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A Journal of Contemporary World Affairs

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COMING IN MARCH
Europe

RAVAGED BY THE PANDEMIC, Europe has seen its efforts to organize a coordinated economic recovery plan disrupted by dragged-out disputes over the rule of law in Hungary and Poland. In both countries, proudly illiberal ruling parties have sought to bend the judiciary, the media, and other institutions to their will while railing against migration. Other governments' moves to mandate vaccination have sparked mass protests, the latest manifestation of simmering populism. And as inflation rises, a housing crisis deepens across the continent, stirring generational discontent. *Current History*'s March issue will cover these trends and more in the region. Topics scheduled to appear include:

- **Polish Illiberalism and the Fascism Debate**
  David Ost, Hobart and William Smith Colleges
- **Migration and National Myths in Hungary**
  Holly Case, Brown University
- **Muslims' Deep Roots in Europe**
  Marc David Baer, London School of Economics
- **Disability Rights and Labor Policy**
  Aude Lejeune, University of Lille
  Seventh in a series
- **Inequality and the Housing Crisis**
  Lindsay B. Flynn, University of Luxembourg
- **The Swiss Way of Assisted Suicide**
  Alexandre Pillonel, College of Social Work and Health, Lausanne
- **The New Face of European Terrorism**
  Raffaello Pantucci, Royal United Services Institute

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"These are public acts of contestation, commemoration, and community building, not just spaces for collective mourning."

The Struggle for Memory and Justice in Mexico

ALEXANDRA DÉLANO ALONSO AND BENJAMIN NIENASS

On September 25, 2021, alongside construction panels surrounding the monument where a statue of Christopher Columbus had been removed by the Mexico City government, feminist collectives and women victims of violence organized an action to reclaim the space as the Glorieta de las Mujeres que Luchan, or Roundabout of Women in the Struggle. The statue had been removed "for restoration purposes" in 2020 by government officials amid concerns that the monument would be defaced ahead of the commemoration of Columbus Day on October 12, as Mexican activists joined a movement across the Americas to topple monuments representing racism and colonial violence.

A year after it was removed, Claudia Sheinbaum, Mexico City's mayor, announced that the Columbus statue would be replaced with a replica of a precolonial statue of an indigenous woman, "La Mujer de Amajac." The government framed this as a response to critiques from indigenous communities and artists who rejected the initial proposal of a female Olmec head designed by a nonindigenous male artist, which was chosen without consultation or transparency. As anthropologist Sandra Rozental argues, the new proposal also reproduced the often violent ways in which the state has appropriated indigenous symbols, feigning justice by displaying them in public spaces without addressing the conditions of inequality and exclusion faced by indigenous communities.

In the midst of this debate, a group of feminist collectives intervened, proclaiming the monument to be a "seized and revindicated space, as a site of memory and resistance." Continuing a recent practice of the feminist movement in Mexico, the activists covered the panels protecting the monument with names, in this case, of groups and women who are fighting for justice across different struggles—from those searching for the disappeared to indigenous women defending their land and rural education. They installed a temporary statue with the figure of a woman (itself criticized by some for its heteronormative aesthetic) on the pedestal where Columbus previously stood. The following day, the names on the panels were erased, presumably by local authorities.

In a statement put out by Antimonumenta "Vivas nos queremos" (Countermonument "We want each other alive"), the group reaffirmed its commitment to make this space "a symbol of resistance of all the women who have fought and will continue fighting against police repression, against military crimes, against land removals, against extraction, against the stealing of water, against patriarchal violence, against femicides and disappearances, against the intromission of governments and churches on the right to decide on our bodies, against the inaction of corrupt institutions and the corruption of an absent state." They reinscribed the names on the panels and continue to organize actions in this space to commemorate the victims of violence and express solidarity with women fighting for justice.

This is one example of a debate about public memory that has intensified in Mexico in a time of widespread violence and human rights abuses, and particularly in the context of the *guerra contra el narco* (war against drug cartels) that started in 2006. Over the past 15 years, more than 90,000 people have disappeared, more than 300,000 have been killed, and there has been a steady increase in criminal violence throughout the country.

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Although the toll of this so-called war is unprecedented, activists within different movements and organizations of victims' families claim that the struggle for justice and memory goes beyond this specific context. They challenge the framing of the violence merely as an issue related to drugs and organized crime. Their interventions show the continuities in state violence over time, drawing attention to forms of structural violence that cut across enforced disappearances, violence against women, migrant deaths, resource extraction, attacks on activists and journalists, and the enduring discrimination against indigenous peoples and the dispossession of their lands.

THE LONG WAR

The *guerra contra el narco*, declared in 2006 by then-President Felipe Calderón, began as an enforcement strategy based on deploying an enlarged military presence throughout the country to confront criminal organizations. The immediate and lasting impact of this strategy has been widespread violence between the state and the drug cartels, and also among the cartels themselves, fighting to control territory and trafficking routes. Hundreds of thousands of people have been killed, disappeared, or displaced, with limited if any responses from the state to bring justice to families of the victims and create a framework for truth, reparations, and guarantees of non-repetition of atrocities.

The government's emphasis on a military strategy—as opposed to alternatives such as legalizing drugs, fighting corruption, and improving the justice system—was continued by the two presidents who followed Calderón. Enrique Peña Nieto, of the Institutional Revolutionary Party, drew heavy criticism and scrutiny for alleged corruption and widespread impunity. The current president, Andrés Manuel López Obrador of Morena, a party of the left, so far has fallen short of his campaign promise to shift the focus to justice for the victims. His administration has continued and even expanded the military's domestic deployment, while the number of those who have disappeared or been killed keeps rising.

López Obrador has made important symbolic moves to recognize victims of violence, including issuing public apologies, opening archives, creating a Commission for Truth and Justice in the case of 43 disappeared students from Ayotzinapa, and establishing a Mexico City memorial, the Sitio de Memoria Circular de Morelia, to acknowledge the state crimes of the 1970s Dirty War. Yet families' organizations and civil society groups have been disappointed by his dismissal of claims about the continuation of violence and human rights abuses during his administration. They have also criticized his failure to commit resources to investigate these cases and bring perpetrators (including state officials) to justice, to strengthen the Executive Commission for Attention to Victims (CEAV), or to offer reparations to victims.

The government's October 2021 establishment of a Commission for Truth and Justice (1965–1990) may well mark a shift. But it does not address violent events in the present or signal a departure from the strategy of militarization. So far, it has also failed to respond to demands for memory and justice regarding historical and structural violence against marginalized populations, in addition to criminal violence.

As with other cases of state violence and organized crime in Latin America, distinctions between victims and perpetrators are blurry. Peacemaking and memorialization efforts are not only contested by those directly affected and by the wider public, but also face threats from criminal organizations and state actors. The struggle over memory and justice in Mexico to a large extent is a struggle over what and who needs to be remembered in the first place, when these acts of remembrance should take place, and how memorials are part of the demand for truth, justice, reparations, and non-repetition.

MEMORY AS A SITE OF MOBILIZATION

Mass mobilizations against criminal violence and insecurity have taken place locally since the late 1990s, including some commemorative interventions, such as the pink crosses laid in public spaces throughout Ciudad Juárez to publicly mourn victims of femicide. The violence of the *guerra contra el narco* has led to unprecedented mass protests at the national level, however. The state's inadequate response to the consequences of its militarization strategy has also prompted the formation of community defense groups (*autodefensas*) who fight the drug cartels by their own means, while organized groups of victims' families and *rastreadoras* (trackers) have mobilized to search for mass graves and remains of their loved ones.

One of the most notable mobilizations took place in 2011, when Javier Sicilia founded the Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity

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(MPJD). Sicilia, a poet whose son was killed that year by members of a drug gang in Cuernavaca, Morelos, began a caravan for peace in Mexico and in the United States, aiming to bring together victims of this violence. This was a key moment in which the demands for justice for the victims were clearly articulated and recognized by the Mexican state. Among the resulting actions were a law to recognize and protect the rights of crime victims (passed in 2013), a national registry of victims, and a compensation fund (which became part of the CEAV, established in 2014).

The MPJD's demands also included a memorial for the victims of violence, bringing the question of memory and memorialization to the forefront of mass mobilizations. Up to this point, memory and public space had not been at the center of widespread debates in Mexico. Previous activism around these questions had mostly been suppressed by the state, particularly in the aftermath of the 1968 student massacre and the Dirty War of the 1970s—a time that the scholar María de Vecchi Gerli refers to as the "first period of disappearances." In part, de Vecchi Gerli claims, this was because Mexico's transition to democracy did not lead to deep structural change and lacked a framework of transitional justice, whereas other countries have experienced "military dictatorships or internal wars with more defined beginning and ending points."

Memory activists show the continuities in state violence over time.

The current "second period of disappearances" has seen an emergence of memory debates in a context marked by different forms of violence and high levels of impunity resulting from corruption and an ineffective criminal justice system. The MPJD called for spaces for communal mourning that could represent and mobilize society in response to the ongoing violence and its many victims—victims who are often portrayed by the government and the media as collateral damage, as criminals who killed each other, or as "deserving" of what happened to them, and whose families are often mistreated by authorities.

In the last months of his administration, Calderón responded to the MPJD's demand by designating a space next to the Campo Marte military camp in Mexico City as the site for a Memorial a las Víctimas de la Violencia (Memorial to the Victims of Violence). The memorial drew heavy criticism because of the rushed process through which the design was chosen, and even more so because of its location next to a military training camp, while the army has been implicated in the very violence that the memorial is supposed to address. The MPJD and most organizations representing victims and their families disengaged completely from the project, which they refer to as a "pretty park" or a "memorial of the state."

The struggle for memory has since taken form in different ways. Through interventions in state memorials, monuments, plazas, and other sites, activists create spaces for communal mourning and resist the idea of memorials as devices for closure. Different groups and organizations of families have renamed plazas, monuments, and streets, such as the Plaza de los Desaparecidos in Monterrey, the Estela de Luz monument in Mexico City, or the Memorial Calle 28 de marzo in Cuernavaca.

Collectives of embroiderers known as Bordando por la paz come together weekly in different parts of the country (and abroad) to embroider and display white handkerchiefs bearing the names of the disappeared in public spaces. The artist and activist collective Huellas de la Memoria has organized actions on the streets and in museums, universities, and other public spaces, displaying shoes of family members searching for the disappeared, from victims of the 1970s Dirty War to Central American migrants who went missing on their journey north.

Local memorials featuring murals and graffiti, including the Mural de la Memoria in Córdoba, Veracruz, or the Memoria que Resiste mural in Mexicali, Baja California, have challenged the narrative about victims as "collateral damage" or as deserving of what happened to them, and thus as undeserving of public commemoration. These interventions aim to counteract the normalization of violence by telling the stories of the victims, situating them in their local context, and making them widely visible to the public on well-known streets and plazas. Yet calls for broader solidarity have also been met with resistance. The parents' association of the school where the Mural de la Memoria was painted decided to erase it.

Other activists and victims working for memory and justice seek to confront both the state and the whole of society by placing "Antimonumentos" (countermonuments) in front of government

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offices and on important avenues, making public demands for accountability and against closure. All along Paseo de la Reforma, one of the main avenues in Mexico City, bold sculptures with bright colors bearing the number of victims for specific events commemorate different forms of violence over the past 15 years. They mark the 49 child victims of a 2009 fire in the ABC childcare facility in Hermosillo, Sonora, due to government neglect; the 2010 massacre of 72 migrants in San Fernando, Tamaulipas; and the 2014 disappearance of 43 students from Ayotzinapa, among others. They draw connections between historical events, such as the 1968 student massacre, and the violence that continues. The Antimonumenta installed in 2019 in the plaza of the renowned Palacio de Bellas Artes has an inscription that reminds the public that every day in Mexico, nine women are victims of femicide (in 2021 the number increased to 10.5).

Some memorials go further by creating spaces meant to address the conditions that led to violence. Among these are the New's Divine Memorial, the Memorial to the Victims of Disappearance in Baja California, and the proposed Memorial to the Victims of Enforced Disappearance in El Quemado. These projects have been able to secure government concessions of space and funding to offer cultural and educational activities focused on restitching the social fabric.

These are public acts of contestation, commemoration, and community building, not just spaces for collective mourning. They are framed as calls for the whole of society to join in the struggle for justice—recognizing that what is being remembered is still happening, and that it is part of a longer history of violence and state neglect, manifested in different forms.

THE POLITICS OF TIME

The debate taking place in Mexico is not only about the politics of memory—who gets to control the telling of the past, to name and publicly mourn the victims—but also about the politics of time. Who gets to declare "transitions," and when? How does the commemoration of past victims relate to the prevention of future violence? How can activists connect different forms and histories of injustice, not just to create broader solidarities, but to show the deep-seated structural conditions of violence and impunity?

In the context of the "war on drug cartels," successive presidents have attempted to put symbolic boundaries between their present and the previous administration's past. This reflects a "temporal Manichaeism" (in the words of historian Berber Bevernage), which locates human rights abuses mainly in the past and consequently focuses present efforts on public commemoration. Such an approach can be seen in Calderón's rushed process to create the Memorial a las Víctimas de la Violencia at the end of his administration, and in that project's focus on closure. It can also be found in the responses of the current administration.

The strategy of proclaiming a rupture fits in with the temporal politics prominently displayed in López Obrador's slogan of a "fourth transformation," promising a fundamental shift echoing previous defining moments in Mexican history. In this framing, the present and the future are symbolically unburdened by the legacies of the past. As the organization Article 19 has argued, however, the current government's approach to addressing the violence so far largely relies on symbolic gestures rather than a serious commitment to non-repetition. Apologies for colonial violence or isolated incidents are paired with denials of ongoing state crimes.

Memorialization efforts face threats from criminal organizations and state actors.

Memory activists, according to sociologist Yifat Gutman and political scientist Jenny Wüstenberg, "use memory as the crucial way of transforming society from below." The activism that fits this description in Mexico consists of diverse actors with various interests and goals, often embedded in specific local contexts. Nonetheless, Mexican memory activists share practices and have often resorted to two major strategies, both confronting the state with a different politics of time. They envision commemorative spaces not simply as places of mourning and accountability, but also as future-oriented spaces of intervention; and they actively link the past and the present to show continuities of state neglect and impunity.

Both of these strategies undermine the tendency of the state (and of each administration) to unburden the political present by locating injustice firmly in a clearly defined past. They also reject the idea that demands for restitution and struggles for transformation are mutually exclusive. Pursuing a form of prefigurative politics, they model and enact an alternative future. Accordingly, these

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social functions of commemorative spaces often go beyond addressing the past as past. Instead, they try to intervene in ongoing forms of violence and to demonstrate that the state has largely "rescinded its responsibility for the care of its constituents' bodies," as Mexican author Cristina Rivera Garza recently remarked.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

The New's Divine Memorial, in the low-income Mexico City neighborhood of Nueva Atzacoalco, is one such intervention. It commemorates the deaths of nine youths and three police officers, as well as sixteen people who sustained critical injuries, as a result of a police raid at a disco. Some of the victims suffocated to death after police closed the doors to prevent youths from leaving the premises. A culture of police brutality and the negligence of government authorities at various levels were blamed for this ill-conceived operation.

