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Democratic Transitions in Central America *edited by Jorge I. Domínguez and Marc Lindenberg. Gainesville, University Press of Florida, 1997. 240 pp. $49.95.*

Long before the world could imagine that war could be cold much less fathom weapons of mass destruction, Central Americans lived in fear of foreign powers. The decline of the Spanish armada left their coastal cities exposed to English pirates. And imperial Spain's descent into oblivion proclaimed what Central American elites thought obvious: Great Britain represented both a novel political-economic paradigm and an emerging threat to their own sovereignty.

The danger, it turned out, lay closer to home. An ephemeral Mexican empire imposed its paternal protection on Central America, whose own postcolonial leaders quickly accumulated a sorry record of internal strife. The patriotic founders of the Central American Federation—liberals and conservatives alike—were clannish and localistic. They were also presidential fetishists who repeatedly warned one another that if they failed to forge "fraternal" unity, their young nations would become the toys of foreigners. That was the first of their self-fulfilling prophecies.

The story of American interventionism in this conflictual region and the eventual Soviet challenge to American hegemony is well known. By the 1980s Central America was a bloody playground for superpowers and a magnet for foreign activists, journalists, and scholars. The best of the latter strove for thick parsimony in their accounts of the region's complex internal dynamics; but too many opted for simplification.

Now that the superpower(s) seem done with Central America, we face a dearth of insightful works and a surplus of distorted views. The collected volume *Democratic Transitions in Central America* provides relief on both counts, presenting us with a robust discussion of the region's delicate transitions from authoritarianism and war in the 1980s to pacification and democratization in the 1990s.

The introduction by Jorge Domíguez links the cases to the theoretical literature on democratization and conveys the enabling message that structural constraints do not preclude strategic action, even in Central America. The volume's conclusion by Marc Lindenberg provides a rare comparative perspective on the variety of emergent transition patterns—from recalcitrant Guatemala to exceptional Costa Rica.

The contributions by Central Americans are all worthwhile, though some deserve special mention. The essay by Sandinista Front for National Liberation (FSLN) Comandante Jaime Wheelock first paints yet another neo-Marxist caricature of Nicaragua's pre-revolutionary political economy; but then it shifts, perhaps unwittingly, to a spirited political account of the country's protracted transition to democracy. In contrast, Silvio De Franco and José Luis Velázquez (prominent anti-Sandinista intellectuals) dispel the myth of a Somoza dynasty overwhelmed by the accumulated pressures of "feudal" rigidities—arguing instead that a widening gap between the country's rapid economic modernization and its laggardly political development proved the undoing of the ancién regime.

If the Nicaraguan contributors have Samuel Huntington and Karl Marx talking to each other, the essay on El Salvador by Rubén Zamora (a Christian Democratic ally of the Farabundo Marte Liberation Front [FMLN]) succeeds at thick parsimony by unself-consciously blending historical-institutionalist, rational choice, and cultural approaches. As rendered by Zamora, the Salvadoran transition reveals the multiple relevances of sociopolitical (re)-arrangements. Previous strategic decisions do leave their mark on institutions and set the parameters for the art of the possible; but ideological reinvention and communicative innovation also create startling opportunities for structural change. And though political actors

compete for power resources, they also seek to maintain a minimal correspondence between public normative dictates and self-seeking pursuits.

This is a serious book about real countries. The playground is quiet, at least for now.

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Cultural Internationalism and World Order *by Akira Iriye. Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997. 212 pp. $32.50.*

This small volume is the product of Harvard historian Akira Iriye's Albert Shaw Memorial Lectures for 1988 at Johns Hopkins University. Iriye, a prominent and prolific scholar of international relations, narrowed the scope of his lectures on "War and Peace in the Twentieth Century" to trace the development of "cultural internationalism" since the late nineteenth century. He acknowledges that definitions of both "culture" and "internationalism" have found little consensus. And he admits the difficulty of separating political and economic ideas, institutions, and policies from cultural phenomena, but he undertakes the task largely through historical descriptive narrative. Iriye concedes that modernization and development have commonly meant Americanization, even though the first two are generally applied to the political economy and the latter to the cultural aspects of international relations.

Iriye's survey of transnational cultural developments demonstrates the important and commonly neglected role of cultural phenomena in the course of the past century. His thesis is that the values, perceptions, methods, and language used in order to cross national cultural barriers are distinct (for analysis) from the activity and conduct people pursue in war, conflict, business, and diplomacy. The tension between cultural internationalism and geopolitical realism is similar to the ideology vs realism dichotomy, except that cultural internationalists often see themselves as realists, striving to avoid the excesses of nationalism. Cultural internationalists believe that even the means to obtain goals (power) need to be culturally defined.

His clarifications and illustrations of the differences among the legal, economic, and cultural aspects of international contact are not always successful. For example, he considers the movement to standardize statistics, weights, and measures aspects of the rudimentary cultural internationalism of the late nineteenth century. The U.S. government, however, pursued a weights and measures agreement at the Panamerican conference of 1889 largely because merchants and manufacturers (many from the West Coast) wanted simplified weights and measures for their commercial activity from Mexico to Chile. Customs laws on this coast required weights in pounds, kilograms, arrobas, or quintales, but it was even more complicated. The countries used arrobas and quintales of different weights. Selling flour or other items by weight was a nightmare. The cultural and economic aspects are not readily separated.

Iriye's narrative incorporates new perceptions of cultural internationalism for the period from 1880 to the 1960s. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, he integrates Japanese and some Chinese intellectual currents and individuals to the Western international cultural movement. He notes how Japanese and Chinese intellectuals (and governments) sought to join the movement—under Western norms—even while asserting national and anti-impe-