

of the Peruvian Ombudsman) that engaged in electoral observation during the disputed 2000 election.

There is also a tendency to view the Americas as largely self-contained. With full justification Santa-Cruz gives pride of place in his book to the large US-centred actors, most notably the National Democratic Institute (NDI), the National Endowment for Democracy, and Carter Center. But the impact of the European Union merits more attention; both the European Commission and the foundations associated with the different political parties in Germany. A key to the implanting of the IEM norm in Peru, for example, was the expansion of the original Transparencia-NDI network to encompass election monitors not only from the OAS but also from the European Union.

In extending this point, it might be interesting to further explore the differences in diplomatic style between the different transnational actors promoting the IEM. Santa-Cruz does an excellent job in teasing out the differences (and tensions) between the OAS and the UN on one side, and the NDI, NED and the Carter Center on the other side, but there seem to be other differences as well. One key element that remains unexplored is the types of personality of the 'big' individuals involved. While the Carter phenomenon needs to be looked at more closely, so does the style of leading election monitors who come from different backgrounds in the Americas (such as, for example, Lloyd Axworthy from Canada or Oscar Arias from Costa Rica).

Still, these criticisms reveal how the Santa-Cruz book serves as an excellent catalyst for discussion. Few recent books blend such sophistication in terms of their analysis of the nexus between international and domestic conditions with the sense that what actors think and do on the ground matters. Instead of closing doors off to debate, it presents a wide number of windows from which we can get a better look at the politics and society of the western hemisphere.

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Salvador Martí i Puig, *Tiranías, rebeliones y democracia: itinerarios políticos comparados en Centroamérica* (Barcelona: Edicions Bellaterra, 2004), pp. 327, pb.

This book by Salvador Martí i Puig is a healthy reminder of the continued existence of Central America. As the author himself advises from the outset, the days when Central America was all the rage with academics and journalists are long gone. The reason for this high profile derived from the fact that daily life for the peoples of Central America was a tragedy worthy of global media attention. Now that peace of a sort has returned to the region, and it is no longer front page news, Central America has reverted to its earlier neglected status.

Martí i Puig's book gains this Central American reader's goodwill by conveying the author's commitment to the region, and an ethical stance expressed in the statement 'today very few spare a thought for the warm people, the exuberant landscape, the sleeping volcanoes with their lazy fumes, and so many dreams and so much suffering' (p. 9). The book is an interesting journey through the history of Central America and a vindication of a region that was once the fulcrum for the central global conflict of the time.

Tiranías, rebeliones y democracia covers the history of Central America from the Conquest and colonisation, arguing – as many scholars have – that many of the roots of the conflict that subsequently turned into revolution towards the end of the 1970s and throughout the 1980s lie in the colonial era and the specific form of agroexport agriculture that developed in the nineteenth century. Chapter one charts the period from colony to the liberal reformation of the nineteenth century and ends with the crisis of the 1930s which eventually gave rise to the oligarchic dictatorships that the author refers to as tyrannies.

Of special interest in chapter two is the notion of the ‘patrimonial state’: this is especially useful for understanding the Somoza dictatorship in Nicaragua, but also works for a good many of the former dictatorships of Central America. Martí i Puig shows how the former dictatorships were constructed around the figure of a dictator and the separation between public and private was nebulous. The oligarchic dictator ran his country as if it were an hacienda and the citizens, a largely illiterate mass to be exploited as labourers. The state was the fiefdom of the dictator and his family. In Central America these characteristics manifested themselves most clearly in Nicaragua, but were also present elsewhere.

In chapters three and four Martí i Puig examines the revolutionary upheaval which followed the assassination of Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, the Nicaraguan opposition leader, in January 1978. Chapters three, four and five are particularly structured around the Nicaraguan experience, perhaps because Nicaragua is the Central American country the author knows best, but also because the Nicaraguan revolution projected itself onto the entire region. Additionally, the ‘low intensity war’ had Nicaragua as its main objective. Both in terms of revolutionary fervour and the imperial reaction to that fervour, Nicaragua and its revolution were fundamental.

The last two chapters, six and seven, are devoted to the study of the negotiation processes between states and insurgents and the consequences of these. The political regimes which subsequently emerged were not those aspired to by the forces of the right (the retention of the status quo), let alone the one dreamed of by the left (the triumph of revolution). The result is representative democracies based on great social polarisation and the persistence of attitudes and practices of the past. Symptoms include the revolts and strikes that have continued in Central America since the defeat of the Sandinistas in 1990, the persistence of the power exercised by the army in Guatemala, violent delinquency in urban centres throughout the region, the appearance of violent youth gangs in Guatemala and El Salvador (the so-called *maras*) and overall social and economic exclusion, as well as state corruption.

Salvador Martí i Puig’s book provides a concise and interpretative vision of Central American history. It is based on an extensive bibliography, and has the added appeal of weaving in beautiful quotes from novels, stories, poems and songs by various writers, including Miguel Angel Asturias, Sergio Ramírez, Roque Dalton, Graham Green, Omar Cabezas, Gioconda Belli and Ernesto Cardenal, amongst others, which help the reader catch the spirit and emotions which nourished many Central Americans throughout the second half of the twentieth century.

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