What happened at the New's Divine was a reflection of the larger problems faced by residents of impoverished areas of the city, where youths have limited opportunities for recreation and encounter the state mostly in the form of policing. Nueva Atzacoalco is considered a marginal zone at the border between Mexico City and the State of Mexico, and has largely been abandoned in terms of public space, services, and security. The police raid at the New's Divine resulted from false claims that the club was involved in small-scale drug trading. It was an easy target for the city government's claims that it was responding effectively against narco-violence. But the architect Sergio Beltrán-García, who led the memorial project, argues that the tragedy was also a consequence of structural neglect by the state.

The memorial is grounded in a set of questions that transcend the commemorative function of the space. Most directly, how can memorial architecture address the fact that there are few spaces for communities to gather and for youths to engage in activities like sports and cultural development? The memorial is a reminder of the consequences of this urban neglect, and of the negative portrayal of nightclubs frequented by youth. Beltrán-García refers to the memorial as "not just a building . . . [but] an institute . . . a public space, a problem-solving tool that gets the 'never again' narrative closer to everyday realities."

In other projects, Beltrán-García and the activists with whom he collaborates follow a similar future-oriented logic. His "Memorial to the City," a statement against the privatization of public space in Mexico City, imagined a memorial to a "tragedy that [had] not occurred yet." The civilian movement Nuestro Memorial 19s, in which Beltrán-García participated, requested civic input for the design of a memorial to the victims of the 2017 earthquake that toppled dozens of buildings in Mexico City, killing some 370 people. It sought a commemorative space focused on reconstruction as much as commemoration.

The Memorial to the Victims of Enforced Disappearance, commissioned by the federal government (though currently paused in response to families' demand for reparations first), commemorates the 91 victims of enforced disappearance and torture by the military in the town of El Quemado, Guerrero, in 1972. As stated in the description of the project, the memorial seeks to "remember these crimes of state terror, but also holistically repair root causes of the tragedy, thus reducing and preventing future reccurrences of state violence." This effort includes repurposing sites of violence to create spaces for cultural activities and agricultural development.

The work of memory activists at the Maclovio Rojas plot in Tijuana has a similar focus on urban renewal, community involvement, and social transformation. Like the New's Divine Memorial and the project for El Quemado, the Memorial to the Victims of Disappearance in Baja California is located in a specific place where violence occurred. This plot, known as "La Gallera," was one of the main sites where drug cartels brought dead bodies for disposal. In a space disguised as an auto-repair shop, a man nicknamed El Pozolero (The Stewmaker) would dissolve the bodies in acid and deposit the remains in a pit, making it nearly impossible to find any traces that could be identified through DNA analysis.

In an area where criminal violence is ever present, the memorial project was at first led by a group of activists and researchers from the Universidad Autónoma de Baja California, together with the Association of the Families of the Disappeared in Baja California. The project initially included a space for mourning as well as a community kitchen and arts programs, particularly focused on youth at risk of getting involved in organized crime.

But the funding promised by the government did not materialize until much later. Meanwhile,

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criminal groups left graffiti threats and dead animals wrapped in blankets inside the plot. The space remained mostly abandoned until new excavations began in 2017 to allow further forensic tests. After years of advocacy, the memorial site was officially inaugurated in 2018, and plates with the names of victims of disappearance in Baja California were finally placed in the space. The other elements of the project focusing on cultural development and community programming were discontinued, given the unsafe conditions in the neighborhood.

Apart from threats, such transformative memorial interventions face delays or cancellations of government funding, as well as backlashes from local communities that prefer not to draw attention to violent events that took place in their midst. In the case of New's Divine, most stakeholders were more interested in the legal claims around the case than in the memorial's intended role of keeping the memory of the tragedy alive or in its cultural programming.

These projects had limited government support and resources. But they also exemplify a lack of solidarity in society, which can prevent memorials from becoming sites where less-affected groups can reflect on their own relationship to, and complicity in, ongoing forms of violence. Some communities reject memorial spaces that blur the line between victim and perpetrator. Others fear that a memorial can generate more violence.

Such concerns emerged in the challenges to the Sitio de Memoria Circular de Morelia. Its commemorative plates in the garden across the street were vandalized, presumably by local residents. Some of the neighbors said that they did not want to be reminded of violent events in their neighborhood. They felt that the names of the disappeared should not be displayed publicly, assuming that they had likely been criminals.

There can also be a tension between what kinds of memorials best serve the needs of victims' families and what types of art or memory work can attract the (seemingly) unaffected. Families want recognition for a concrete act of injustice; other activists want to show the historical and structural conditions that shape the larger context in which state and criminal violence takes place. Spaces that achieve the latter goal often display certain levels of ambiguity and openness to allow for multiple historical associations. Such features do not always easily connect with families' demands for the moral clarity that serves as a foundation for claims to truth, justice, and reparations.

HISTORICAL CONTINUITIES

In 2018, the fiftieth anniversary of the 1968 student massacre was marked by the reopening of the memorial museum in the Plaza de Tlatelolco in Mexico City, where the events took place. Renamed M68: Memorial del 68 y Museo de los Movimientos Sociales (Memorial of 68 and Museum of Social Movements), the site attempts to challenge the dominant patriarchal and teleological narrative of the 1968 movement, with its leading male figures and its portrayal as a single, exceptional event, separated from past and current social movements.

In the vision of the lead curators, Luis Vargas Santiago and Luis Josué Martínez Rodríguez, M68 proposes a polyphonic, open approach to memory, drawing from a multiplicity of archives and artistic interventions to create a nonlinear narrative in which connections between past events and present movements can be made. They emphasize the idea that memory is always in construction and center a feminist perspective, bringing forward the voices of women in the 1968 movement. Their approach seeks to create discomfort, generate responses and action by the public, and challenge the idea of closure in monuments, memorials, or archives.

It is reflective of the shift in Mexico's memory debate that such claims are made by M68, an institutional space that is part of the National Autonomous University and has a wide public reach, drawing students from around the country and providing programming for the local community. Yet such challenges to the dominant narrative and evocations of historical continuities have already been at the center of some memory activists' work, most notably that of Comité 68, Comité ¡Eureka!, and H.I.J.O.S. These organizations were founded by activists, intellectuals, and victims' families to search for the disappeared, to commemorate victims of the 1968 and 1971 student massacres in Mexico City and the Dirty War of the 1970s, and to build legal cases against the responsible state officials.

Their protests and interventions in public spaces and archives have challenged the state's narrative by drawing links between the drug war and state violence dating back decades. The Museo Casa de la Memoria Indómita in Mexico City, established in 2012 by Comité ¡Eureka!, connects the violence of 1968 and 1971 with current events, demonstrating the continuation of a system of impunity and the cartels' adoption of state methods from the Dirty War.

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Comité 68's 2013 intervention in the Memorial to the Victims of Violence in Mexico City made these connections explicit by placing canvases with the names of 7,978 victims of political persecution, torture, extrajudicial killing, forced disappearance, femicide, and criminal negligence on the empty steel plates of the "state memorial." The list goes back to the 1950s, but it also includes events that occurred after the inauguration of the memorial, such as the disappearance of 43 students from Ayotzinapa in 2014. Comité 68 calls this a "seized memorial." It renamed the space with a canvas that reads "Memorial to the Victims of *State* Violence," echoing the slogan of mass mobilizations around the disappearance of the 43 students: "Fue el Estado" (It Was the State). Comité 68's long-term vision is to create a space for its archive in the memorial in order to document state violence, assign responsibility to the perpetrators, and recognize the victims.

The philosopher Tzvetan Todorov's distinction between literal and exemplary memories—between a memory that adheres to the specificity of an event (and the event's meaning for the specific victims) and a memory that strives for generalizations—is useful for understanding such activist interventions. To a certain extent, those two poles are always at play in public memory: some victims strive for recognition for a specific instance or moment of suffering, whereas other activists give meaning to events by linking them to questions about the underlying conditions in which violence and injustice occur. Memorial interventions are aimed at examining specific events in the context of a larger history.

Activists like the Comité 68 do not simply create an analogy between events, but remind us of historical continuities in the trajectory of Mexican politics. In the words of sociologist Robin Wagner-Pacifici, they "carry events forward." The continuities they expose lie not only in the system of impunity, but also in the cartels' direct involvement in and appropriation of the state's counter-insurgency methods of the Dirty War. Now, activists have started to draw even wider circles of historical injustice to build broader solidarities against the enduring effects of patriarchal and colonial violence.

Memory as Past, Present, and Future

The Mexico City government's recent proposal to replace the Columbus statue with a replica of a pre-Columbian statue was framed by the mayor as a recognition of "a history of classism and racism that dates back to colonization." This discourse attempted to respond to the demands that feminist collectives, indigenous movements, and memory activists have made for recognizing the historical roots of the current violence and linking different forms of violence.

Yet as Fátima Gamboa, a Mayan lawyer who is part of the Red Abogadas Indígenas (Network of Indigenous Lawyers), argued: "The debate is now about a statue rather than about the rights of the women who are alive now, their precarious socioeconomic status, and the discrimination they continue to face." One of the challenges in this debate over public memory, at the center of intersecting struggles for justice in Mexico, is how to link accountability for past injustices to a commitment to social transformation in the present.

In a context of continuing violence, repression, and dismissal—consider López Obrador's statements that reports of domestic violence are exaggerated and that he has "had enough" (*ya chole*) of feminist groups—there is a struggle to change dominant narratives that have historically criminalized activists and victims of violence and generated social indifference. At the same time, the breadth of the movement for memory and justice, with its multiple manifestations around the country and echoes in the Mexican diaspora, offers an opportunity to demonstrate how memorials not only can support the struggle for truth and justice, but also can create public space to address the conditions of violence—with the past, present, and future in mind.

This long-standing call echoes Rosario Castellanos's 1968 poem "Memorial de Tlatelolco," written after the student massacre of October 2:

> *Recuerdo, recordamos*
> *Esta es nuestra manera de ayudar a que amanezca*
> *sobre tantas conciencias mancilladas,*
> *sobre un texto iracundo, sobre una reja abierta,*
> *sobre el rostro amparado tras la máscara.*
> *Recuerdo, recordemos*
> *hasta que la justicia se siente entre nosotros.*

"I remember, we remember / This is our way of helping it dawn / upon so many tainted consciences, / upon a wrathful text, upon an open fence, / upon the face sheltered behind the mask. / I remember, let us remember / Until justice comes to sit among us." ■

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"Brazil's response to the pandemic is partly a story of neglect, but also a story of how social forces mobilized and sought to push back against neglect."

Neglect and Resistance in Brazil's Pandemic

JOÃO NUNES

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On October 26, 2021, a committee of the Brazilian Senate approved the final report of an inquiry into the country's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on a six-month investigation, the 1,300-page report provides evidence of the Brazilian federal government's direct responsibility for the calamity, which so far has resulted in over 610,000 deaths and more than 22 million confirmed infections. The report singles out President Jair Bolsonaro as having committed nine crimes, including charlatanism and crimes against humanity.

Analyzing Brazil's response to COVID-19 with a focus on neglect puts the role of Bolsonaro's government in a new light. The Brazilian response produced neglect through a combination of omissions, obstructions, and deliberate actions on the part of the federal government, including Bolsonaro himself and other actors around him. But to see Brazil's handling of the pandemic as simply a matter of governmental failure risks overlooking the fact that the response has been traversed by political struggle, with many actors mobilizing various forms of resistance. In other words, Brazil's response to the pandemic is partly a story of neglect, but also a story of how social forces mobilized and sought to push back against neglect.

In order to understand how neglect came to define the Brazilian response to the pandemic, some observations about the meaning of "neglect" are in order. We tend to approach neglect as a matter of something being overlooked, forgotten, or rendered invisible. But there are also cases where things are hidden in plain sight. In such cases, the way a certain reality has been presented may prevent us from identifying important dimensions.

In the realm of public health problems, there may be situations in which an issue has been ignored (involving certain rare diseases, for example), or purposefully concealed by those in charge (as with lead contamination), or even relegated to such a low rank in the list of priorities that the response is inadequate or nonexistent (mental health services, for instance). In other areas, problems can be highly visible yet obstacles to alleviation or resolution remain entrenched. In these situations, the issue is not invisibility, but rather how the health problem has been rendered visible—what aspects have been privileged, and what other, deeper dimensions remain unseen or obscured.

It would be impossible to claim that COVID-19 has been an invisible health problem. Nonetheless, much can be said about the quality of the attention it has received in certain countries, and how such attention failed to prevent situations of neglect or may even have contributed to reproducing them.

In Brazil's case, despite intense political and media scrutiny, the COVID-19 response was permeated with neglect. One aspect of this pertains to disease transmission. The Senate inquiry revealed that the federal government, and specifically Bolsonaro, failed to act to prevent transmission. The state did not restrict the circulation of people or bar large gatherings, nor did it incentivize the use of masks. Unlike many countries, Brazil never had a nationwide lockdown. Instead, the federal government, which was constitutionally mandated to coordinate a pandemic response, effectively worked to promote transmission of the virus.

A study by researchers from the University of São Paulo and the civil society organization Conectas Direitos Humanos, led by Deisy Ventura, Fernando Aith, Camila Lissa Asano, and Rossana Rocha Reis, examined over 3,000 federal regulations and directives issued in 2020, concluding that there was a deliberate governmental strategy

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to allow the virus to spread, and even to facilitate its dissemination. This entailed, among other things, calling on people to carry on with their lives as usual and disparaging the use of masks.

The government acted under the misguided assumption that collective immunity (or herd immunity) could be achieved by transmission, rather than immunization. In April 2020, Bolsonaro claimed that the disease would disappear when 70 percent of the population became infected and developed antibodies. The likely consequences of uncontrolled transmission had already been pointed out by many experts, in Brazil and worldwide.

The neglect of disease transmission by Bolsonaro's government included a combination of actions and inactions that resulted in a surge in hospitalizations and high death tolls. In many regions, this led to the collapse of hospital capacity. One stark example was the January 2021 "oxygen crisis" in Manaus, the largest city in the Amazon. At least 30 COVID-19 patients died due to lack of oxygen supplies or means of transport to other facilities.

Poverty and Risk

Another instance of the neglect of COVID-19 in Brazil pertains to socioeconomic determinants, or the conditions in society and the economy that may influence patterns of disease spread. In handling the pandemic, Brazil had to grapple with extremely high levels of poverty and inequality that left a substantial part of the population at high risk of infection. Many Brazilians could not avoid going to work, traveling on public transport, or living in overcrowded and unsanitary conditions.

The federal government effectively worked to promote transmission of the virus.

Some social protection measures were implemented during the pandemic, most notably the temporary cash transfer program Emergency Aid (Auxílio Emergencial). The program was aimed at low-income informal workers, the self-employed, and underprivileged sectors of the population. Through the end of October 2021, over 60 billion reais (roughly $11 billion) had been disbursed through this program.

Nonetheless, it would be erroneous to say that these measures show that the government acted to address socioeconomic determinants of disease transmission. The government failed to address rising unemployment during the pandemic, which peaked at 14.7 percent in March–April 2021 and by August was still at 13.2 percent, affecting 13.7 million Brazilians. Moreover, most jobs created during the pandemic were of low quality: in July 2021, over 7.7 million people were underemployed, working fewer hours than they could—a 25 percent increase from a year earlier. The government also failed to control inflation, which reached a 12-month rate of 10.25 percent in September 2021.

Overall, Brazil's economic situation during the pandemic was marked by impoverishment of the population. Between August 2020 and August 2021, average income in real terms decreased by 10.2 percent, the largest drop since 2012. According to a study by the Fundação Getúlio Vargas, as of October 2021 there were roughly 28 million Brazilians living below the poverty line, about 5 million more than before the pandemic. A December 2020 study found that 117 million Brazilians faced moderate to serious food insecurity during the pandemic, with difficulty accessing sufficient or adequate food. Of these, 19 million were living in hunger.

