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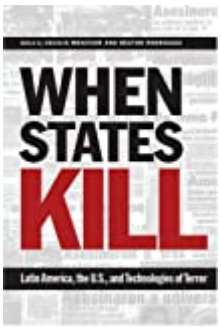

Cecilia Menjivar, Nestor Rodriguez, eds. *When States Kill: Latin America, the U.S., and Technologies of Terror.* Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005. xiv + 374 pp. $55.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-292-70647-7; $22.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-292-70679-8.

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Sowing the Seeds of State Terror

Terrorism is in the eye of the beholder. One's "terrorist" is another's "freedom fighter." To the United States government, the right-wing military dictatorships and paramilitaries of Latin America that it supported in the second half of the twentieth century were the latter because they were fighting purported communist subversion. But as the authors in this volume compellingly suggest, these groups and regimes–located from Mexico to Argentina–could more accurately be described as the former. Their excessive use of violence qualified as state terror by violating the human rights of not only their political opponents but innocent civilians as well. The authors also are generally in agreement that the repressive governments in the region during the last half-century could not have accomplished what they did without the help and influence of the United States. This aid came in a variety of forms–from munitions and technology to training and ideology. As editors Cecilia Menjivar and Nestor Rodriguez point out in their concluding remarks: "The United States does not bear sole responsibility for every act of state terror in Latin America, as the authors in this collection make clear. Yet, it is important to acknowledge that the U.S.-Latin American interstate regime played a key role in setting up and operating campaigns of terror to eliminate perceived 'subversives' " (p. 345).

This is a sobering collection of essays. Many authors make effective use of primary source material–in the form of interviews, oral histories or published victim testimony–to offer stark, and occasionally gruesome, detail about the extent of the state-perpetrated violence. The sympathies of the volume's authors clearly lie with those who were subjected to the whims of the state. But although Menjivar and Rodriguez are pledging all royalties from the sale of the book to the Center for Justice and Accountability (p. xiii), none of the essays come off as advocacy scholarship.

A variety of disciplines and methodologies are represented in this volume. Menjivar and Rodriguez, who write the introductory and concluding essays, are sociologists; other contributors include historians, political scientists, anthropologists and a journalist. With some exceptions, most of the essays are narratives that chronicle campaigns of state terror and human rights abuse. However, the book is organized geographically, with Mexico and Central America as one main section and South

America another. Each essay examines a specific country and its recent experience with political violence. (Chile is a curious omission, however.) The editors provide a cogent introduction, opening with the question that drives the entire volume: "What causes the state-directed political violence that has characterized political culture in much of the Latin American region since the mid-twentieth century?" (p. 3). The duo rejects the idea that political violence is inherently part of Latin America's culture or is merely a byproduct of its colonial heritage. Rather, they see more recent roots for this trend, including a confluence of U.S. political interests in connection with local conflicts.

Many of the essays emphasize the role of the United States in its support of Latin American militaries, which often used that support–be it material, intellectual or political–against its own people. The infamous U.S. Army School of the Americas (SOA)–recently reincarnated as the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC)–is frequently referenced. Established by the United States shortly after World War II, it was used, ostensibly, to train Latin American militaries in counterinsurgency techniques. In reality, however, the school's graduates served as proxies to oppose communist influence in the region and the brutal tactics learned there were applied to all enemies of the state. As Menjivar and Rodriguez state, "SOA graduates have been among Latin America's worst human rights abusers, including the most notorious dictators of the region" (p. 19).

The issue of torture also is raised throughout the book and the authors offer similar explanations about its effect and usefulness to the militaries–that it was used more than simply to extract information, but also to send a message to others that instilled fear and quelled dissent against the state. There is a general suggestion that if these various techniques were not necessarily learned directly from the United States (via the SOA), then it nevertheless often received the United States' tacit approval. In his essay about Argentina, Ariel C. Armony attributes the Argentine military's use of torture to the influence of U.S. advisors in the 1960s. In sum, "torture was justified as 'the morally preferable response to threats to state security' " (p. 309).

The essays that focus on U.S. influence make a compelling case for the responsibility it bears for fomenting political violence. For example, Richard Grossman traces the repressive tactics of Nicaragua's Guardia Nacional (GN) back to the methods employed by the U.S. Marines who pursued nationalist rebel Augusto Sandino in the 1920s and 1930s. He asserts that the arrests and killings that took place in the hunt for Sandino were later adapted–with the help of SOA training–by the GN to neutralize alleged communists as well as opponents of the ruling Somoza family. Elsewhere, Joan Kruckewitt and Jeffrey J. Ryan chronicle the militarization of Honduras and Uruguay, respectively. Both countries are portrayed as largely peaceful until U.S. military aid tilted the political balance toward the armies, which were used to combat suspected communist infiltration during the reheating of the Cold War in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Kristin Norget posits that the impact of militarization has been felt more recently in Mexico, where threats to commercial interests from such groups as the Zapatistas has led to increased U.S. pressure on the Mexican government to use its military (as well as proxy paramilitaries) to maintain domestic order and stability.

