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Michael Reid, *Forgotten Continent: The Battle for Latin America's Soul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. xv + 384, £19.99, hb.

This book by Mike Reid has been eagerly anticipated. As editor of the Americas section of *The Economist* and a journalist who has dedicated himself to Latin America for 25 years, he was widely expected to produce a book that would capture the recent changes in the region while writing in a style that would be accessible to the general reader. These hopes have been partially, if not totally, fulfilled. The strengths of the book come from its broad sweep of history, politics and economics (with passing nods to sociology, anthropology and culture) coupled with journalistic vignettes based on interviews with a wide range of individuals. This helps to bring the book alive and to remind the reader that the drama of Latin America is lived out through the lives of ordinary people.

The sub-title of the book is 'the battle for Latin America's soul'. This raises the question of which protagonists are engaged in this fight and Reid is in no doubt that the struggle is between democratic reformers and autocratic populists. He also believes passionately that the reformers will prevail and that the United States will not be an obstacle in their path. The message of the book is optimistic, the glass is half-full rather than half-empty, and democracy is taking root in what has been regarded by many as barren soil. Such a message is attractive and will no doubt satisfy most of the general readers to whom this book is addressed. Reid marshals solid evidence in support of his thesis and makes clear that the left or centre-left has no monopoly on sensible reforms. As an example, he cites the success of the Conditional Cash Transfer schemes (CCT) in Mexico run by centre-right governments with the similar CCT schemes run by centre-left governments in Brazil. Reid is pragmatic on the question of what works and what does not work and he argues convincingly that the democratic reformers who dominate in most parts of Latin America have a similar mindset.

It has become fashionable to identify the fault-line that runs through Latin America and Reid is entitled to his view. However, he overstates his case by pitting autocratic populists against democratic reformers. The only autocratic populist who comes close to fitting Reid's description is Hugo Chávez in Venezuela and the Chavista model has always been of limited relevance to the rest of Latin America because of its foundations on abundant oil reserves and high oil prices. And even the description of Chávez as autocratic now looks strange after his defeat in last year's referendum on constitutional change.

Reid would have done better to focus on the history of injustice in Latin America, illustrated by poverty, inequality, environmental degradation, impunity, corruption and criminality. All these issues, with the exception of the environment, are admirably illustrated in the book and democratic governments (including in Venezuela) are struggling to reduce injustice through a wide variety of reforms. In this sense, there is really no fault-line in Latin America and Reid is right that the United States is not necessarily an obstacle towards lowering injustice. Which of these experiments in democratic reform succeeds best is something that time alone will determine since the process is still at a relatively early stage.

The title of the book ('Forgotten Continent') is unfortunate. It reminds me of the spate of books and articles on the theme 'Rediscovering Latin America' that began with an article in *Encounter* magazine in 1965. Forgotten by whom? Clearly not by the 550 million who live in the region nor by the 40 million *Latinos* in the

United States. It has not been ‘forgotten’ by China, for whom the region is now an indispensable source of raw material, nor by Spain from where many leading companies are heavily invested in Latin America. It has not even been forgotten by the United States, although Latin American governments have been irritated by the narrow range of policies on which the US has tried to focus. It *has* been forgotten by the UK, but that happened a long time ago.

Reid takes the occasional swipe at academic writing, so he will not object if I take him to task for some journalistic lapses. Central America is described as ‘backward’ despite the success of Costa Rica in attracting IT companies engaged in exports. Leonel Fernández in the Dominican Republic is described as centre-left, when he is most definitely centre-right. The GATT was founded in 1947, not 1945, and the income inequality data for the US (p. 4) are seriously out of date (recent data have shown that 20 per cent of US income is received by one per cent of individuals – a degree of inequality as bad as anywhere in Latin America).

Despite these shortcomings, Reid has written an engaging and challenging book. The Latin America that emerges is sensitively described and the reader is left with a sense of cautious optimism that appears to have solid foundations. It is not sensationalist, as many journalistic accounts of Latin America are, and Reid is surely right to focus so much on the political transformations that have strengthened the democratic foundations in so many countries. This is a much more rewarding approach than the ‘state versus market’ argument that can still be found in the literature.

Florida International University

VICTOR BULMER-THOMAS

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Kurt Weyland, *Bounded Rationality and Policy Diffusion: Social Sector Reform in Latin America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), pp. xii + 297, \$60.00, \$24.95, pb; £35.00, £14.95, pb.

This book applies a bounded rationality perspective to examine the causal mechanisms of cross-national policy diffusion in pension and health reforms in Latin America in the last two decades. The author argues that an understanding of the way in which policy-makers learn from foreign policy is an important factor explaining the speed and direction of international policy diffusion. Based on extensive interviews with policy-makers, the author confirms the importance of cognitive shortcuts to identify and assess policy options. A focus on these cognitive shortcuts, it is argued, illuminates the causal mechanisms of policy diffusion in the region. The book provides a detailed analysis of the bounded rationality perspective (chapters one and two), which is then applied to pension reform (chapters three and four) and health reforms (chapters five and six), before discussing the implications of the findings for our understanding of policy diffusion in the era of globalisation (chapter seven). This is an interesting and illuminating book, which will no doubt make an important contribution to our understanding of social sector reforms in the region and elsewhere. Some of its findings challenge widely held views, for example regarding the extent of the influence of the World Bank on pension reform in the region. The operationalisation of bounded rationality perspectives in a cross-national policy reform context will make an important addition to the toolbox available to researchers.