Economists have argued that the effects of the emergency cash transfer program have proved to be merely anaesthetic, failing to address structural problems in the economy—the same problems that aggravated the effects of the pandemic. The government's measures were also insufficient to create the economic conditions that would enable people to stay home and prevent the spread of the disease. The government's announcement of a new, haphazard cash transfer program to replace both the emergency assistance and the internationally acclaimed Bolsa Família program—created in 2004 during the presidency of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva—has led to further economic uncertainty, revealing that Bolsonaro is ready to forgo fiscal responsibility and lay waste to good practice in social policy in order to seek an advantage in the October 2022 elections.

Pandemic Populism

A troubled economy is a predictable result of a pandemic. This does not exculpate Bolsonaro's government, however. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, Bolsonaro emphasized the need to protect the economy first and foremost, asking people to continue to go to work. This rhetoric, which included the president's comparison of COVID-19 to a "downpour" that would

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inevitably get people wet, created a false dichotomy between protecting the economy or public health. It was a form of blackmail, in that Bolsonaro and his government attempted to make people accept the virus and its consequences in the name of saving the economy. The result was two interlinked disasters.

As is demonstrated by rising unemployment and growing precarity, the Bolsonaro government never had a purposeful social protection strategy aimed at protecting jobs, income, and livelihoods. Nor was attention paid to working conditions during the pandemic—leaving thousands of frontline health workers without access to personal protective equipment (PPE). The administration never set a clear economic direction, beyond zig-zagging attempts to satisfy corporate agendas and crucial interest groups—such as the parliamentarians who could guarantee the survival of Bolsonaro's government and spare him from impeachment.

Indeed, Bolsonaro's administration has no clear ideology and no clear governing strategy, save that of dismantling what past governments achieved. It is predicated on the permanent creation of diversions and confusion—philosopher Marcos Nobre has termed it "chaos as method"—to distract people from the president's constant mishaps and failures, while satisfying an extremist base of supporters.

The social protection measures instituted by the government during the pandemic need to be understood as part of an ongoing effort by Bolsonaro to broaden his base in the run-up to the October 2022 elections. In fact, Bolsonaro at first was reluctant to support the emergency cash transfer program, which was originally developed by other political parties in Congress. Then he seized on it as a way to boost his dwindling popularity ratings by appealing to the poorest sectors of the population, particularly those in the northern and northeastern states. In past elections, they voted for the Workers' Party of da Silva, who will be running in the 2022 presidential election after his corruption convictions were overturned by the Supreme Court in April 2021.

As a populist leader, Bolsonaro has been campaigning ever since he was elected—not only for reelection but also to maintain his popularity among key sectors (such as the military and the police) and among his social media followers. His public statements make clear that he is primarily interested in political survival and in avoiding prosecution. In August 2021, he claimed that the three options available to him were "being sent to jail, death, or victory." For him, the pandemic was always just a backdrop for his own travails.

OMISSIONS AND OBSTRUCTIONS

An assessment of Bolsonaro's brand of populism is essential for understanding the extent to which the pandemic was neglected. It helps explain why this neglect was not simply a failure to recognize or deal with the problem, but rather a complex mixture of omissions, obstructions, and actions.

Throughout the pandemic, there were several manifestations of denialism on the part of Bolsonaro and his government. Early on, the president dismissed the severity of the disease, calling it merely a "little flu" that would severely affect only the elderly and the immunocompromised. His government failed to take the crisis seriously and refused to assume a leadership and coordinating role, constantly shirking its responsibilities.

This failure of leadership revealed itself in numerous ways: in the absence of clear guidance and PPE provision for frontline health workers; in inadequate stockpiling and distribution of essential items like oxygen tanks and anaesthetics for intubation procedures; and in the lack of a clear public communication strategy to inform people of risks and preventive measures. The government was slow in responding to pharmaceutical companies offering deals for vaccines, and deliberately prolonged the negotiations. The government also took an ambiguous position toward the World Health Organization's COVAX facility, which aims to distribute discounted COVID-19 vaccines to lower-income countries. Brazil only joined COVAX at a late stage.

Another omission relates to corruption that occurred at a time when official vaccine negotiations between the federal government and pharmaceutical companies had stalled. According to the Senate inquiry, Bolsonaro failed to act when informed that representatives of obscure companies were offering to mediate in negotiations with Ministry of Health officials for purchases of vaccines at inflated prices.

It would be simplistic to describe the Brazilian government, and Bolsonaro himself, as simply omissive, however. Bolsonaro failed to act, but he also deliberately sought to obstruct those who wanted to act. He repeatedly clashed with state governors and mayors who instituted more restrictive measures, accusing them of infringing on citizens'

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freedoms and laying blame on these officials for the economic consequences of the pandemic.

Bolsonaro assumed a contrarian posture toward scientists and health authorities who warned against large public gatherings. He made a point of routinely going out in public without a mask, meeting supporters, and fomenting large gatherings. He called into question the effectiveness and safety of vaccines, even as the immunization campaign got underway. He refused to be vaccinated himself, joking in December 2020 that COVID-19 vaccines might turn people into alligators. Bolsonaro's anti-vaccine pronouncements persisted well into the pandemic. In October 2021, he mentioned an old and discredited story about the supposed association between COVID-19 vaccination and faster development of AIDS.

The president also cast doubt on official data for infections, deaths, and hospital-bed occupancy rates. In June 2020, he urged his supporters to invade public hospitals and gather video "evidence" of how many beds were actually filled with COVID-19 patients. Also that month, in the face of a growing number of cases and deaths, the official government website for COVID-19 statistics briefly stopped presenting cumulative data for the pandemic. The Supreme Court later ordered the website's data to be reinstated.

Bolsonaro's position was not simply denialist. He sought to obstruct, to sow doubt and mistrust, and to obfuscate the real toll of the pandemic.

Perverse Activism

Yet Bolsonaro the obstructionist had another side, closer to what could be considered, in the words of doctor and medical science educator Drauzio Varella, a position of "activism." While dragging his feet on vaccine purchases, Bolsonaro was extremely active in promoting ineffective "early treatments" like hydroxychloroquine and ivermectin—long after Donald Trump had stopped doing so. On September 21, 2021, Bolsonaro was still promoting these medicines in his speech before the General Assembly of the United Nations. The persistence of this behavior, even after the effectiveness of these drugs against COVID-19 had long been disproved by scientific studies, led the Senate inquiry committee to call for Bolsonaro's indictment for charlatanism, among other charges.

The Senate investigation also uncovered evidence that the peddling of false COVID-19 treatments was supported by a parallel "cabinet" providing Bolsonaro with advice that went against the scientific consensus, and by the spread of misinformation by parliamentarians and Bolsonaro's sons. Bolsonaro's insistence on an "early treatment" for COVID-19 was a coordinated effort that included the Ministry of Economy, aiming to create the illusion of a panacea that might dissuade people from staying home. Bolsonaro's actions resulted in public funds and resources being diverted to produce and distribute these medicines, at a time when the country was struggling to secure sufficient vaccines for a sustained immunization drive.

Bolsonaro's activist stance was also visible in attempts to turn the pandemic into another chapter of Brazil's culture wars. In May 2020, he repeatedly joked that chloroquine was taken by those on the right of the political spectrum—thereby turning what should have been a scientific debate about the effectiveness (or lack thereof) of this drug into an ideological dispute.

Poverty and inequality left much of the population at high risk of infection.

Bolsonaro viewed the pandemic through the prism of a permanent confrontation with his critics and opponents (real and imagined), most notably São Paulo Governor João Doria, who has announced his intention to run for president in 2022. Doria's state government supported the development of the Coronavac vaccine, in a collaboration between the Chinese company Sinovac Biotech and the São Paulo–based Instituto Butantã. Bolsonaro worked to discredit this vaccine, using rhetoric that included dog-whistling xenophobia. Other members of his government joined in, notably then–Minister of Foreign Affairs Ernesto Araújo and Minister of Economy Paulo Guedes. Their pronouncements created diplomatic problems that may have jeopardized Brazil's internal vaccine production. It has been suggested that China, Brazil's main supplier of pharmaceutical ingredients, may have prioritized other countries in its exports in response to the Sinophobic statements coming from the upper echelons of the Brazilian government.

Bolsonaro may have been trying to stay afloat politically in the troubled waters of the pandemic, but in doing so he harmed the country's pandemic

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response when it suited him. He pushed to keep the economy going in a bid to avoid blame for the country's economic deterioration, and tried to undermine the achievements of potential rivals. When confronted with the pandemic's death toll, Bolsonaro was dismissive, repeatedly saying that he was "sorry," but everyone has to die someday. Again, Bolsonaro sought not simply to navigate the pandemic, but to use it to advance his interests and agenda through a combination of omissions, obstructions, and deliberate actions.

The human costs took a back seat, even when it came to the president's own supporters. According to a study by researchers Sandro Cabral, Niboiuki Ito, and Leandro Pongeluppe, available in a preprint version last revised in August 2021, municipalities where Bolsonaro received a majority of votes in the 2018 election appear to have been harder hit by COVID-19. The data show a strong association between Bolsonaro's television and radio statements and shifts in the pandemic curve. The authors estimate that one year after the first diagnosed case in Brazil, municipalities with Bolsonaro voter majorities registered 299 percent more new cases and 415 percent more new related deaths. The differences were even more pronounced in municipalities where Bolsonaro won with more than 70 percent of the vote. These registered 567 percent more new cases and 647 percent more new deaths than in municipalities where he secured narrower victories.

Bolsonaro's brand of pandemic activism also had a heavy impact on indigenous peoples. As of late November 2021, there were more then 61,000 confirmed cases of COVID-19 among the indigenous population, and 1,235 deaths. According to a study led by Josilene D. Alves, which drew on official data from the Special Secretariat for Indigenous Health, in July 2020, COVID-19 incidence among indigenous peoples was more than 16 times higher than in the rest of the Brazilian population, and COVID-19 mortality among indigenous peoples was 6.5 times higher. According to the study, the indigenous population's vulnerabilities in the pandemic include a higher prevalence of infectious diseases, respiratory diseases, and chronic diseases; high rates of malnutrition and obesity; poverty; and the risks associated with communal living, particularly the high number of residents per household and the sharing of personal utensils.

The Senate inquiry recommended indicting Bolsonaro on charges of crimes against humanity, specifically in relation to his failure to address the particular vulnerabilities of Brazil's indigenous population. This charge is one step short of genocide, which was considered in an early draft of the Senate report. That would have required evidence of a deliberate intention on the part of Bolsonaro to eliminate indigenous groups.

Regardless of the charges that made it into the final report, the neglect of indigenous populations during the COVID-19 pandemic cannot be understood simply by looking at the policies that Bolsonaro's government implemented, or failed to implement. One must consider the interaction, cumulative impact, and even side effects of other actions and omissions on the part of this government, some of which predate COVID-19 and go beyond the strict sphere of public health.

These omissions and actions have included failing to enforce environmental regulations that could stop the destruction of the homelands of indigenous groups (namely the Amazonian rainforest), and deliberately working to accelerate this destruction; blocking the demarcation of indigenous territory; weakening or co-opting institutions created to protect indigenous peoples; dehumanizing indigenous peoples through comments that present them as uncivilized or as obstacles to progress; and seeking to assimilate them by condoning, and even in some cases promoting, the destruction of their traditional ways of life and the invasion of their territories. Taken together, these may plausibly be considered a strategy of elimination.

PUSHING BACK

Discussions of the Brazilian response to the pandemic have a tendency to make it simply a story about Bolsonaro. This is a simplistic reading that misses important aspects of the situation. The Senate inquiry revealed an ecosystem of parliamentarians, Ministry of Health officials, private actors and intermediaries, doctors, military personnel, and online influencers—many with direct or indirect links to Bolsonaro himself—who all contributed to the public health disaster. But there is much more to this story than Bolsonaro and his entourage.

Neglect can be viewed as a relationship in which certain groups (indigenous populations, for instance) are systematically placed by the state or other powerful actors in a situation of vulnerability to illness. This vulnerability is compounded by the inability to bounce back when disease occurs—in the strict sense of not having access

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to the means to regain health, and in the broader sense of being unable to recover from its economic consequences. As a relational phenomenon, neglect is always contested. The actions and omissions of elites or powerful actors trigger the reactions of other actors, both public and private, who attempt to resist and subvert them—and even, at times, to bypass them altogether, setting out their own alternative agendas.

Such was the case in Brazil, where many actors sought to offset the consequences of governmental neglect. Countless professionals in the country's public health system, the Sistema Único de Saúde (SUS), including doctors, nurses, nursing technicians, and community health workers, carried out their work in the absence of centralized guidance. Despite the paralysis and obstructions at the federal level, the middle and community levels of the system displayed resilience. They continued to function, often with pragmatic adaptations to the new pandemic reality, such as developing new masks and protocols.

Professionals cared for infected patients and conveyed risk and prevention messages that the federal government failed or refused to deliver to the public. Although lacking adequate PPE provision, they carried out their work in close proximity to vulnerable populations. The SUS has also done a remarkable job rolling out the immunization campaign despite a shortage of vaccines caused by governmental neglect. By late November 2021, 307 million doses had been administered, and 62.9 percent of the population was fully vaccinated.

Yet the SUS, which played such an important role in the response, has itself become a terrain of struggle. Beset by chronic underfunding and lack of resources, it has been targeted for renewed efforts at privatization in recent years. At the same time, the health service has been criticized for its supposed inefficiency and poor quality by private actors, namely private health-care plan providers, and by some neoliberal-influenced political sectors—including those close to Bolsonaro. These attacks have met with resistance from scientists, health professionals, and civil society movements, who have questioned the assumptions and agendas underpinning such criticisms.

Another example of the resistance to governmental neglect can be found in Brazil's scientific community—a long-standing target of Bolsonaro's rhetoric. His anti-science diatribes cannot be separated from his attempts to wage a culture war against alleged leftist bias in public universities. But Brazilian scientists working in research institutions like the Instituto Butantã and the Fundação Oswaldo Cruz (Fiocruz) have contributed to the research, development, and production of vaccines. Epidemiological studies that played a crucial role in the COVID-19 immunization strategy were carried out by the same public universities that Bolsonaro has constantly demonized.

When Bolsonaro's government attempted to impose a blackout on pandemic data, including numbers of infections and deaths, some of the country's major news outlets joined forces to collect and systematize local- and municipal-level data. This ensured the continuity of daily updates on the country's epidemiological situation. On a parallel track, a network of software developers and volunteers worked to consolidate state-level epidemiological information to supplement the data available to both the public and researchers. Fiocruz, which is the largest public research institution in Brazil and is linked to the Ministry of Health, also provided detailed data in weekly epidemiological surveillance bulletins.

Governors and mayors provided examples of alternative ways to face the pandemic.

Across the country, state governors and mayors provided examples of alternative ways to confront the pandemic—and indications of what a more responsible and effective nationwide response might have looked like. One example is the small city of Araraquara, in the state of São Paulo, which drew Bolsonaro's criticism for imposing two strict lockdowns in 2021. The first lockdown lasted from February 23 to March 2, and the second from June 20 to 27. Researchers at the Federal University of São Carlos have shown that the first lockdown prevented 3,500 infections and 259 deaths, in a city that had to that point registered 171 deaths. The second reduced the daily average of new cases by 49 percent and the number of hospitalizations by 24 percent.

