

During my own fieldwork with *evangélicos* in Rio de Janeiro, I have often wondered how to grasp the experiences of the people I worked with. Denyer Willis did not only see, smell and hear things I did not, but she also caught in words things that lingered in my mind and body, which I could not catch, let alone describe, and which only after reading her monograph attained a place in my consciousness.

Throughout the book, Denyer Willis connects the embodied experiences of grace to day-to-day politics and violence. At various moments in her monograph, she weaves in traces of her initial questions that concerned the exceptional status of Batan as the only community in Rio de Janeiro that had an Unidade de Polícia Pacificadora (Pacifying Police Unit, UPP) in an area that was dominated by a *milícia* (a mafia-like organisation that can include off-duty police officers and firefighters) and not by a gang of drug traffickers. As she describes, during her stay in Batan she gradually began to understand that this exceptional condition does not matter that much to the residents since their predicament did not radically change. Tellingly, one of her interlocutors corrects her when she describes Batan as ‘pacified’ and pushes her to question the temporal projections that portray a ‘before’ and an ‘after’ of the reign of one or another armed actor. ‘For many in the community, the logic of pacification simply continued the logic of the militia, which had for the most part been the logic of the traffickers’ (p. 37), Denyer Willis writes.

Denyer Willis also opposes voices that portray all Brazilian *evangélicos* as conservative Christians who uncritically support(ed) Jair Bolsonaro, the former Brazilian president who managed to gain popular support from several prominent pastor–politicians before and during his presidency. This is not to say that she pictures the longing for grace as inherently good or unproblematic. I take from her book the insight that we can understand how this longing for grace is frequently abused politically only when we perceive how it is connected to pain, loss and desire, and to the myriad ways Pentecostalism helps people in *subúrbios* to channel these emotions and to make sense of a world that repeatedly falls apart. For those who want to understand that (and more), I greatly recommend reading Denyer Willis’ monograph.

doi:10.1017/S0022216X24000609

Mateo Jarquín, *The Sandinista Revolution: A Global Latin American History*

University of North Carolina Press, 2024, pp. xvii + 314

Eline van Ommen

University of Leeds

(Received 25 July 2024; accepted 25 July 2024)

To write the history of the Sandinista Revolution, Mateo Jarquín argues, it is crucial to treat the leaders of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) as

protagonists, taking seriously their domestic and foreign policy objectives, as well as the strategies they employed to achieve these goals. Moving beyond the 'narrow focus on US foreign policy' that characterises much of the older literature on the topic, Jarquín's book sets out to trace the rise and fall of the Sandinista Revolution primarily from the perspective of the FSLN decision-making elites, starting with their road to power in the late 1970s and ending with the Sandinistas' surprise electoral loss in 1990 (p. 1). Yet, *The Sandinista Revolution* does much more than that. By situating the Sandinista Revolution in its Latin American and global context, Jarquín's book offers an impressive and nuanced analysis of the Cold War's final decade, and the conflict's lasting legacies in Nicaragua, Central America, and beyond.

The book is divided into four chronological parts, each zooming in on a different phase in the revolution's history, namely the origins (I), its consolidation (II), the civil war (III), and the peace process that ultimately resulted in the FSLN handing over power to a government led by Violeta Barrios de Chamorro (IV). Each stage in the revolution's trajectory, Jarquín demonstrates, had its own dynamics, confronting the FSLN leaders with a different set of challenges, which they could not always overcome. But the global context always mattered, contributing to the fall of Anastasio Somoza's dictatorship in July 1979, shaping the revolution's domestic programmes (such as land reform and literacy campaigns), and pushing the country towards a democratic transition. Like the Mexican and Cuban revolutions that came before it, Jarquín shows, the Sandinista Revolution was 'thoroughly internationalized' (p. 6). Throughout the book, comparisons are made between Nicaragua's revolutionary experience and other revolutions, such as those in Chile, Cuba and Vietnam. While a comparative approach to revolutions can be useful, it did make me wonder about the extent to which the Sandinista Revolution was exceptional, if at all. Was the Sandinista Revolution more internationalised than others? And if so, why? Was this the result of the global context, Sandinista strategy, or both?

While *The Sandinista Revolution* focuses on Latin Americans, it does not ignore the United States, which remained the most powerful and important actor in Central America. Rather, by centring the Sandinista perspective, Jarquín shows that US foreign policy was 'not the only game' in town, as an evolving cast of Latin American, European, African and Asian diplomats were intimately involved in shaping the revolution's trajectory (p. 6). These multilateral coalitions, moreover, ensured that the United States – despite an enormous financial and military advantage – was often unable to determine outcomes on the ground in Nicaragua and the wider Latin American region. In the years leading up to the FSLN's triumph, for instance, it was an unlikely group of Latin American leaders, including Omar Torrijos (Panama), Fidel Castro (Cuba) and Carlos Andrés Pérez (Venezuela), who provided the young Nicaraguan guerrillas with weapons, political support and strategic advice. They did so for various political and personal reasons, which the book explores in detail. Torrijos, notably, considered the Sandinista struggle through the lens of his own 'anti-colonial struggle' to reclaim the Panama Canal (p. 39). This 'Latin American fellowship of the Revolution' was a decisive factor in the revolution's triumph, ensuring that the Carter administration had little success in its rather naive efforts to keep the FSLN out of power. Similarly,

the US-funded civil war that ravaged Nicaragua throughout most of the 1980s largely ended because 'Central American elites took matters into their own hands', launching a regional peace initiative that resulted in the signing of the historic Central American Peace Accords in 1987 (p. 171). Even today, Jarquín writes in the Conclusion, the United States seems 'surprisingly incapable' of influencing Central American politics (p. 236).

A key objective of the book, Jarquín notes, is tracing the 'interplay between domestic and international factors' in shaping the revolution's trajectory. To do so, *The Sandinista Revolution* draws on an impressive number of archival sources from Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Cuba, Mexico and the United States, as well as interviews with former diplomats and revolutionaries. These primary sources, however, are mostly concerned with foreign policy and the revolution's global dimensions. To connect international diplomacy to domestic developments, Jarquín makes creative use of memoirs published by Sandinista leaders, oral history interviews and the large body of interdisciplinary literature that has been published since the revolution's triumph. Indeed, one of the book's strengths is how effectively it blends primary materials with Spanish-language published sources, giving credit to previous scholarship of the revolution. Furthermore, by highlighting the revolution's international reverberations, as well as the ability of the Nicaraguan revolutionaries to shape global affairs, the book is in a fruitful conversation with recent literature on the global Cold War, twentieth-century Latin America and the international and transnational history of the Central American civil wars.

Certainly, future histories might explore more closely how the revolution's international character shaped grassroots experiences of revolution and civil war in Nicaragua and beyond. Similarly, we still need to know more about the Sandinista project's impact beyond the Americas and Western Europe, particularly on people in the Soviet Union, the Middle East, Asia and Africa. Indeed, as Jarquín notes in the book's Preface, historians have only recently started to write about country's the revolutionary period. This book, written in an engaging and accessible manner, is an important step in that direction. A sweeping diplomatic and political history of the Sandinista Revolution, it is essential reading for students and historians of Central America, Third World revolutions and the global Cold War.

doi:10.1017/S0022216X24000610