

costs (p. 131). Pointing at corruption and the impact of 'savage capitalism' in the border region, they question the value of the neoliberal model for Mexico, and suggest that the femicides constitute a by-product of globalisation in a patriarchal context. The argument of blaming external economic factors, such as the interests of multinational companies, as the source of new forms of exploitation and killings stems from a justifiable concern among left-leaning academics and fiction writers to highlight the daunting disposability of unskilled workers in globalised industrial capitalism. However, López-Lozano also accuses these accounts of perpetuating the stereotype of the border as a zone of terror, in which justice, dignity and humanity cannot thrive, but he does not provide substantial backup for his critique.

One of the articles does not directly relate to either media representations or public responses, but rather deals with oral testimonies on gender violence experienced by transgender sex workers in Tijuana. The levels of abuse from which they suffer are tremendous, and yet transgender persons are an often overlooked group when talking about gender violence at the border, which is why this article addresses an academic omission that has long been ignored.

In the opening chapter the editors outline their intention to contribute to building bridges between different communities at the local and national level, as well as between organisations of civil society and government institutions. This is an immensely ambitious undertaking, and one at which the book can surely achieve only a modicum of success. However, with its focus on analysing current media representations of gender violence at the US–Mexico border, the volume provides readers with useful tools to deconstruct current media discourses. It makes readers aware of the need to be critical of sensationalist use of violence and accusatory depictions of victims and their families, and calls for contestation of disempowering portrayals of the border community. The volume also promotes a careful scrutiny of depictions of murderers as criminal masterminds and pathologic others on the one hand, and a glorification of the police on the other, highlighting the illegitimacy of the current politics of not-knowing, and the underlying patriarchal ideologies.

*University of Manchester*

SUSANNE HOFMANN

*J. Lat. Amer. Stud.* 43 (2011). doi:10.1017/S0022216X11001039

Ed Vulliamy, *Amexica: War along the Borderline* (London: Bodley Head, 2010), pp. xxxi + 336, £20.00, hb.

When Mexico makes the news in Britain, it is usually because of drug wars and narco-violence. There is casual talk of 'Colombianisation', talk which may displease Colombians as much as Mexicans. The topic, though difficult to research in depth, deserves serious treatment, but in *Amexica* Ed Vulliamy opts for the superficial and the sensationalist, starting with the meretricious cover, which depicts a beautiful, bullet-ridden young woman. The book is based on a trip along the long, porous, violent US–Mexican border, terrain which Vulliamy previously described in a series of articles in *The Observer*, chunks of which are recycled verbatim in the book. The author has done plenty of legwork, posing at times as a 'clueless gringo' (p. 233), and has an impressive network of contacts: journalists, academics, police, vigilantes, maquila workers and human rights activists. Their (sometimes extensive) contributions are the best bits of the book, even if their word has to be taken on trust. They usually know whereof they speak and, compared to the annoying authorial voice, they often speak

forthrightly and even eloquently. Thus, we get some sense of why Ciudad Juárez is the most murderous city on earth, not least for women: there is no controlling interest; the major drug cartels are engaged in open warfare; the United States supplies state-of-the-art weaponry; the streets belong to drug-dealing and drug-consuming gangs; and the authorities are feeble and/or corrupt. Elsewhere the situation is less bleak; Nuevo Laredo has enjoyed a brief *pax mafiosa* (which, cynics might say, is the most realistic and rapid road to a semblance of order); in Tijuana, too, things have somewhat improved, although Vulliamy says little about this.

Rather, his tone is unrelentingly grim and gruesome, and he writes in a crudely macho style full of cliché, error and repetition. Mike Flores, a Native American, 'spits words of fire' (p. 73). In the Arizona desert, 'the hinges of hell would cool this land' (p. 48). A 40-year-old grandmother has a 'vice-grip handshake ... [and] the aura of Semtex', fetchingly offset, however, by a 'lambent smile' (p. 205). Vulliamy bids goodnight – oddly, in Spanish – to a 'sleazebag' American and his 'teen lovely' and, in return, receives 'a look that said he wanted to punch my teeth down my throat' (p. 128). 'Thirteen miles north of the border' Vulliamy interviews a trucker: 'Bill Sanderson shoots a dart of spittle through his front teeth onto the tarmac' (so, truckers spit through their front teeth – is there another way?) (p. 240). South of the border, in Miguel Alemán, 'every pair of eyes seems to follow a stranger', while in a Matamoros restaurant 'the man behind the bar fixes us all the while with dead, unshining eyes, cold as steel and ice' (pp. 255 and 289). This is thirsty work, so, by way of injecting gritty realism (I assume), Vulliamy keeps telling us what he and his interlocutors are drinking: 'a couple of cold ones' with hoodlums in Nuevo Laredo (p. 233); seven consecutive coffees with a human rights lawyer in El Paso (p. 137); a Bud for a US customs veteran, while streetwise Vulliamy opts for a 'Mexican Dos Equis beer' (pp. 92–3). 'My car was shot at twice ... but I wasn't hurt', recounts a human rights activist in Juárez, 'switching from coffee to a modest liqueur' (p. 178). And a presidential spokeswoman, one of the few administration officials whom Vulliamy interviews, 'meets me at the Brasserie Lipp (the one in Mexico City, not Paris ...)' to insist, over mineral water, ...' (p. 20). And so it goes: blah, blah, slurp.