Civil society also offered resistance to the government's neglect. One organization, the Articulation of Indigenous Peoples of Brazil (APIB), highlighted the insufficiencies of governmental policies to address the impact of the pandemic on indigenous peoples. As of November 2021, it continued to collect detailed evidence showing

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that the government's response had resulted in the violation of their rights to life and health. In June 2020, APIB had presented its own alternative emergency plan to forestall the unfolding disaster. This plan included recommendations for government action ranging from massive testing, improvements to disease surveillance networks, enhanced communication with indigenous leaders, improved risk communication strategies, provision of more medical personnel and PPE to indigenous villages, and measures aimed at ensuring livelihoods and food security, among many others.

In sum, multiple and diverse forms of resistance to the government's neglect have emerged throughout the pandemic, with different degrees of success. Any account of the Brazilian response to COVID-19 would be incomplete without assessing them.

CONSEQUENCES TO COME

It is uncertain whether Bolsonaro will face consequences for his neglect of the pandemic. Criminal prosecutions of a president in office depend on the prosecutor-general—and the current holder of the post, Augusto Aras, has been consistently omissive, to Bolsonaro's benefit. But criminal charges are possible when Bolsonaro leaves office. The International Criminal Court will receive the Senate report and may investigate alleged crimes against humanity.

Impeachment proceedings are unlikely, however, given the proximity of the upcoming elections, as well as the present configuration of parliamentary forces, many of which have benefited from budgetary amendments enabled by the Bolsonaro administration. Nor is it certain that the electorate will punish Bolsonaro for his handling of the pandemic. The country's economic situation is more likely to be the determining factor in voting decisions.

Nonetheless, governmental neglect of the pandemic left an immense toll in lives lost and long-term effects, as well as a socioeconomic crisis. The loss of skills and talents will impede Brazil's development for decades to come. So will the severe disruption to the education of younger generations—another neglected aspect of the pandemic.

The magnitude of the crisis may contribute to reaffirming in the eyes of the Brazilian public, and even some of the country's elites, the importance of upholding health as a public good. New party-political alignments may begin to emerge in response to the dire socioeconomic situation. But it is more likely that change, at least in the short term, will emerge from the social movements—inspired by feminist, black, indigenous, and LGBTQI+ struggles—that have long been pushing back against Bolsonaro and the culture of neglect he represents. ■

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"[P]aradoxically, it is Peru's political bankruptcy—in terms of parties, policies, and leadership—that has enabled this resurrection of history in the nation's political life."

An Eruption of History in Peru's Bicentenary

ALBERTO VERGARA

azotado de fechas con espinas
[whipped by dates with thorns]
—César Vallejo

Anyone who visited Peru today would be struck by the starring role of historical discussion in the public sphere. Tuning in to a news broadcast, one would see members of Congress or reporters declaring their positions on the Spanish Conquest and independence, on the 1968–75 military government of General Juan Velasco Alvarado and its agrarian reform, or on the origins of the 1993 constitution and its consequences.

Until very recently, things were not like this in Peru. The past two decades were characterized by a public sphere uninterested in—perhaps even at odds with—history. It was generally thought that the country was fueled by the economy alone, rather than some form of common historical construction. But now the situation is different: history is back, in a strange and unexpected relationship with politics in contemporary Peru.

The evolution of historical and political readings of countries occurs alongside the evolution of the actual histories and politics of these same countries. In the Latin America of the 1960s and 1970s, for instance—marked by revolutionary horizons and the pall of dictatorship—the social sciences tended to center on development-related issues and theories of modernization or dependency, whereas the democratization trend of the 1980s and the collapse of communist regimes around the world coincided with an academic concern for citizenship and democratic institutions. These narratives and realities fed into each other.

In the 2000s, Peru enjoyed unprecedented economic expansion. Between 2001 and 2014, the economy doubled in size and the poverty rate fell from 54.8 percent to 22.7 percent. Peru was the star performer in Latin America, prompting former US Vice President Al Gore to speculate that the world would soon recognize "the Peruvian miracle." As far as the establishment and the official (largely *limeño*) discourse were concerned, this success stemmed from a decisive milestone in national life: the Constitution of 1993, which had done away with the populist state and transferred responsibility for development to the private sector. In this reading, contemporary Peru had vanquished the historical Peru so prone to rebellion, populism, and instability.

It is no coincidence that the state-led multimillion-sol Marca Perú (Brand Peru) campaign of the 2000s promoted the notion of the country as being, above all, one great brand. This brand depicted a festive nation, enriched by and proud of its cuisine, but also shorn of conflicts, history, or intellectuals. In this context, neither the political nor the media, business, or technocratic elites held up any kind of historical lens to the country.

The era's economic growth also coincided with the degradation of political representation. "Peru may be the most extreme case of party collapse in Latin America," political scientists Steven Levitsky and Mauricio Zavaleta said. A majority of representatives lacked both the interest and the ability to explore historical complexities. Urban Peru—the part of the country most attuned to the world and to the benefits of economic expansion—enjoyed a spell of satisfied amnesia.

In 2021, the 200th anniversary of Peruvian independence stirred hopes that commemorations

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would spark a national conversation. But as in the rest of Latin America, where many nations have commemorated their bicentenaries in recent years, there was little interest. Well-intentioned government and private commissions did not appeal to either the general public or the political elites. Planning was disrupted by the coronavirus pandemic, which hit Peru like no other country in the world, leaving 200,000 dead. Gross domestic product shrank by 11 percent by the end of 2020. Peruvian society reached the bicentennial in a beleaguered state, and there was nothing to indicate that the milestone would awaken any sort of historical introspection.

Yet as Bob Dylan sang, "Tomorrow is never what it was supposed to be." The presidential election of 2021 altered the trajectory. As if chance and fate were two sides of the same coin, political contingency intermingled with the old social structures.

THE ANDEAN CANDIDATE

In April 2021, the Peruvian citizenry proved apathetic about the first round of the presidential elections, giving rise to highly fragmented results in which no candidate exceeded 20 percent of the votes cast. Pedro Castillo, a political unknown who did not even register in polling ten days before the election, finished first with 19 percent—a share that would have been good enough only for fourth place in any previous election. Keiko Fujimori finished second, with just 13 percent, and advanced to the second round for the third time running. (She had lost the previous two presidential runoffs in 2011 and 2016.)

Many Peruvians still regard the Inca Empire as the nation's golden age.

This contingent outcome aroused the most profound and structural differences in national political life, as the two candidates embodied totally opposite positions. Whereas Fujimori laid claim to the rightist authoritarian mantle of her father, former President Alberto Fujimori (who held office from 1990 to 2000), Castillo's party, Perú Libre, is avowedly Leninist and in favor of the dictatorships in Venezuela, Cuba, and Nicaragua. Fujimori positioned herself as the candidate of capitalism, whereas Castillo routinely used words such as "nationalization" and "statization."

As Fujimori attracted mass support in Lima, Castillo won over voters in the provinces, especially those in the highland regions. These political differences gave rise to (and were subsequently radicalized by) demonstrations. Racist and classist organizations and discourses emerged in Lima—alongside the Fujimorista right—to contest the legitimacy of Castillo's platform. The political polarization filtered through to society.

And then, it burst into history. Castillo's candidacy called out to neglected, provincial Peru, pitting the high Andes against frivolous Lima, Quechua against Spanish. In the words of historian Raúl Asensio, the myth of the "provincial redeemer" was born. The old Peruvian political and intellectual tradition that historian José Luis Rénique has termed "the radical nation" came to the fore.

In 1888, after the nation's traumatic defeat by Chile in the Pacific War, essayist and poet Manuel González Prada asserted that the "real Peru" could be found not along the coastline but in the settlements of the Andes. Since then, modern Peruvian radicalism has been tied to the highlands, which it depicts as the sole space for national redemption. Its essence was encapsulated in 1927 by José Carlos Mariátegui—the Marxist intellectual and founder of the Peruvian Socialist Party—who endorsed the idea that "the indigenous proletariat awaits its Lenin." From then on, almost all radical leftist projects have been rooted in the Peruvian Sierra, which is treated as the repository of the genuine and lost morals of the nation—a space that reminds Peru of its origins and embodies its long-term trajectory.

Castillo, a rural teacher and trade unionist, personified and aired many of these ideas that the boom years had concealed. As Asensio has argued, these concerns survived in marginal and radical public spaces, above all in the highlands. But they are always present. Some years ago, I published a book titled *Ni Amnésicos Ni Irracionales*, in which I proposed that the Peruvian electorate judges electoral candidates based on simple but important historical reference points (hence the title's dismissal of the suggestion of voter amnesia). The victories of presidential candidates Alejandro Toledo in 2001 and Ollanta Humala in 2011, both of whom had historical and political links to *Perú profundo*, as the geographical, political, and cultural hinterland is known, proved that the soil was fertile for the politicization of these connections, beyond electoral conjunctures.

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Paradoxically, then, the 2021 election, with insubstantial candidates who failed to capture the public imagination, presented an opening for the exploitation of social inequalities and the old and debilitated radical tradition—and with them, of history.

In praise of the Incas

On July 28, 2021, Peru celebrated the bicentenary of its declaration of independence and Castillo took possession of the presidency. The public was surprised to hear the new president devote the first five minutes of his speech to reviewing the country's history—and proposing a historical perspective that had been absent for a long time. For starters, on the national bicentennial, he downplayed the importance of the date, asserting that independence had not brought "real improvement for most Peruvians." He insisted, "Our history goes much further back than that."

For millennia, Castillo continued, the Andean inhabitants had lived in harmony with nature and found ways of solving their problems. The men from Castile did away with that world and replaced it with centuries of subjugation, while the minerals they extracted paid for European development. But now, for the first time, "the country will be governed by a *campesino*, a person who belongs, like many Peruvians, to the sectors oppressed for so many centuries."

The wager on history is manifest. So, too, is the simplism: life was harmonious until the Spaniards arrived to usher in centuries of uninterrupted economic exploitation and political degradation, with a handful of oppressors and throngs of the oppressed. This historical narrative is well known in Peru. In their 1988 book, Gonzalo Portocarrero and Patricia Oliart examined "the critical idea" of Peruvian history—one that was reproduced at the state schools through radicalized leftist teachers. Many Peruvians still regard the Inca Empire as the nation's golden age.

In the end, this "critical idea" coalesced with political faith. Castillo closed the historical section of his inaugural by exalting himself as a liberator in an age-old tradition, the bearer of an umbilical link to pre-Hispanic Peru. This is redolent of the "Andean utopia" that historian Alberto Flores Galindo studied in the 1980s, culminating in the quest for an Inca who would restore the lost original order.

Setting aside the historical simplism of Castillo's speech, it is important to note that this repertoire of arguments persists in much of Peru. Castillo may lack the experience to formulate historical musings of this caliber, but his speechwriter is clearly well aware that the president agrees with them. Above all, he knows there is still a Peru where these ideas are familiar and appreciated. It must be acknowledged that Castillo successfully deployed them to frame a political discussion based on a distinguishable reading of long-term nation-making.

The day after taking office, Castillo swore in his prime minister, Guido Bellido, at La Pampa de la Quinua in the department of Ayacucho. This was where, in 1824, pro-independence forces defeated the Spaniards, drawing the colonial era on the continent to a close. Despite this historical association, Castillo again dismissed the importance of the dawn of the republic in favor of pre-Hispanic symbolism, receiving an Incan *varayoc* (staff) to mark his assumption of power.

The president also stressed that the political subject par excellence is not the citizen but "the peoples," in the plural, and sometimes "the people" in the singular. This is a vocabulary that breaks with the Enlightenment tradition founded on citizenship and its associated rights—granted, a tradition that was only legitimized in Peru with great difficulty. Castillo, alongside "the people" and "the peoples," is rehabilitating an unashamedly fragmentary and communitarian vision of the country.

This can be better understood if we analyze the political doctrine of Perú Libre, the party that nominated Castillo for the presidency, and to which Bellido also belongs. Perú Libre's political manifesto reads: "We are a political party forged in the interior of *Perú profundo*, in the Peruvian Andes, that questions not only the centralism forged by the parties of the right but also the indifference of some leftist parties from the capital that, with their 'democratic' neutrality, enabled the consolidation of neoliberalism in our homeland."

Thus, the party plays up its Andean identity and its animus for Lima's political class, including the left. Accordingly, the historian José Luis Rénique has suggested that Perú Libre belongs to an Andeanist, federalist, and radically anti-Lima left, for which there are only two precedents in Peruvian history: the Tahuantinsuyo Committee of the 1920s, and Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path).

Death of a Maoist

A few weeks after the Castillo administration took office, the death on September 11 of the

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former Shining Path leader, Abimael Guzmán, incited another historical debate. According to data published in the 2003 Truth and Reconciliation Commission (CVR) report, this Maoist armed group and the war it waged against the Peruvian state between 1980 and 1993 left almost 69,000 dead and almost $9 billion in economic losses, in addition to untold political and human consequences. Although the most popular narrative of recent years holds that the period of political violence ended with Shining Path's surrender in 1993, the passing of Guzmán revealed that the dust had not quite settled on the conflict.

At any other point in recent history, the death of the terrorist leader would not have generated too much drama. But Guzmán's demise occurred at a time when the proximity of the Castillo administration to leaders and groups with ties to Shining Path was a crucial public talking point. For instance, the press reported that Minister of Labor Iber Maraví had appeared in police reports as a member of Guzmán's old organization in the early 1980s. Moreover, the prime minister, Bellido, had publicly expressed his sympathies for the group. On a public stage characterized for over 30 years by the absolute repudiation of Shining Path, the provincial left was suddenly showing that Peru's internal armed conflict was far from dead and buried; its heirs were very much active. Surprisingly, the contemporary, identity politics–driven *limeño* left, which forms part of Castillo's governing coalition, was willing to back them fulsomely.

Peru's internal armed conflict was far from dead and buried.

The national tension stirred by Guzmán's death has provided two lessons. First, we do not have even the beginnings of a common account of what happened during the internal armed conflict. If the left appeared to sympathize with the heirs and abettors of revolutionary violence, the right reacted with hysteria, rushing to veto any discussion about the period that went beyond adherence to the simplistic progression from Guzmán's blood-fueled madness to Fujimori's heroic pacification—even though Fujimori is still in jail for human-rights crimes. In this conservative version of events, the fact that the armed forces were undeniably part of the brutal violence back then is neither here nor there. Until the arrival of Castillo, this crude discourse had not been challenged by prominent political actors (though this is not to say that it wasn't subject to social and cultural critiques). But now his emergence has made this reading difficult to sustain.

Second, these discussions have shown that beyond the major cities—and especially in the highlands—the discourse of a conflict confined to the past is precarious. As anthropologist Kimberly Theidon has shown in her pioneering study on the legacies of the conflict in rural contexts, the rigid boundaries between former *Senderistas* and non-*Senderistas* are blurred. The anonymity of the big cities can mask old animosities, but in the villages victims and perpetrators are compelled to see one another every day. In these environments, the conflict did not end in 1993; there, to borrow William Faulkner's celebrated phrase, the past is not even past.

