

but also in how the discourses and debates of this period constitute the roots of the current crisis and the artistic responses it has elicited.

*University of Bristol*

EDWARD KING

*J. Lat. Amer. Stud.* 50 (2018). doi:10.1017/S0022216X18000111

Héctor Perla, Jr., *Sandinista Nicaragua's Resistance to US Coercion: Revolutionary Deterrence in Asymmetric Conflict* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. xxi + 241, £75.00 hb.

This highly original and thought-provoking work provides a fresh perspective on the decade-long conflict between the United States and Nicaragua's Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN). Héctor Perla argues that Ronald Reagan's policy of 'rollback' in Nicaragua was defeated thanks to the Sandinistas' mobilisation of a transnational social movement, a movement which strengthened public opposition to intervention within the United States. The book contributes to existing scholarship on solidarity with Central America in the United States, but Perla's approach is unique because he emphasises the decisive, foundational role played by Central Americans in the development of the solidarity movement.

Perla's choice of targets and questions is astute. He notes that Latin Americanists' view of the Sandinista Revolution is dominated by the Sandinistas' electoral loss in 1990, and that post-1990 scholarship has sought to explain the Sandinistas' failure. Within international relations (IR), in contrast, the Contra War is considered as a 'loss' for Reagan. Perla sites his work firmly within the latter field, arguing that the US effort in Nicaragua had been fully defeated, militarily and politically, by the end of the Reagan presidency. However, he argues that IR scholars have failed to accurately explain Reagan's defeat, because they do not recognise the power that can be wielded by poor, marginalised states in asymmetric conflicts. This blind spot is further exacerbated by IR scholars' failure to account for Latin American agency within US–Latin American relations. Perla therefore seeks to use the Nicaraguan example to make a broader case for theoretical shifts within IR.

The first half of the book, which provides context for the argument, consists of four chapters. They provide a brief history of US–Nicaraguan relations; an overview of the relevant debates within IR; an analysis of the Sandinista response to US aggression within Nicaragua, drawn mainly from secondary sources; and a history of the development of the solidarity movement in the United States, which draws on multiple interviews with activists. The last of these four chapters is perhaps the strongest section of the book. It demonstrates clearly that the work of Nicaraguan Sandinistas based in the United States and US-born Central Americans was crucial to the development of the movement. Perla's approach here is supportive but not hagiographic: the discussion of the way in which the conflicts between the FSLN's three 'tendencias' played out on the streets of San Francisco and Los Angeles, for example, is particularly fascinating.

Elsewhere, Perla's clear commitment to the Revolution's goals can skew the picture a little. His account of the Revolution's response to US aggression within Nicaragua draws on a rich, engaged, but also constructively critical literature. Perla often omits the criticism, so that his summary does not always fully reflect the scholarship that he cites. For example, he rightly suggests that the second wave of the Sandinista agrarian reform was instrumental in strengthening support for the Revolution in the countryside, but neglects to mention that the first wave of reform had played a key role in

fomenting peasant opposition to the Sandinistas (and support for the Contras). Similarly, he shows that the introduction of guerrilla warfare tactics in late 1983 and 1984, and the use of Batallones de Lucha Irregular (Unconventional Warfare Battalions, BLIs), helped to secure the Sandinistas' military victory. But he fails to mention that the BLIs were composed almost entirely of conscripts, and that the use of compulsory military service in these years was one of the Sandinistas' most divisive and bitterly opposed policies.

The second half of the book focuses on events in the United States, and the impact of the FSLN's advocacy work. Perla provides a series of statistical analyses of coded data. He argues that the FSLN gained considerable 'standing' within the US media; and that the FSLN was successful in ensuring that the framing of the Contra conflict in the mainstream media ran counter to the President's preferred narrative. Working from opinion polls, he then suggests that the periods when this counter-narrative was more prevalent correlate with periods when public opposition to the Contra War was more pronounced. Finally, Perla presents data which demonstrates that members of Congress with larger numbers of solidarity organisations in their districts consistently voted against Contra aid in greater numbers than their peers, arguing that this demonstrates the decisive impact of the Central America solidarity movement.

Throughout the book, Perla relies on a comparison between Nicaragua and other cases of 'rollback' in the Reagan era: Afghanistan, Cambodia and Angola. He suggests that the fact that Congress consistently supported aid for these other interventions is clear proof that it was the FSLN's advocacy efforts, and not alternative factors such as Vietnam syndrome, which ensured that Reagan's intervention in Nicaragua was unsuccessful. Given the centrality of this point to the overall argument, a brief summary of these other cases of intervention would have been welcome, and might have revealed some important differences. In Afghanistan, Angola and Cambodia the presence of substantial numbers of foreign troops from Communist countries made US intervention much easier to justify to Congress. Moreover, in both Afghanistan and Angola third countries – Pakistan and South Africa respectively – played a significant role in the intervention, quelling congressional fears about the extent of CIA involvement. In Nicaragua, Argentina was originally meant to play a similar role, a hope that was thwarted as a result of the Falklands War.

Arguably, the relative strength of solidarity with Central America was not only the result of activists' agency. The proximity of the United States and Nicaragua, and the considerable migration that had occurred between the two nations, created far more fertile conditions for the kind of cultural interchange necessary for activism. But these caveats do not detract from the fact that, as Perla shows, the raw unmediated testimony of victims of the Contra War had a considerable impact in the United States, thanks to the countless speaker tours and brigades organised by solidarity activists in Nicaragua and the United States. This book is a very welcome contribution to the scholarship on the Contra War, one that is sure to spark considerable and fruitful debate.

*Institute of Latin American Studies, University of London*

HILARY FRANCIS

*J. Lat. Amer. Stud.* 50 (2018). doi:10.1017/S0022216X18000123

Pablo Piccato, *A History of Infamy: Crime, Truth and Justice in Mexico* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017), pp. xi + 374, £27.95 pb.

Over the past decade, tales of crime and violence have dominated coverage of Mexico. Since Felipe Calderón declared war on the country's cartels, images of headless torsos,