Occasionally, macho journalese yields to lyrical yuck. We encounter the 'eternity of Texas' and, a page later, 'the endlessness of Texas', where the night sky reveals 'so many stars like [*sic*] God is throwing sugar at you' (pp. 180, 181). There is also some strange jargon: Juárez and the border are 'charismatic', epitomes of a 'post-political global economy' (pp. xxi, 97, 106, 219). Vulliamy laments 'another day of heterotopia in the human junkyard' (p. 157). The Arizona desert is a 'pyrexia', suffering from 'xerosis' (pp. 48, 49); in other words it's hot and dry. Corpses are 'saprophytic' (p. 303). And there are substantial errors: Cuernavaca (misspelled, like dozens of names and places) is not a 'smart Mexico City suburb'; it is a city of 350,000, 50 miles from the capital, across a 12,000-foot mountain range. President Calderón cannot have been a 'co-founder' of the Partido Acción Nacional (National Action Party, PAN), since it was founded 23 years before he was born (p. 19). Neither Zedillo nor Clinton were presidents in 1988 (p. 92). Keen to point up the gross inequalities of Mexican society, Vulliamy goes a little far in converting 15 pesos, a rural daily wage, to '8 pence or 12 cents', when it's ten times as much (p. 66). It is nonsense to say that the apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe in 1531 occurred 'in the cotton fields' or that Juárez recovered from the ravages of the Mexican Revolution by 'making copper wire' (pp. 282–3, 105). Nor does the Virgin 'wear a serpent' (facing p. 161). Nor are the current drug wars, by a long way, 'the most vicious phase ... in Mexico's history since

the revolution of 1910' (p. 16), since the Church–State conflict of 1926–9 produced many more casualties, both absolutely and relatively.

Vulliamy may know the contemporary border at first hand, but the rest of Mexico and the broad sweep of Mexican history remain a mystery to him. In particular, his treatment of indigenous Mexico and of the 'primal mystery' of 'folk Catholicism' is thoroughly confused, full of bizarre 'Aztec' atavisms, including two 'pure Aztecs' who wash up from Veracruz, which is a bit like talking of 'pure Picts' from Greater Manchester (pp. 84, 276). All this is odd, since the bombastic bibliography makes sweeping (and often daft) claims regarding 'the best general histories of Mexico' or the 'best' of 'innumerable books on ancient Mexican and Aztec lore' (pp. 316–20), which might make us think that Vulliamy has done his historical homework, which he clearly hasn't. And while he may be able to bid gringo sleazebags goodnight in Spanish, his grasp of the language is plainly weak: I counted (conservatively) over 50 errors, not including dozens of erratic accents. More surprisingly, his English falters. Brownsville is 'seeped in epic history' (p. 255); a baseball crowd is 'arraigned on wooden benches' (p. 214); we hear a 'peel of laughter' and are presented with a 'fanfaronade of cakes' (pp. 184, 279). Coyotlinaut ([sic]; it should be *coyotlinahual*; but it's not surprising that Vulliamy's Nahuatl, which he keeps spelling Nuahuatl, is even worse than his Spanish) is referred to as an 'Aztec diety' (p. 181). Can't the Bodley Head, subsidiary of the Random House Group, tap the Bertelsmann billions to pay for some decent copyediting?

Thus, while the book offers some good vignettes of border life, its lack of analysis, coupled with its penchant for macho posturing, is disappointing. Critical of 'mediocrity, blog and twitter' (p. ix), Vulliamy snipes at fellow journalists who, looking 'downright silly' in their pristine flak jackets, are disappointed not to find 'a besieged Sarajevo' on the border (p. 129). In contrast, he aligns himself with the journalistic good guys who man 'the ramparts of quality' (p. ix). In his case, however, the ramparts have crumbled and the quality is elusive. Maybe the 'clueless gringo' pose isn't such a pose.

*St Antony's College, Oxford*

ALAN KNIGHT

## CORRECTION

During the editing process two mistakes were introduced into Kevin Middlebrook's review of Michelle L. Dion, *Workers and Welfare: Comparative Institutional Change in Twentieth-Century Mexico*, which was published in *JLAS* 43: 1 (February 2011), pp. 165–7. The CTM should have been referred to as the Confederación de Trabajadores de México, and the labour 'sector' in the PRI was inadvertently altered to the labour 'group'. We apologise to Professor Middlebrook for these errors.