LANGUAGE AND LAND

This brings us back to the matter of the nation-making process. The CVR report found that Quispe and Huamán were the most frequent surnames in the lists of the dead and the disappeared during the internal armed conflict. Both originate in Peru's poorest indigenous areas, which in itself calls attention to the country's entirely unequal construction of citizenship. How could Shining Path and the armed forces commit such atrocities against this population? And worse still, why did the country officially register only a portion of these deaths while leaving the rest in obscurity? These questions are all the more painful because they concern events that are only possible in an openly unequal social and legal order.

The debate over the national question surfaces every day. When Bellido attended a session of Congress to request a vote of confidence, he began his speech in Quechua—an indigenous language that the Constitution recognizes as one of the country's official languages, alongside Spanish and Aymara. The opposition—in the bicentennial year of the republic—responded by shouting down the prime minister, and the president of Congress demanded that he continue in Spanish. The upshot of this episode, just as the government had calculated, was that media attention fixated on the linguistic clash, and not on the prime minister's proposals. Since the government is fragile, it usually attempts to play the symbolic card.

Once again, nation-making and historical exclusion had come under the spotlight. The

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opposition, for its part, came across as high-handed and bound to odious privileges. The incident led to a public debate about the status of Quechua and the indigenous languages—and, in turn, to another debate about the criteria that gave shape to the Peruvian nation. Predictably, in the next round of polling, the executive's approval rating rose while that of the legislature fell.

In one more instance of this unexpected incursion of history into politics, on October 3, 2021, the Castillo administration launched a "second agrarian reform." The first agrarian reform was the work of the leftist military dictatorship headed by General Velasco Alvarado five decades earlier. It culminated in one of the most radical land redistributions in Latin American history, putting an end to the premodern rural labor regime and leading to a reappraisal of the role of the Peruvian *campesino* in the public sphere. Notably, the Castillo administration chose to propose its agrarian reform on the anniversary of Velasco's 1968 coup d'état rather than of the introduction of the first reform.

In a speech to announce the "second agrarian reform," delivered at the Incan fort of Sacsayhuamán in Cuzco, the president evoked pre-Hispanic Peru and vowed to unite the voices of Huáscar and Atahualpa—the sibling heirs to the Inca throne, who fought a civil war when the conquistadors arrived. As with every other history-related posture of this administration, we are in the realm of history as sentiment rather than knowledge. For all its frequent invocations of the past, this government overlooks the historical canon of the Peruvian left: figures such as José Carlos Mariátegui, Hugo Blanco, and Alfonso Barrantes—to mention but a few obvious names—are absent from the speeches. The force and the priorities of Andeanist history as sentiment lie in another sphere.

In concrete terms, the initiatives that comprise the new agrarian reform are considerably less bombastic than the history-centered speechifying that surrounds it. This is a set of measures that have either been attempted before or are already practiced, such as cheap loans and technical support for small farmers. As various specialists in agricultural policy have pointed out, however, the measures do not deal with climate change or any other future challenges. This is another indicator of the use of history by the Castillo administration: grandiloquence hiding the absence of a substantive project.

TAKING THE NATIONAL QUESTION SERIOUSLY

That returns us to the central argument of this essay: paradoxically, it is Peru's political bankruptcy—in terms of parties, policies, and leadership—that has enabled this resurrection of history in the nation's political life. In the first two months of his presidency, Castillo opened up a debate about the place that the poorest and indigenous populations have had in the Peruvian nation-making process. Regardless of how inaccurate his interpretations may be, Castillo's presidency has fleshed out a bicentennial that had seemed gray and lacking in depth. Unexpectedly, Peru is currently being subjected to a kind of shock therapy of historical argument.

How has the conservative opposition responded to the challenge? Rather than promoting an alternative reading centered on nation-making, they opted for the primal scream of denouncing "communists!" and, in so doing, effectively abandoned the debate on the national question. Instead, they attempted to discredit their opponents based on an appeal to a sort of internationalism. The Peruvian rightist parties have supported the Spanish far right (particularly the Vox party) by joining an emerging alliance in defense of "Hispanicity" and against "communism".

This is particularly unfortunate because there was once a Peruvian right that took the national question seriously—or, to be more precise, a right that was anticommunist, but not just anticommunist. For example, the conservative intellectual José de la Riva Agüero's *Paisajes Peruanos* described and analyzed a journey in 1912 to the Peruvian highlands in search of the "national soul," whereas his ideological bedfellow Víctor Andrés Belaúnde penned more than one volume dealing with *Peruanidad* (the title of an essay he published in 1943). One might take issue with their interpretations, but these conservative politicians and intellectuals did not shrink from debating the national question by resorting to hysterical denunciations of communism.

The strategy of opposing the Castillo administration with a rhetoric based on "Hispanicity" and anticommunism has had a predictable outcome. Fuerza Popular and Renovación Popular, the right-wing groupings that have embraced this strategy most fervently, have registered the lowest public backing of all parties in recent polling.

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Thus, the political polarization that Peru is presently experiencing has an intellectual correlate: a nativist left and an anticommunist right. Overcoming this polarization poses a major political challenge in a context in which social-democratic and liberal platforms have all but vanished. But it is also an intellectual challenge. It is important to stress that there may be an alternative to the predominant narratives, one founded on national integration through the classic agenda of citizenship.

The Peru of today is a largely urban country, with 79.3 percent of the population residing in the cities, and the remaining 20.7 percent in rural areas, according to the 2017 census. Moreover, the same census found that 13.9 percent of Peruvians are native speakers of Quechua and 1.7 percent of Aymara. These figures show that the Peru directly represented by Pedro Castillo is of undeniable relevance, and every effort is required to ensure that these Peruvians receive the equal opportunities that they have long been denied. But they also signal that a nativist reading of the nation, such as the one favored by Castillo, is subject not only to intellectual limitations, but also to demographic ones.

There is room, therefore, for a national vision that conceives of the citizen, rather than "the peoples," as the main political subject—a vision that is based on the reality of a predominantly urban and interconnected country, and that stresses the gradual and unfinished building of a common national substrate. Given the intellectual anemia nowadays suffered by all political camps, it would be naive to believe that a perspective of this type could take shape anytime soon. But it is worth highlighting the possibility all the same.

The radical historicization of the Peruvian political sphere may well abate soon. This is not only because the inertia of everyday politics could consume overly ideological administrations. As I finish this essay in mid-October 2021, Castillo has just replaced his prime minister, Guido Bellido—*Cusqueño*, Quechua speaker, and senior Perú Libre cadre—with Mirtha Vásquez, a member of another leftist group, marking a growing gulf between the administration and the party. Even though Castillo has positioned himself as the "provincial redeemer," it has already become clear that this has much more to do with the objective circumstance of his rural background than with any ideological work carried out by the president.

Without Perú Libre and its leader and main ideologue Vladimir Cerrón in command, the nativist discourses could lose vigor—even if a symbology targeted at the modest rural base endures. Which, after all, would not be so bad. To put it another way: I hope Peru doesn't return to an amnesic public sphere, but I likewise heed Albert O. Hirschman's still-valid warning that the more structural and over-intellectualized the diagnoses of Latin America's problems, the more governments will be compelled to attempt Herculean reforms for which they are ill-equipped—and will end up sowing frustration among the population they profess to favor. ■

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"Different experiences with governmental support have led some to view the state as an ally that has prioritized their needs, whereas others see it as having neglected its responsibility."

History and Divisions in Nicaragua's Disability Rights Movement

STEPHEN MEYERS

Central America has a unique civic history that dates back to the civil wars and communist revolutions that erupted in the region toward the end of the 1970s. Through much of the 1980s and into the 1990s, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador were embroiled in conflicts that continue to shape the region today. Although the effects of this period cut across Central America's political, economic, and social landscape, one consequence deserving of particular attention is how the history of conflict calls into question the idealism of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), as well as assumptions about the role civil society should play in representing disability interests. Recognizing the impact of civic history on relations between marginalized groups and their states offers insight into the power and potential of integrating new roles for civil society into international human rights law.

Disability and Equality
Sixth in a series

The CRPD, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2006, is a landmark among international human rights instruments. It protects the rights of the world's largest minority—the estimated 15 percent of the global population that is disabled. The convention's fifty articles cover the full pantheon of rights, ranging from education and voting to more disability-specific rights, including rehabilitation and social protection (such as social security benefits). Yet its truly groundbreaking provisions focus on civil society.

The CRPD explicitly obligates signatory states to "closely consult and actively involve persons with disabilities . . . through their representative organizations" in developing and implementing legislation and policies relating to disabilities. It also requires them to ensure that "[c]ivil society, in particular persons with disabilities and their representative organizations, shall be involved and participate fully in the monitoring process" of the CRPD's implementation.

Although the participation of civil society organizations in human rights debates and the monitoring of rights violations has a long history, these two articles in the CRPD are unique. They represent, for the first time, the creation of an explicit positive legal obligation for states to seek the input of organizations representing rights holders on all levels of development, monitoring, and implementation of human rights.

In short, these provisions make persons with disabilities the makers of their own histories. By actively integrating advocacy into the convention, they recast persons with disabilities, who have historically been forced into dependency in the societies in which they live, as agents defining their own futures, with direct influence over their inclusion by the state.

As revolutionary as this aspect of the CRPD is, it should come as no surprise. The motto of the international disability rights movement is "Nothing about us without us!" This demand is reflected in the history of Western disability rights movements. Many of the most prominent disability rights activists from the United States, the United Kingdom, and other Western countries where persons with disabilities first mobilized were intimately involved in the advocacy for, and drafting and popularization of, the CRPD. The

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convention also reflects a guiding assumption that persons with disabilities and grassroots organizations representing them will embrace an understanding of civil society as standing outside the state and pushing it to implement the human rights framework laid out by the CRPD.

And yet, despite broad acceptance of the CRPD around the world (with 182 ratifications and accessions to date), local disability civil societies often remain fragmented and have not followed the path indicated by the convention. Many international disability rights activists view this fragmentation as the result of a lack of awareness or an underdevelopment of political consciousness among persons with disabilities in different locales. But I argue that it reflects local civic histories that have established different relations among the state, civil society, and persons with disabilities. This means that understanding local civic histories is necessary in order to understand the localization (the process by which international law is incorporated into domestic law) of the CRPD and the unintended effects of its civil society provisions.

Nicaragua's revolutionary period (1979–90) provides a striking example of how Central American civil societies were forged in a unique way that continues to impact daily life. Disabled Sandinista soldiers were held up as exemplars of service and sacrifice during the civil war, and were given a special place in society that still shapes their participation in disability politics today.

Disabled Sandinista soldiers were held up as exemplars of service and sacrifice.

Meanwhile, the chronic lack of state resources, particularly in the area of social welfare, pushed other persons with disabilities to band together to form social-support or self-help organizations to address their education and livelihood needs. Many of these groups remain proud of this legacy and skeptical of the state's role in implementing social and economic rights. These grassroots organizations, associations representing war veterans, and other members of disability civil society rooted in the civic culture of Nicaragua's revolutionary period are divided and circumspect in their evolving roles as advisers and advocates for their rights under the CRPD.

UNIFYING POTENTIAL

Creating unity in diversity has been the central challenge across modern disability movements from their beginnings in the 1960s to the present. The unifying device introduced in the West for raising the consciousness of persons with disabilities was the social model of disability. This perspective mobilized a broad coalition of disabled persons by emphasizing that regardless of their different types of impairment, whether physical, sensory, intellectual, or mental, they faced a common enemy. It was society, personified in the state, that refused them individual agency.

This perspective shifted the focus from individuals with impairments to the way society "disables" impaired persons through physical, attitudinal, and legal barriers that prevent them from participating on an equal basis with their nondisabled peers. Originators of the social model focused on the undue power granted by the social welfare state to health-care providers, educators, social workers, and legal authorities to decide how persons with disabilities would be cared for, educated, and provided with services. Legal guardians were often appointed to make decisions for them. Until the 1970s, institutionalization was almost universal among persons with disabilities, who were forced to live in hospital wards, nursing homes, and residential schools regardless of the nature of their disabilities.

The Western disability movement did not reject services; it demanded both individual and political control of them. By claiming the right to advise on legislation and policy, rather than allow nondisabled doctors, social workers, and philanthropists to speak for them, disabled persons won the basic civil right to determine the time, place, and manner of the support they received from the state. Through advocacy, they effectively rolled back the state without losing the services on which their independence depended. But in Central America and much of the global South, the problem of an all-too-powerful state is a much more complicated case to make.

The social model has been globalized by the CRPD, whose preamble states, "Disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others." The CRPD also enumerates the accommodations, supports, and services to which persons with disabilities are entitled, and ensures their control over them through the civil society articles and specific civil rights, such as the right not to be institutionalized.

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From the beginnings of disability studies research in the global South, however, the basic premise of the social model and its connection to the welfare state has been questioned. Anthropologists, sociologists, and others have noted that disabled persons in the global South and organizations representing them are focused on a constant struggle for survival or the immediate need for rehabilitation, whereas disability movements in the West are focused on rights.

This critique highlights an important difference between the experiences of disabled persons in the global North and South, including Latin America. But resource scarcity is only one factor that shapes local disability movements and the identities of their participants. Local civic histories help explain the ways in which different groups of persons with disabilities have come together to address the needs of their members—and how they distinguish themselves or join with others, pursuing either separate claims or common cause.

Struggle and Solidarity

Nicaragua provides a very different context than the West for the study of disability movements. After Haiti, Nicaragua is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. With a gross domestic product per capita of just $1,900 in 2020, the relative wealth of its citizens is less than a thirtieth of that of US citizens. That gap in relative wealth is arguably even greater between Nicaraguans with disabilities and their US peers, given the lack of safety nets and opportunities in the context of widespread poverty.

The lives of persons with disabilities in Nicaragua often center on a struggle for services beyond the most basic health needs, in the absence of a social welfare state and modern medical care. Civil society has often played an outsized role in Nicaragua in meeting the survival needs of the population. Social and economic rights take precedence over the civil and political rights that have animated much of Western civil society and disability movements in the West.

Relative poverty is just one force that has shaped Nicaragua's civic history. A more important contributor is the Sandinista ideology of *solidaridad* (solidarity) that became the rallying cry of the Sandinista Revolution and the guiding ideology of popular organizing in its aftermath. Augusto Sandino was a guerrilla fighter and self-taught intellectual who led a peasant rebellion that ended the US occupation of Nicaragua in 1933. Although he was assassinated by the US-backed dictatorship of Anastacio Somoza in 1934, Sandino's philosophy of nationalism, pragmatic Marxism, and Catholic humanism was adopted by the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN), which led the 1979 revolution against Somoza's son, Tachito.

Part of the Sandinista philosophy was a rejection of a powerful centralized state in favor of a unique form of democratic socialism, in which "the people" were empowered to take on many functions of the state. What this meant in practice, after the FSLN took power in 1979 under the leadership of Daniel Ortega, was that the Catholic Church, labor unions, farmers' cooperatives, and others organized to provide much of the health, education, and other services that a state would normally deliver through its ministries. The most famous example at the time was the National Literacy Crusade, which mobilized 95,000 volunteers to go across the country to teach basic reading skills in the poorest barrios and remotest villages. The effort resulted in a 37 percent drop in the illiteracy rate in just five months. This form of collective action became a template for all subsequent civil society organizations initiated in the postrevolutionary period, lasting until 1990, when the Sandinista government finally left power after losing elections. It also became a template for disability organizations.

Today, the FSLN is back in power, and the Sandinista ideology of "people's power" and dedication to the common good has taken on a new salience. Ortega, who returned to the presidency in 2007 and has been reelected to two more terms since then, has vowed to "continue the revolution." Part of this continuation involves reliance on civil society to help the government reach many of its social and economic objectives.