U.S. efforts abroad in fighting–or getting local governments to fight–the "war on drugs" are raised not only in Mexico, but Colombia and Peru, as well. In perhaps the most sympathetic portrayal of the United States in this collection, John C. Dugas's essay on Colombia asserts that the United States has earnestly worked to improve the "atrocious" human rights situation there, which has featured alarming rates of political killings and kidnappings (p. 227). But, he argues, those efforts have been undone by a "contradictory" U.S. policy that has given Colombia significant military aid to fight the "war on drugs" but which eventually gets funneled down to the paramilitaries that are committing most of the human rights violations (p. 228). In Peru, the situation described by Abderrahman Beggar is slightly different. There, the political violence of the 1990s was not initiated by a military government, but rather by a civilian one, led by Alberto Fujimori. Nevertheless, as Beggar points out, U.S. influence was significant in the militarization of Peru during this time, when the Peruvian government cracked down on Sendero Luminoso, Tupac Amaru and the drug trade using anti-subversion tactics picked up at the SOA.

As some of the authors point out, not all of the anti-subversion campaigns were coordinated directly by the United States. Some operations featured collaboration among Latin American governments themselves. The most notorious example, as J. Patrice McSherry spotlights, was Operation Condor, a military intelligence network created in the 1970s that included Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay, Bolivia and Brazil (Peru and Ecuador were later involved to a lesser extent). Operating similar to the United States Special Forces, it shared intel-

ligence, operations, and, in some instances, coordinated assassinations. The extent of the United States' direct involvement remains unknown, as many key sources are still classified. But McSherry surmises that, considering the tactics, methods and networks used in Operation Condor, the United States was at least tacitly supportive. In those instances when the United States did not have a direct role, Argentina often served as a proxy, Armony argues. Its experience with the "Dirty War" in the 1970s and 1980s was turned into a commodity in which its ideology and training were exported into neighboring Bolivia as well as various paramilitary groups in Central America.

U.S. influence is not the exclusive focus of every essay in this volume. In a departure from the narrative style of most of the other essays, historian Aldo Lauria-Santiago argues for broadening the bounds in which to understand state violence. Using 1980s El Salvador as an example, he contends that rather than simply looking at "functional or instrumental arguments â¦ to explain the practice of violent repression" (p. 85), scholars should more carefully analyze how a country's "history, culture and local class relations" (p. 86) impacted this development. In his view, context and historical memory are also key, which he supports by drawing a connection between the political violence of the 1970s and 1980s to the memory of a 1932 revolt. Lauria-Santiago is less concerned with the U.S. role, which he admits is present, and more attuned to issues of identity, ideology and local interactions.

The most unique approach of all the essays in this collection is by M. Gabriela Torres. In her essay about Guatemala, she undertakes a close reading of cadaver reports to analyze deeper meanings of the injuries suffered by victims of state violence. Torres read some 3,000 cadaver reports in order to derive the significance of such patterns and factors as: location (which indicated the spreading of violence); omission of names (a warning that this could happen to anyone); rape or sexual assaults (to instill fear and vulnerability as well as to inflict shame and disrespect on the victim and/or their families); insertion of objects (continued defilement); and the removal of fetuses (a "symbolic obliteration of communal hope") (p. 162). By shedding light on the process of how political violence can be seen as "natural," Torres also successfully demonstrates how such acts, in turn, are seen as part of the "culture."

For their part, Annamarie Oliverio and Pat Lauderdale maintain that political violence is not necessarily part of the Latin American cultural heritage. They point to Costa Rica as a prime example. For most of its history, it has avoided suffering the same political violence as its neighbors in the region, but not without difficulties. Through political ingenuity, timing and location, they argue, Costa Rica largely has been able to resist U.S. pressure over the last quarter-century to militarize, which, as the other essays have shown, often has led to political violence.

Although many of the essays are sound, some general questions linger. For example, none of the essays delves much into the internal debate within these military governments. Its leaders are portrayed as almost uniformly willing participants who, without question or conscience, eagerly committed acts of political violence upon their own people and reaped the material gain procured via U.S. aid. Surely there were questions raised among officers about the violent paths these regimes were navigating. The voices of many of these actors, however, are largely muted. In addition, although the U.S. government reflects poorly in these essays, the concluding essay fails to expound on lessons learned and its significance on U.S. policy going forward.

But these points are minor and do not obscure one of the central arguments of the book. Collectively, the essays make an implicit–though no less convincing–case that the United States has, in fact, been a state sponsor of terrorism. As these essays reveal, with the United States now involved in a so-called war on terror halfway around the world, there is a certain tragic irony, then, that it has played so central a role in the training and support of practitioners of state-sponsored terror in its own hemisphere.