organizations (229, 246). The problem is the tension between these statements and his use of political process theory. His interpretation of events is often more nuanced and accurate than his narrow thesis statements about political opportunities. Perhaps he tries too hard to cling to a theoretical model that, while useful in some ways, cannot account for the complexity of the processes it seeks to theorize.

I have one other complaint about Huezo Mixco's treatment of the 1970s. Part of his motivation for writing the book was his indignation that guerrilla comandantes or the Cuban government often get credit for unifying the Left and for the gains embodied in the 1992 peace accords, while "the efforts of others on the revolutionary Left" are "barely recognized" (13). He insists that these advances were only possible given "the historical development of the social movement" in decades prior (302). This point is true and important, especially in a present-day context in which the country's electoral Left is in disarray and Salvadoran social movements are struggling to find a path forward. However, his sharp distinction between civilian activists and guerrillas carries an implicit moralism: civilian movements good, guerrillas bad. He characterizes the guerrillas' violence as offensive in nature and criticizes them for "dismantling" civilian movements (304). This judgment denies the moral legitimacy of taking up arms against a state that had exterminated thousands of nonviolent dissenters by 1980.

Furthermore, the sharp distinction between civilians and guerrillas did not exist. In his zeal to show that the mass movements of the 1970s were not mere fronts for the guerrillas, Huezo Mixco neglects the real connections between civilian movements and the various armed factions that united as the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN) in 1980. He discusses the biggest mass coalition of the late 1970s, the Bloque Popular Revolucionario, as if it were entirely separate from the Fuerzas Populares de Liberación (FPL), the largest of the guerrilla groups. In reality there were strong personal and political ties between the Bloque and FPL, with influence flowing both ways. The first general secretary of the Bloque, the schoolteacher Mélida Anaya Montes, was already an FPL militant when the Bloque was formed. Her successor as general secretary, the peasant organizer Facundo Guardado, had likewise joined the FPL beforehand. Though Guardado echoes Huezo Mixco's point about the autonomy of the Bloque's member organizations—recalling that they "had their own life, their own dynamics" separate from the guerrillas—he also emphasizes the linkages. "The idea for the Bloque emerged" from FPL leaders, and the relationship endured thereafter.[12] Here is thus another example where interviewing the surviving veterans of revolutionary movements could have deepened the understanding of revolution.

Inclán's book on the modern-day Zapatistas breaks down the category of political opportunity, arguing that the prospects for "mobilization, success, and survival" often differ. A movement's external context may offer ripe conditions for recruitment and

[12] Facundo Guardado, interview with author, San Salvador, May 22, 2015. Other oral and written sources confirm this point.

https://doi.org/10.1017/lar.2022.25 Published online by Cambridge University Press

mobilization but not for success; and while it may preclude success, it may simultaneously allow for survival. For Inclán, the democratic transition in Mexico in the 1990s opened a window of opportunity for the Zapatistas but did not allow them to achieve their goal of Indigenous autonomy at the national level. She attributes this outcome to the protracted nature of the transition and the fact that it was delinked from the peace negotiations between the guerrillas and the state. At the same time, however, the emergence of a global solidarity movement (with the help of the internet) helped the Zapatistas preserve control over a limited territory in Chiapas. This aspect of Inclán's argument helpfully refines older iterations of the theory. The book also includes a wealth of original data on pro-Zapatista protests in the period 1994–2003 and on access to public services across locales in Chiapas.

I found other parts of the argument less convincing. Inclán contends that the "Zapatistas were poised to become influential counter-elites" in the mid-1990s but failed to take advantage of "changing political conditions that could have functioned as opportunities for success" (27, 83). By rejecting political parties and declining "to have a civic, unarmed political organization represent their interests," they forfeited a chance to have "allies in power" (93–94). These statements underestimate the structural obstacles they faced. Elsewhere Inclán implicitly acknowledges elites' power and intransigence: "The Zapatistas' refusal to take part in negotiations and electoral politics only made it easier for political elites to ignore their claims—*which they were not considering in any case*" (137, emphasis added). There is little evidence that allying with political parties would have borne fruit. Certainly the Zapatistas' suspicion of the center-left Andrés Manuel López Obrador has proven well-founded since he assumed the presidency in 2018.

The book also says little about the movement's own structures and participants. Inclán argues that a "transnational solidarity network" and astute "discourse framing" enabled the Zapatistas' survival (41, 43). These latter factors are indeed important, but neither can explain the continued mass support for the Zapatistas in the highlands and jungles of Chiapas. The Zapatistas' organizing, education, and empowerment of villagers is arguably the most crucial reason for the movement's resilience. This devaluation of the role of local organizing is common in studies of social movements. Some scholars go so far as to assert, as Inclán does, that "powerless groups must rely on external organizers and supporters" (98).[13] This assumption likely stems in part from Inclán's methodology, which apparently did not include research in Zapatista territories or much engagement with the ethnographic literature. Certain strategic shifts within the movement are attributed to Subcomandante Marcos alone, a notion that interviews with Zapatistas might have dispelled.[14] Ultimately the book makes an interesting intervention in social movement theory but reflects some of the common pitfalls of social science research on movements.

All the books on this list help us understand the forces that shape revolutionary movements. Most of the authors seek to view revolutions from the vantage points of rank-and-file participants and citizens, though some do so more successfully than others. My general takeaway is methodological: students of the Left must venture beyond archives and libraries. Despite its well-known limitations, oral history is a valuable and often indispensable tool for telling a history of the Left that goes beyond the comandantes. Talking to the

[13] For a classic critique of this assumption see Aldon D. Morris, "Birmingham Confrontation Reconsidered: An Analysis of the Dynamics and Tactics of Mobilization," *American Sociological Review* 58, no. 5 (1993): 621–636.

[14] The book contains other misleading characterizations of the Zapatistas. For instance, Inclán repeatedly labels them an "antiglobalization" movement, when in fact they condemn the *neoliberal* or *capitalist* version of globalization (see, for instance, the 2005 "Sexta Declaración de la Selva Lacandona," https://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/sdsl-es/). She also asserts that they "change[d] from a Marxist discourse to an indigenous frame" soon after the uprising (106). Zapatista public rhetoric did undergo some shift of emphasis in 1994, but the statement oversimplifies the diverse ideological influences that constituted Zapatismo before 1994 and still today. See Christopher Gunderson, "The Provocative Cocktail: Intellectual Origins of the Zapatista Uprising, 1960–1994" (PhD diss., City University of New York, 2013).

https://doi.org/10.1017/lar.2022.25 Published online by Cambridge University Press

revolutionaries themselves, and a diverse sample of them, should be a key part of the researcher's tool kit whenever possible.

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Cite this article: Young, Kevin A. (2022). Beyond the Comandantes: Revolutions and Revolutionaries since 1959. *Latin American Research Review* **57**, 504–514. https://doi.org/10.1017/lar.2022.25

https://doi.org/10.1017/lar.2022.25 Published online by Cambridge University Press