Unimplemented Rights

Nicaragua was one of the first countries to sign and ratify the CRPD, just months after it was adopted by the UN in late 2006. The CRPD's articles on civil society created new opportunities for existing Nicaraguan disability associations to advise on and monitor implementation of their rights. A number of international nongovernmental organizations and donors, such as Handicap International (now Humanity & Inclusion) and the Disability Rights Fund, helped set up new disabled persons' organizations.

Perhaps the most important of these latter groups is the Federation of Associations of Persons

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with Disabilities (FECONORI), a national coalition that was initiated in 2006 and has been funded since then by a group of European donors. FECONORI states that its purpose is "to lead the process of implementation of national and international legal frameworks in reference to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, for full enjoyment and effective rights." To that end, FECONORI represents 21 different disabled persons' organizations in Nicaragua, ranging from the Association of Psychiatric Patients to the Association of the Deaf-Blind of Nicaragua.

The initial step toward FECONORI's objective of local implementation of the CRPD framework was accomplished in 2011 with the passage of Law 763, the National Disability Law, by the Nicaraguan Assembly. In many ways, Law 763 is a carbon copy of the CRPD: it enumerates virtually all of the same rights and often uses the exact same language. In the decade since its passage, however, much of the law has gone unimplemented.

A recent and egregious example of its failure occurred during the national elections in November 2021. Though there were many concerns regarding the fairness of the elections—Ortega won his fourth term in office by having most opposition candidates imprisoned—the election was also a direct violation of both the CRPD and Law 763. Both guarantee voting access for people with disabilities, including physical access to polling places, ballots in accessible formats, and reasonable accommodations and personal assistance to ensure that individuals can cast their votes. European observers and local disability rights advocates found that Blind and visually impaired Nicaraguans were afforded no Braille ballots, and many polling places were located in buildings physically inaccessible to persons with mobility disabilities. In fact, many of those polling places were in schools, further indicating the lack of progress not only in voting rights, but also in disability inclusion in education.

FECONORI tries to mobilize its member organizations to address these issues and press the government to promote disability rights. But many decline to participate, and at least one, the Organization of Disabled Revolutionaries (ORD), works at cross-purposes with the federation. Others see little point in holding the state accountable for the provision of opportunities and services that they believe it has little capacity to provide.

PRIVILEGED WAR VETERANS?

The ORD was the first disability advocacy organization in Nicaragua, and it is still one of the most prominent. It stands on one side of a deep fault line that runs through the Nicaraguan disability movement. As the representative of disabled Sandinista veterans, it has consistently argued that its members should be prioritized over other Nicaraguans with disabilities for access to state services and social benefits. With Ortega back in power, the ORD has further committed to going it alone, believing that it has a special relationship with both national and local government officials.

Founded in 1982, the ORD today has a membership of approximately 15,000 ex-Sandinista soldiers who were wounded during the civil war that followed the 1979 revolution. Former members of the National Guard, which had been Somoza's personal army, led a US-backed counterrevolution and became known as the Contras. The conflict lasted nearly a decade. The ORD was formed as a civil society organization to serve the thousands of wounded "war heroes" who returned home from the front. (After the 1990 peace accords, many wounded Contra soldiers returned to Nicaragua, where they were often marginalized in their communities and denied access to rehabilitation and other benefits and services.)

The lives of persons with disabilities in Nicaragua often center on a struggle for services.

The ORD has historically had a number of functions. The first is social support, which at one point included a workshop operated by the ORD to build and repair wheelchairs for members. Local chapters provided mutual aid, such as collecting funds to help a member through a crisis. The ORD also solicited assistance for its members, for example by contacting government leaders, most of whom were fellow Sandinistas, to ask for jobs. To this day, it is common to find ORD members employed in government offices. Many have worked as security guards and night watchmen in schools and other municipal buildings.

During my fieldwork from 2008 to 2012, I observed that ORD members described themselves as *lacerados de la guerra* (war wounded), rather than *personas con discapacidades* (persons with disabilities), emphasizing that they had an identity that set them apart. It was also clear in my interviews and observations that they felt they held an

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important moral position in the community. Denis, the president of a local ORD chapter in a northern city that had experienced heavy fighting during the civil war, told me, "We are the dead, the wounded, and the wounded ex-soldiers who participated in the war—that is, the Revolution." Thanks to the Sandinista government, he said, "the mothers of heroes and martyrs . . . are eating a little better."

In fact, the ORD's work in civil society was complemented by meager state rehabilitation and social welfare benefits for disabled ex-combatants. This state support was codified in 1990 in the form of Law 119: Granting Benefits to Victims of War. This law directs the Nicaraguan Institute of Social Security and Welfare to grant "life pensions for permanent disability, prostheses, rehabilitation service, and professional rehabilitation to Nicaraguan victims of war when they suffer illnesses, injuries, mutilations, or any degree of incapacity as a consequence of their participation in the war."

Law 119 was never implemented, however. The Sandinista government fell from power the same year the measure was passed. More than two decades later, members of the ORD were increasingly hopeful that with the Sandinistas back in power, the law would finally be implemented. The ORD continued to assert a special moral claim to scarce state resources.

In my interviews with local members of the ORD, one told me, "Because we have acquired our different disabilities while contributing to the country, I think [the government] should give us special attention." Another said that as the civil war became a more distant memory for many Nicaraguans, ORD members were losing their status: "It is clear that we need more support, especially because a lot of times, we are forgotten, or not remembered—the sacrifice that a person who fought in the war has made." Yet another ORD member lamented:

> In the hospitals we are already not being treated as people with disabilities from the war, but instead we are treated like any other. . . . There is no longer the priority for the person who went to war. . . . "

The National Disability Law 763, which was passed in 2011 in large part due to the advocacy of FECONORI, represented an existential threat to the ORD. It replaced all previous disability laws and subsumed all people with disabilities into a common identity and beneficiary group. Immediately, the ORD national office began working at cross-purposes with the national disability rights movement, petitioning the government to exempt its members from the new law and reinstate Law 119 to cover them. The ORD argued that it was society's "moral obligation" to prioritize disabled soldiers because they exemplified solidarity with the state.

In an interview, a national ORD board member portrayed the changes in disability laws as a zero-sum game. Gains for the national disability movement necessarily meant a loss for members of the ORD, he argued, given the general scarcity of rehabilitation and other social welfare benefits.

The ORD withdrew its participation in FECONORI, whose leadership was criticizing the ORD for refusing to be team players. FECONORI had lost one of its most prominent member groups—the one with perhaps the strongest ties to the Ortega regime. This fracture belies the idealism of the CRPD, which assumes that disability civil society will share a common identity, rather than be divided by opposing identities and claims that some persons with disabilities are more worthy than others.

Nor do participants in the disability movement necessarily see the government as a common enemy. Different experiences with governmental support have led some to view the state as an ally that has prioritized their needs, whereas others see it as having neglected its responsibility. Meanwhile, Law 763 continues to go largely unimplemented.

SELF-HELP OR HUMAN RIGHTS?

In addition to creating privileged identities within disability civil society, the revolutionary period also gave birth to a number of disability self-help groups. They embodied the voluntary spirit that characterized the Literacy Crusade. This spirit was pragmatist as much as it was idealist.

After the revolution, the Sandinista government inherited a country bankrupted by the Somoza regime. The dictator and his family had left the country with suitcases of cash pilfered from the treasury. There was no budget to carry on basic operations. The situation was made even more dire by the advent of civil war and economic sanctions imposed by the Reagan administration, which viewed the FSLN as a socialist threat.

In the decades since, Nicaragua's economic fortunes have not substantively changed. Some

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disability rights organizations have seen little purpose in changing the law and advocating for the government to meet its obligations under the CRPD, despite international funding for disability advocacy. The president of the Association of the Blind explained to me his analysis of differences between local and international disability movements in relation to state capacity:

> In the perspective of the international organizations, their professionals, and the people and the leaders with disabilities that are in America and Europe . . . when they have a new benefit, they have a government with the sufficient funds and then the law does not only have the meaning of a desire. I believe that here the law is a desire or an objective for the future because you need to wait for the capacity.

As with the ORD, the origins of the Association of the Blind go back to the revolution. Luis, its founder and current president, had been blinded during a battle in the late 1980s. He was sent to Cuba, an ally of the Sandinista government, for rehabilitation. While there, Luis learned to read Braille, use a walking stick, and otherwise live independently. But when he returned to Nicaragua, he realized that he was largely alone in having the skills to live independently as a Blind man.

Shortly after his return, Luis and several other visually impaired people founded a grassroots association. He said, "I was motivated to join with them since I had the possibility of studying in another country, so I wanted to join an association with the purpose of helping other people, blind like me, have that opportunity." Their first project was to create a "micro-school" where members taught one another basic skills that ranged from reading and writing Braille to riding the bus or going to the store. After members learned to become independent, they were expected to help teach others.

By the time I encountered the Association of the Blind, it had 200 members, a small residential school where children from rural villages could stay for a few months to learn skills for independence, and several employment projects. The latter included a bicycle-repair business and relationships with cigar factories and other local businesses where members could be placed for training.

Luis explained that his commitment to the Association of the Blind was the same as his original commitment to the Sandinista Front—to build a better society through solidarity. Although he was certainly not against the CRPD or Law 763, his association and others felt that their time, effort, and resources were better spent directly helping their members—running the school or making job placements—than advocating for the implementation of laws that the government had no capacity to carry out.

This attitude created friction with FECONORI. In an interview, a FECONORI board member commented on the federation's differences over rights advocacy with more grassroots disability associations like the Association of the Blind:

> They have other goals, objectives, another vision, which is difficult because sometimes the associations have a focus that is not on human rights but for the poor, the beggars. . . . But the truth is that is not the issue, the struggle we have is to strengthen the capacities and the dignity of persons with disabilities, which is different than their approach.

Here, an umbrella organization meant to represent persons with disabilities before the government, in keeping with the CRPD, sees its own interests as separate from those of its member organizations. But although the work of providing education and jobs may not be human rights work per se, it is an approach that reflects the civic histories of disability civil society in Nicaragua, where disabled persons' organizations have had to make up for the lack of state resources.

The unity achieved by disability movements in the West was the result of a shared experience of domination by service providers, medical experts, and others under strong social welfare states. People with disabilities came together to demand that they, not others, determine their own rights. That history is now universalized by the CRPD's civil society provisions that obligate states to seek out the advice of disabled persons' organizations on law and policy, and to ensure that they are involved in monitoring their rights.

But in Nicaragua, as in many other places in the global South, persons with disabilities have their own unique histories. Often divisions arise in the disability movement when certain groups, such as wounded war veterans, lack shared interests with other groups. Some groups see little use in advocating for new laws or demanding new rights, but instead focus on self-help and serving the immediate needs of their members. Recognizing the unique histories of specific groups in specific places is essential for understanding the extent to which international law can successfully create new roles and expectations for local civil societies. ■

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"Ecotourism is not just an alternative to other forms of development—it is also an alternative to other forms of tourism."

Why Latin America Has Embraced Ecotourism

CARTER A. HUNT

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In 1983, Mexican architect Hector Ceballos-Lascuráin popularized the term "ecotourism." He defined it as "traveling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific objectives of studying, admiring, and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural manifestations (both past and present) found in these areas." It has since been argued, however, that the academic Nicolas Hetzer was the first to use the term, to describe the ecotours he organized on the Yucatán Peninsula in the 1960s. Costa Rican conservation biologist (and future president of the International Ecotourism Society) Gerardo Budowski is also credited with promoting the symbiotic potential in the conservation–tourism relationship, back in the 1970s. In any case, what these three origin stories make clear is that ecotourism was conceived in Latin America. That is also, arguably, where ecotourism is best represented to this day.

In the mid-twentieth century, policymakers promoted tourism primarily as a tool for advancing traditional or underdeveloped societies through a series of economic stages linking them to global markets. But at the height of this modernization era in international development, scholars began to question the growth-based approach to tourism and its ability to provide countries with a passport to development. By the late 1980s, development experts began to reject top-down approaches in favor of a more democratic and holistic concern for people and nature. This turn was epitomized in the title of the World Commission on Environment and Development's 1987 report, "Our Common Future." Known as the Brundtland Report, it drew attention to social and environmental concerns that had been largely absent in international development discourse, ushering in the era of "sustainable development."

In the realm of conservation, the new thinking about sustainable development led to strategies that aimed to use community-centered approaches for improving people's welfare while simultaneously protecting the environment. Sustainability challenged growth as the ultimate goal of development, and new forms of alternative tourism more consistent with natural, social, and local community values came to be viewed as a "green passport" to developmental success. Development specialists and conservationists in the public, private, and nongovernmental sectors all promoted ecotourism in particular as a "win-win" option for both communities and ecosystems.

The impetus for sustainable development created by the Brundtland Report and the subsequent Rio Earth Summit in 1992 set lofty expectations for ecotourism. The sector was hailed as a stimulus for sustainable economic activity, an effective mechanism for biodiversity conservation, a strategy for empowering marginalized peoples, and a means of promoting cross-cultural understanding through appreciation for nature. The subsequent years saw dramatic investment and growth in the ecotourism sector, putting its ability to achieve these multiple objectives to the test across Latin America.

By the end of the century, the dueling mandates of environmental conservation and community development proved hard to fulfill across all settings. Bolstered by the launch of such publications as the *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* in 1993 and the *Journal of Ecotourism* in 2002, a parallel wave of critical scholarship arose across the disciplines of anthropology, geography, and biology. Some of this writing questioned whether tourism could be part of the solution to sustainable development and biodiversity conservation challenges, or if it

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was simply another form of business-as-usual capitalism dressed in sheep's clothing.

Other scholars have argued that such critiques rely on faulty understandings of what distinguishes ecotourism from other forms of tourism. All too often, the term "ecotourism" is used interchangeably to describe different varieties of nature-based tourism. These may involve tourist experiences in nature, but do not contribute directly to the conservation of biodiversity or the well-being of local communities, whereas ecotourism is supposed to generate net benefits for conservation and local communities in destination areas. Such benefits include creating direct financial support for wildlife and protected areas; diversifying livelihoods to reduce dependence on mining, logging, or uncontrolled hunting and farming; enhancing environmental interpretation and ethics for hosts and guests; and strengthening resource management institutions.

Critiques of ecotourism also often fail to consider the wider context in which conservation occurs. Ecotourism is not just an alternative to other forms of development—it is also an alternative to other forms of tourism. Any reasonable assessment of its value must recognize what likely would have happened in the absence of existing forms of ecotourism. Alternative economic activities in biodiverse contexts (such as commercial agriculture, fossil fuel extraction, timber harvesting, or mass tourism) almost always involve far more deleterious outcomes for local people and environments. At its best, ecotourism keeps such powerful influences at bay.

In practice, little heed has been paid to such ivory tower debates. Ecotourism continues to be an essential strategy pursued by individuals, enterprises, and conservation and development institutions across Latin America. Surveying its outcomes in different parts of the region, with attention to the broader sociocultural, economic, and political history in each context, will show that ecotourism continues to offer much of the same promise in Latin America that it did when the idea was first defined and explored there in the late 1980s.

GROWTH IN THE GALÁPAGOS

For over two centuries, explorers, pirates, whalers, naturalists (most famously, Charles Darwin), and conservationists have meticulously studied and described the Galápagos Islands. Before Ecuador created the Galápagos National Park in 1959, these islands hosted plantation agriculture, prison colonies, and even a US Army base that used the iconic geologic formations for target practice. The migrant-based population grew over the twentieth century, bringing new residents from populations as diverse as the native Salasacas of Andean Ecuador, Norwegian farmers from Hardangervidda, and utopian visionaries from the United States. This convergence of multiple ethnic groups, cultural worldviews, and livelihood strategies has created a multilayered society, linked by the shared challenges of negotiating the islands' unique ecological conditions.

The human population of the Galápagos was just 300 in 1900, and there were still only 1,500 residents in 1950. The slow trickle of tourism that began in the late 1960s began to pick up pace when the Galápagos Islands were designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1978. Since that time, the population has grown to over 35,000, and some 270,000 visitors arrived in each of the two years prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Overtourism is an increasingly critical concern in the Galápagos.

The "floating hotel" model of boutique cruise tourism in the islands was designed to limit ecological impacts, but it provided negligible local economic benefits for island communities in the early decades. As the local population grew, so did demands for more economic opportunities for residents. Eventually, in 2011, on-island visitors began to exceed boat-only travelers. Attracted by economic conditions better than those in most of mainland Ecuador, the migrant population has grown alongside the increase in visitors.

Though tourism has been largely successful as a mechanism for conservation and development, it has also quickly become one of the primary drivers of change to the local environments. Invasive species now outnumber native species in the islands, and the growing human presence is further exhausting freshwater resources, generating large quantities of waste and sewage, and jeopardizing the habitats of several endemic plant and animal species.

Even in light of growing concerns that the impacts of the current scale of tourism in the small archipelago exceed what can legitimately be considered ecotourism, it is essential to remember that this tourism does not occur in a vacuum.

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Without ecotourism's support for the National Park and the Galápagos Marine Reserve (created in 1998 and recently expanded during the COP26 global climate policy meeting in November 2021), the scale of other activities—particularly commercial agriculture and fishing—would have increased far beyond current levels in the islands. Furthermore, visitors to the Galápagos National Park subsidize the rest of the Ecuadorian National Park System; a drop in visitation would have inhibited conservation efforts across the country. As is true in all popular ecotourism destinations, avoiding overtourism will remain a critical concern in the future. Nevertheless, in the Galápagos we can still safely say that conservation and communities on the islands are better off than they would have been had the ecotourism industry not been established.

Indigenous Integration in the Amazon

Building on an earlier history of safari hunting in the region, ecotourism potential in the Brazilian, Ecuadorian, and Peruvian Amazon drew attention in the 1980s, in the wake of the Brundtland Report. Early satellite imagery revealed the destruction under way across the Amazon. The Indigenous rights movement was also garnering increasing international support. Many public and nongovernmental institutions promoted ecotourism as a win-win for Amazonian biological and cultural diversity.

Arrangements between private ecotourism operators and Indigenous communities with varying levels of land-tenure security arose in response to the growing opportunities. Despite concern that tourism could exploit and commodify local Indigenous communities, some of these joint ventures permitted their participation in ecolodge management, decision-making, and ownership. Successes in cultural preservation and revitalization have been documented, along with political empowerment and mobilization to incorporate additional conservation areas. Even critical scholars recognize that Indigenous Amazonians have exhibited the ability to develop ecotourism enterprises while avoiding the cultural disruption that often results when global markets reach Indigenous communities.

Despite such localized successes, many academics and other critics remain hesitant to acknowledge the value of ecotourism for the region's biodiversity and Indigenous residents. To qualify even the most valid concerns, it is again helpful to consider the activities for which ecotourism provided an alternative.

The petroleum industry has played a disproportionate role in endangering the health and well-being of local communities across the Amazon. Cattle ranching and commercial agriculture (especially focused on soy and African oil palm) have caused considerable forest loss and social conflict as well. Hydroelectric projects have forced the relocation of communities or otherwise displaced long-standing subsistence livelihood practices. Considering the likely impacts of these "alternative" development strategies for the region, we can conclude that the region's biological and cultural diversity are better sustained by the presence of ecotourism as a primary land-use and livelihood strategy.

The Costa Rican Experiment

Costa Rica may be the country most associated with the phenomenon of ecotourism. Long before then-President José Figueres announced that it would be "offering itself to the world as a 'laboratory' for this new [sustainable] development paradigm" in 1997, the "Green Republic" had been at the forefront of ecotourism development. Costa Rican-based biologists like Gerardo Budowski, Mario Boza, and Dan Janzen drew early attention to the symbiotic relations between tourism, conservation, and national park management. Janzen even suggested that from a conservation standpoint, "ecotourists are a better form of cattle."

The government had avoided the political turmoil and armed conflict that afflicted many of its Central American neighbors. Instead of funding a military (which it abolished in 1948), it had invested in the schools found in every corner of Costa Rica. But it was not until ecotourism got a strong foothold, with numerous small-scale ecolodges scattered across the country, that Costa Rica's economic performance began to set it apart from its neighbors. Places like Tortuguero on the Atlantic Coast, Monteverde's cloud forests in the central highlands, and Manuel Antonio National Park on the Pacific Coast led the early ecotourism waves.

Nowhere is the value of ecotourism better demonstrated than on the Osa Peninsula, home of the country's biodiversity jewel, Corcovado National Park. There, ecotourism has not only helped reduce deforestation, but its presence is also associated with reforestation in several places. Though

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it is hard to imagine, given its current reputation, Costa Rica had one of the highest rates of deforestation of any country in Latin America heading into the mid-1980s.

This southern Pacific region had seen decades of other development efforts, starting with multinational fruit companies and artisanal gold mining, then proceeding through subsidized agricultural intensification, cattle ranching, and failed forestry operations. As recently as the early 2000s, tiny Costa Rica was among the world's top ten producers of African palm oil, which is now cultivated right up to the edge of protected areas across the Osa region. Ecotourism is an essential mechanism for keeping the palm oil sector and these other more environmentally degrading activities at bay in the region.

Costa Rica also is another example of how ecotourism serves as an alternative to other forms of tourism development. With the 1995 opening of Liberia airport in the Guanacaste Peninsula, the northern Pacific region underwent extensive multinational resort development. This raised concerns that the country was jeopardizing the small-scale ecotourism industry on which its international reputation had been built.

By 2012, plans for a large airport in the Osa Peninsula raised fears that the region was headed down a similar path of overtourism. Mobilization of the ecotourism, conservation, and scientific communities in opposition to such an airport has helped Osa avoid that path for the time being. Small-scale boutique operations—an increasing number of which are owned and operated by Costa Ricans—continue to support a mosaic of public and private protected areas across the Osa Peninsula region and livelihoods for dozens of rural communities.

NICARAGUA'S INSURMOUNTABLE ODDS

By the end of the twentieth century, one would have been hard-pressed to find a tourism industry in any part of Latin America that did not try to capitalize on the tidal wave of ecotourism development by incorporating at least the rhetoric of green, sustainable, and eco-friendly practices. As Costa Rica made a name for itself as an ecotourism leader, neighboring Nicaragua saw its first Sandinista experiment come to a close in 1990. Three subsequent Western-friendly administrations led to a degree of political stabilization and external investment that had not been seen in the country for decades.

Nicaragua's economy had been heavily agrarian heading into the late 1990s. The only meaningful industry consisted of exploitive textile maquiladoras outside Managua. Ecotourism development was one of the few other activities that provided an alternative to further intensification of agriculture or natural resource extraction.

Natural disasters and armed conflicts had left the Nicaraguan economy starved for foreign exchange. But the largest lowland rainforest in Latin America outside of the Amazon provided ample resources for ecotourism development. Substantial economic incentives for foreign investment were written into 1999's Ley de Incentivo para la Industria Turística (Law 306) and the 2004 Ley General de Turismo (Law 495). These laws provided complete exemptions from import, sales, materials, equipment, vehicle, and property taxes for both foreign and Nicaraguan individuals and businesses involved in tourism-related activities.

Ecotourism is an essential mechanism for keeping environmentally degrading activities at bay.

Cheap labor and real estate also helped fuel a tourism development boom, especially along the southern Pacific Coast, which had been made more accessible to the outside world by Liberia airport in northern Costa Rica. Bifurcated trends in tourism resulted, with rustic, rural operations on one end of the spectrum, and on the other, luxury boutique hotels purporting to offer ecotourism at its finest.

Closer inspection of these places revealed that the same institutionalized corruption that had long characterized Nicaragua also manifested itself in the tourism sector with extensive exploitation of employees, disputed real estate acquisitions, and ecolodge properties used as fronts for illegal timber extraction. But despite such questionable ethics in the sector, tourism was helping to draw attention to conservation threats, endangered ecosystems, and the potential for increased nature-based development. Would the industry expand in a sustainable fashion that prioritized net benefits for local communities and conservation? Political developments rendered the question moot.

Daniel Ortega, the former leader of the revolutionary Sandinista government, returned to power in 2007, and his new presidency quickly devolved

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into another oppressive regime. Ortega, along with his wife and vice president, Rosario Murillo, oversaw the violent quelling of student-led protests in 2018 and the imprisonment of leaders of the political opposition before the 2021 elections. After two decades of continuous increases, tourism arrivals dropped by 28 percent in 2018 and remained at those reduced levels heading into the COVID-19 pandemic.

Although ecotourism can provide net benefits for communities and conservation, it cannot overcome the effects of poverty, corruption, and authoritarian rule. There are limits to what ecotourism can accomplish, as Nicaragua demonstrates. Yet this is not evidence of a defect in the idea of ecotourism, or an indictment of its record to date, but rather a testament to all that ecotourism is up against across Latin America—and its potential value to the region.

HEALTHY RECKONINGS

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic brought worldwide tourism to an abrupt halt in March 2020, the industry was already facing at least two major reckonings. First, unchecked development in the sector, which came to be called overtourism, was leading to high-profile protests in various destinations. Second, tourism's carbon footprint, particularly from long-haul travel, provoked both important discussions regarding the industry's long-term sustainability and an emergent flight-shaming movement that seeks to shift social norms against air travel.

Nonetheless, new frontiers of ecotourism have been emerging across Latin America. Colombia's 2016 peace accords opened up interior regions to ecotourism development. Panama has invested in infrastructure upgrades and promoted greater domestic use of its national parks. Extensive expansion of private and public protected areas in Chile has added to ecotourism resources in that country. Yet just as such positive changes were occurring across Latin America, other countries were backtracking from their earlier ecotourism successes. Beyond Nicaragua's political violence, Honduras, El Salvador, and Mexico all saw gang and drug cartel–related violence slow or stop the development of nature-based tourism in numerous destinations.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic brought a third reckoning: it exposed the vulnerability inherent in heavy reliance on tourism. The dependence of sectors like transportation and food production on a thriving tourism industry was made particularly apparent. The pandemic also revealed the critical role that ecotourism plays as a conservation and development tool. The loss of the resources it provides for conservation placed wildlife populations in jeopardy as desperate people returned to extractive activities, illegal poaching, and expansion of subsistence cultivation.

How will ecotourism evolve in response to these three challenges? In the eventual reemergence from the pandemic, will desperation to return to previous levels of revenue lead to a reordering of priorities, resulting in less concern for the degree of social and environmental well-being generated by tourism?

One aspect of the regional debate about overtourism is that many of the most iconic Latin American national parks have historically been visited by more international tourists than domestic visitors. There had been some previous pushes to increase domestic park usage, as a means of promoting greater awareness of the value of protected areas. But it was the pandemic that prompted more extensive local use of parks, as outdoor recreation became one of the few permitted public activities during lockdowns.

This type of visitation also has distinct climate consequences, producing much lower emissions than international long-haul travel. Yet it is uncertain whether growing domestic markets can yield levels of financial support for conservation that are comparable to the international, high-value/low-density model often promoted within the ecotourism sector. As in the Galápagos, where the international visitor fee of just $100 for up to a 60-day visit has inexplicably stayed the same since 1993, such shifting visitation dynamics across Latin America will require careful restructuring of user fees for parks that host ecotourism activities.

THE ONGOING EMBRACE

It has now been nearly four decades since Hector Ceballos-Lascuráin popularized the term "ecotourism." Today, the most widely cited definition is that of the International Ecotourism Society, recently updated as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education." But much as ecotourism was framed as a win-win approach for both environment and society in the decade after the Brundtland Report ushered in the era of

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sustainable development, other niche tourism labels now compete for the mantle of essentially the same principles, as in recently popularized calls for "regenerative" tourism. Yet as Martha Honey, a cofounder of the Center for Responsible Travel, has argued, "To abandon the concept because of its misuse or confusion is a classic case of throwing out the baby with the bathwater."

Problems can arise when ecotourism strays from its principles or succumbs to the temptation to scale up too far, risks that must be carefully managed in popular destinations like the Galápagos and Costa Rica. Mechanisms that keep limits on visitors' numbers and their activities, and other management controls such as those in the joint partnerships in Peru, provide a blueprint worth considering elsewhere. In cases like Nicaragua's, however, even well-managed ecotourism will not be enough to overcome entrenched forms of poverty, inequality, authoritarianism, and corruption.

The global tourism industry as a whole crossed the threshold of more than one billion international travelers in 2012, eventually peaking at 1.47 billion in 2019. In the nature-based tourism sector alone, international and domestic visits to protected areas worldwide exceeded 8 billion per year before the pandemic. Most prognosticators expect that the industry will soon return to such levels, then surpass them in the coming decades.

For such reasons, scholars have included international tourism in the suite of indicators used to describe the "Great Acceleration" of the Anthropocene, the post-1950 era of unprecedented environmental change and species loss resulting from anthropogenic activity. It is now more critical than ever to understand how human activities can be better managed to support the survival of species—including our own—on the planet. By highlighting alternatives to business-as-usual development (other forms of tourism among them), ecotourism will have a continuing role to play.

In Latin America, the stakes are exceptionally high. Threats from human activities—such as industrialized agriculture and oil palm plantations; mining, petroleum, and other extractive industries; unregulated commercial fishing; and less responsible forms of mass tourism—combine with the resulting biogeophysical changes (climate change, ocean acidification, pollution) to jeopardize biological and cultural diversity throughout the region.

Certainly, ecotourism is not without its limitations. But in light of the social and environmental consequences of what might otherwise exist in its absence, ecotourism's promise as one of the most sustainable means of protecting biodiversity while supporting rural communities' well-being is alive and well. Committed application of ecotourism principles remains an effective conservation strategy that passionate environmentalists are busy promoting over the alternatives, and implementing to great effect across Latin America. ■

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Gangs, Deportees, and Haiti's Troubles

CHELSEY L. KIVLAND

Just the other week, Mack, one of my research assistants chronicling the resettlement of *depòte*, or Haitian migrants deported back to Haiti from the United States due to criminal matters, sent me an interesting text message. He wrote that he was interviewing a *depòte* who had become a *chèf gang*, a gang leader, in his Port-au-Prince neighborhood. The use of the phrase *chèf gang* struck me, since most often my interlocutors have used the term *baz*, or "base," to refer to what goes by the name "gang" in the United States. Mack himself is a US deportee, and his choice of language reveals his prior involvement with the "gangsta life," as he often puts it. But his wording also reflects a shift in the meaning and activities of street organizations in Haiti—a shift away from the politically engaged, defense-oriented *baz* toward the nonpartisan, profiteering *gang*.

When I asked Mack why he used the term *gang* and not *baz*, he explained that the group was not trying to "help the neighborhood or make any changes" but just to "advance themselves." He then linked such machinations with the July 7, 2021, assassination of Haitian President Jovenel Moïse: "They killed him as a gang out to get rich or stop others from getting rich."

Later that day, I called Msye Joseph, a police officer and deportee-processing executive. He registers deportees and oversees their transfer to relatives, who house them as they get settled in the country. I asked him to explain the meaning of *gang* and how it differs from *baz*. Joseph began by proclaiming that the *baz* were disappearing in Haiti. "All *baz* have become *gang*, and the *baz*, they no longer have any, or not the same, political power."

His point was not only that *baz* have relinquished a populist political agenda, but also that they were partnering with politicians in ways that replicated criminal exploitation—not representation—of the population. The difference is not that the typical gang is apolitical, but that it *fè politik*, or "does politics" out of self-interest, rather than *fè leta,* or engages with governmental or nongovernmental agencies on popular empowerment projects.

"Concerning the *baz*," Joseph continued,

> This is people who have based themselves in the zone, and they make *brigad* [defense patrols], and yes, they can have weapons, but they use these to protect the zone. But now because the media talks most about gangs and the language of the deportees enters Haiti, we see *gang* circulate. It identifies those criminal *baz*. Those that do criminal things, that steal from people in the street and from motorists passing through the zone. The *gang* and deportee can go together because the deportee cannot speak for a zone like the *baz* can, but they can do criminal things like a *bandi* (bandit or thief) can.

Deportees have also used the *gang* label to defend themselves and to assert some agency and power over the stigma projected onto them, just as *baz* have long done.

Like Mack, Joseph connected the rise of the gangs—as phenomenon and vocabulary—to the presidential assassination. Joseph claimed that Moïse was slain at the hands of a "Colombian gang" that had turned against him because of his willingness to ally with "Haitian gangs" to take over the management of drug trafficking through Haiti. "This was not a fight over political visions or projects," he said, "but over *lajan ak pisans ant gang yo* [money and power between the gangs]."

STIGMA AND CACHET

In 2019, I began a three-year ethnographic project on the resettlement process and the experiences of deportees from the United States to Haiti, with funding from the National Science Foundation and the Wenner-Gren Foundation. Approaching the third and final year of research,

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I am ready to offer some lessons learned about the categorization and stigmatization of deportees in Haiti. These lessons are, however, complicated by the mass repatriation of Haitian migrants.

Many left home to settle in Brazil, Chile, and other Latin American countries after Haiti's devastating 2010 earthquake. Facing unemployment and increased social discrimination in these countries, and sensing that US immigration policy has changed with the departure of Donald Trump and the inauguration of Joe Biden, thousands of Haitian migrants have attempted to reach the United States. Yet they have been summarily barred from asylum hearings and denied reentry. Over the past few months, an estimated 4,000 migrants have returned to Haiti, and they are reshaping the landscape for deportees in the country.

In the past, repatriated citizens and criminal deportees did not coalesce into a united front or political bloc. Repatriates distanced themselves from the stigma of criminality, and many criminal deportees positioned themselves not as Haitian migrants but as American exiles. But as media reports on the brutality with which US immigration officers treated the repatriates in the Texas/Mexico borderland circulate on cell phones and in chat rooms, a new solidarity between the criminalized deportees and the other repatriated deportees has begun to emerge. Both groups are joining forces to advocate for access to asylum hearings and for more uniform and equitable handling of cases.

Many Haitians suspect deportees of bringing crime into the country.

In a video series on his Facebook account, Mack presented the violations of asylum law and policy that these repatriations constitute. Through such videos, he calls on others—readers included!—to join our work of advocating for those now stuck on the borderlands with nowhere to call home. He urges the reopening of asylum hearings in the United States, which had been suspended under Trump and remained delayed under Biden as he grappled with the pandemic.

I embarked on this project already familiar with the politics involved in naming street organizations in Haiti. My book *Street Sovereigns* shows how the term *baz*, with its appeal to the social basis and popular sovereignty of the group, serves to defend and justify their activities. In contrast, the term *gang,* as I have learned in my work with deportees, is increasingly used in Haiti to equate urban groups with criminality and violence—to refer to a group as a *gang* is to depict each member as a self-serving, greedy thief.

Street hangout for deportee-founded Baz Kolon Blan. Author photo, 2020.

I was made immediately aware of this when I described my work to an officer with Direction Centrale Police Judiciaire, the state security office that registers deportees in the country upon arrival. He quipped, "So you must like the gangsta because the people deported—not all but most—are gangsta. It's thievery that they do."

Deportees must grapple with the prejudices of many Haitians who suspect them of bringing crime into the country. Several deportees have shared with me the challenges they face in trying to find employment, housing, and schooling, not to mention friendships and community. Yet the politics of naming the deported as "gangstas" is, to be sure, more complicated than this. As I have witnessed, deportees can use the *gang* label to defend themselves and to assert some agency and power over the stigma projected onto them.

In the conversation I had with Mack about gangs, he explained how it can be advantageous for someone—a deportee, in particular—to claim a gangsta identity. He spoke about not only the need to protect oneself by stoking fear in others, but also the reasons to cultivate the desirable persona of the quintessential urban Black American. He said that because he could talk, walk, dress, and act like a gangsta, other deportees and young Haitians wanted to be associated with him. This was a reason he ran a rap music studio, something he would not have done in the United States. In Haiti, he could position himself, by way of the

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cachet of his racial and urban American identities, as an expert in this domain. "I got in with the studio because I could see how Haitians love rap music, and that being an American thing, I could do that," Mack told me.

This comment raises the key question of how *depòte* not only suffer but also rework processes of criminalization and racialization as they make a life in a society that both reveres and fears them. How do deportees' affiliations with *American* Blackness—a socially prized yet stigmatized racialization—serve as the basis for and the means to contest marginalization in Haitian society? This is the question I aim to address in my research for my next book. In so doing, I seek to reveal the transnational hierarchies that structure deportees' lives, as well as the ways they navigate and upend these hierarchies.

So much uncertainty is on the horizon for the Haitians my research assistants and I have been following over the past two years. How will the forced repatriation of thousands of Haitian migrants from the US borderlands reconfigure the complex interrelations of deportees and Haitian society, which is foreign to many of them? It is estimated that 20,000 migrants will be repatriated over the coming months. Their integration will occur at a time when power and politics have been profoundly destabilized in this already unstable country by the presidential assassination, a contested election cycle, and the ravages of the COVID-19 pandemic. I hope our research team can work together to help Haiti through these compounding crises of instability, for which the United States bears a share of responsibility.

One way of doing so is to listen more acutely to the grievances of those deported and the pathways of reintegration they recommend. There are calls for initial financial support, assistance with obtaining identity cards and driving permits, guidance for finding housing and employment, and occasions for bringing together deportees and the repatriated to form connections and build community. Many *depòte* have suggested to the research team that these proposals could be pursued through a state office dedicated to deportee resettlement. This office would also advocate for the reduction, if not abolition, of deportations—at least, so goes the dream of the research team. As Jocelyn, a deportee and participant in the research project, said of the cumulative tasks ahead: "*Pa lage rev la pandan w ap travay pou demen k ap pi bon*!" (Don't leave the dream behind as you work for a better tomorrow!) ■

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Reframing Centuries of Cuban Lives

JESSE HOFFNUNG-GARSKOF

In the fall of 1962, villagers in a small farming community 65 miles east of Havana were surprised by the sudden arrival of a detachment of young Soviet soldiers and a midnight convoy of large transport vehicles. The Cuban army, representing the revolutionary government that had been in power since 1959, instructed the townspeople to stay in their houses. As they "peered through the wooden slats of their louvered windows," they saw massive trucks carrying what looked like the trunks of very large palm trees, hidden under canvas tarps. When US warplanes began flying low over their village, the residents of Santa Cruz de los Pinos understood that they were in danger, though only later would they learn that the objects in the trucks were nuclear missiles, capable of incinerating tens of millions of people in the United States, poisoning many more, and provoking equally destructive retaliation.

Cuba: An American History
Ada Ferrer
Scribner, 2021

With this tale of homesick Soviet enlisted men carving Cyrillic initials into trees in the Cuban countryside and rural Cubans peeking through wooden louvers at huge transport trucks, historian Ada Ferrer brings new life to a familiar story, the Cuban Missile Crisis. The move is typical of her riveting new book, *Cuba: An American History*, which reframes both familiar and unfamiliar episodes through attention to the experience of everyday Cubans. The result is a book that is not just deeply entertaining, not just elegantly synthetic, but also brimming with brilliant, original, and profoundly humane reinterpretation.

The book's subtitle, *An American History*, is a wry invitation to misunderstanding. To some readers, the idea that the long-unfolding history of Cuba might be a window onto a larger American experience, in the ecumenical sense of the term, will be intuitive. This is an island that sat at the center of European conquest and genocide, 300 years of Spanish colonialism, inter-imperial rivalries, Atlantic slavery and commodity production, US imperialism, global musical culture, revolutionary anti-imperialism, and, for several months in the early 1960s, the real possibility of global Armageddon. Cuba's history opens out onto a history of the Americas. Yet for a much larger group of English-language readers, the book's title permits a more chauvinistic reading of American history as US history, with the express purpose of undermining that very chauvinism.

Ferrer offers what she calls a "shadow history" of the United States, a highly selective account told according to a destabilizing organizing principle: Cuba. The arc of this American history includes President James Monroe in 1823 declaring the principle of nonintervention in Latin America in order to protect "Americans' stake" in Cuban slavery; Vice President Rufus King dying in 1853 on a sugar estate in Matanzas; the 1898 US intervention in the Cuban war of independence; the infiltration of Cuba by US investors in the first decades of the twentieth century and by organized crime in the 1930s and 1940s; the escalating confrontations of the Cold War; successive waves of Cuban migrants to the United States; and the 2016 visit of Barack Obama to Havana.

But the project of a "shadow history" determines not only which events are to be included, but also which vantage point will be selected when depicting them. History, Ferrer notes, "always looks different from where one stands." So instead of standing next to frightened citizens of the United States who watched the Cuban Missile Crisis on their televisions (or who practiced ducking under their desks in public elementary schools), readers stand with Ferrer inside the homes of the residents of Santa Cruz de los Pinos, watching through their windows as the world edges toward nuclear annihilation.

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HISTORY ON A HUMAN SCALE

By alternating between highly local perspectives and more traditional vantage points, Ferrer manages to relate world-changing events and processes on a human scale. The approach is cinematic, moving in and out between close-up and wide-angle views, "cutting" back and forth among multiple settings, and altering the speed with which time passes within each scene.

Take, for instance, the four paragraphs on one remote segment of the Cuban coastline that introduce another iconic episode in US–Cuban relations. The first paragraph operates on a geologic time scale—forests thousands of years old, ancient species from the time of the dinosaurs, dense swampland, and jagged limestone. The next two introduce a human scale, unfolding in time-lapse from mounds built by indigenous Taínos through 500 years of colonization, to describe a "place so inhospitable, so isolated from the rest of the island," that there were no towns or cities. A handful of scattered residents harvested roots in the swamps and baked them in small open fires to produce charcoal, the region's only industry. Then a final paragraph picks up the pace, covering only two years, as a revolution that sought to "pulverize" the time of the past through rapid and radical transformation built a hospital, an electric power plant, an aqueduct, and a resort on the beautiful beach called Playa Girón, facing the inlet known as the Bay of Pigs.

Cuba's history opens out onto a history of the Americas.

In April 1961, one month before the scheduled opening of the resort, 1,400 exiles seeking to overthrow the revolutionary government encountered a raucous beach party bathed in electric floodlights at a landing site that they had understood to be remote and deserted. Their boats were damaged and disabled by craggy limestone on the sea bottom. Their path to the mountains, where they had planned to set up as guerrillas should the initial invasion fail, was blocked both by swamps and by a local population wholly embedded in the revolutionary transformations underway.

The rest of the chapter toggles between a slow-motion account of the unfolding disaster of the invasion and a brisk but thorough flashback to the even more disastrous process by which the project took shape, as the Central Intelligence Agency, the State Department, and the White House moved forward without an actual plan or even a basic understanding of Cuba's social and geographic terrain. Ferrer summarizes the heated debates about why the invasion failed—the many and obvious mistakes of intelligence agencies and the ambivalence or outright betrayal of President John F. Kennedy. But her way of telling the story lets readers in, from the outset, on a "fundamental truth" that lay at the heart of the disaster and continues to bedevil scholars and participants who argue about its failure: "no invasion lands on empty ground; no intervention unfolds on a blank slate."

This is a powerful interpretive move. But Ferrer's account of the Bay of Pigs immediately undermines any idea that the most important reason for understanding the episode is the possibility of a reevaluation of US empire. Her warning, in the introduction, that "this is a deeply personal book" comes into full view as a graceful interpretive innovation in a coda to this chapter. Within Cuba, the failed invasion served to consolidate the power of the revolutionary leadership, which mobilized the military and mass organizations to round up as many as 50,000 suspected enemies, including Ferrer's father. With a light touch, she mentions only that her mother searched for, and found, her father in the crowd at one of the makeshift detention sites. In other equally succinct passages, Ferrer introduces her parents' migration to the United States and her own later return to Cuba as a researcher.

These moments anchor, and reveal the logic behind, what is perhaps the most dramatic dimension of her approach to the revolution and its long aftermath. Rather than take a position on the clotted debate over whether Fidel Castro became a Communist before or after the United States decided to overthrow him, for instance, she asks: What was it like to stand for five hours listening to a speech by Fidel and feel as if anything were possible? Rather than judging the political positions of Cubans who went into exile, she asks: What was it like to be shouted at and spit on by neighbors as you stood on a dock waiting to board a boat for the United States, only to be greeted by shouts of "Down with Fidel" in Florida?

Beyond the disruption of common-sense understandings of what is and is not American history, beyond the skillful deployment of shifting frames, magnifications, and timelines, and belying the inevitable description of the book as "epic," it is this personal approach—not just to the period

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framed by the author's own life, but to the entire sweep of 500 years—that sets this work apart. Ferrer's "American History" is unsparing in its account of unspeakable violence, corruption, imperial meddling, and authoritarianism. It weaves together the rebellions, constitutional conventions, revolutions, social and artistic movements, economic improvisation, and humor through which various Cubans have struggled for survival, liberation, equality, national sovereignty, democracy, and justice.

Yet this is a sensitive personal history of a divided Cuban people rather than a programmatic history of a uniform Cuban *pueblo*. Ferrer's sympathies are with the villagers peeking out their windows, with the charcoal burners, with the disaffected revolutionaries caught between superpowers, with the marchers hopeful for a new beginning, and with migrants hopeful for a different new beginning. Her sympathies are with those who left Cuba and those who were left behind.

Finally, Ferrer asks readers not to imagine that either the defeat of projects for liberation or the incommensurability of these different perspectives was ever the only thing that mattered. Reflecting on the fraught relationship between Cuba and Miami, she concludes that despite the political vitriol on both sides, this relationship was "not always sinister."

> Sometimes it was just about family and survival, longing and attachment. So, a young girl in Cuba grows up in a home with a special drawer filled with nice clothes given to her family by relatives in the United States. They were clothes, pressed and never worn, waiting for the day the family would fly to its exile abroad. A young girl in Miami grows up in a home with another special drawer, also filled with nice clothes, pressed and saved, waiting to be sent to family in Cuba. In so many ways, big and small, each place depends on the other. ■

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