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Lindo-Fuentes, Héctor and Ching, Erik (2012) *Modernizing Minds in El Salvador: Education Reform and the Cold War, 1960–1980*, University of New Mexico Press (Albuquerque, NM), xv + 341 pp. \$29.95 pbk.

Centred around the 1968 education reform, which promoted television as the exclusive mode of education delivery, this book is an excellent and stimulating historical study of Salvadoran politics and society, of much greater universal relevance than the title suggests. The study counters the ‘standard narrative’ (p. 9), of presenting the successive dictatorships from 1931 onward as homogenous power blocs, with a relational analysis of the heterogeneity of and frictions among ‘reformers’ and ‘conservatives’, thus identifying the different – at times competing – class fractions and political actors (landowners/agricultural vs industrialists/manufacturers, the Catholic Church and autonomous militaries that sometimes diverged from the conservative elite positions), related to differing understandings of modernisation. This is embedded in the interconnectedness of domestic policy-making in the context of ColdWar ‘development aid’ and popular mobilisation and armed resistance. The (for some, perhaps too) detailed but outstandingly thorough and systematic account draws on extensive and comprehensive primary and secondary sources, including international archival collections, interviews, speeches and media and official reports.

The book is structured with an Introduction, six chapters that combine a thematic framework with a chronological approach, and a Conclusion. The Introduction frames the book theoretically and methodologically, by reference to postcolonialism, development and revolution, and a nuanced discussion and historical contextualisation of capitalist modernisation. Chapter 1 discusses the rival visions of modernisation and education among the Salvadoran right in the period 1871–1960, distinguishing a rigid economic libertarianism from state-led economic and social development. Chapter 2 covers the years 1961–1967, showing the relationship between modernist reforms – especially through the US government’s ‘Alliance for Progress’ – anti-communist repression and the emergence of the teacher union ANDES as one of the principal opposition forces. In Chapter 3, these historical, national and international contexts frame an in-depth discussion of the contested education modernisation project and its intertwinedness with foreign aid agencies, especially USAID and UNESCO. Chapter 4 analyses the implementation of the education reforms throughout 1967–1971, to some extent the corporate interests involved and the resistance to it by ANDES, within growing popular mobilisation and organisation. Chapter 5 deepens the analysis of the political implications of the education reform and modernisation generally between 1971 and 1976 (i.e. land reform and infrastructure), pointing to the dialectics between policy imposition, state terrorism and resistance. Chapter 6 presents a critical discussion of the effectiveness of the reform, aptly highlighting that judgement of success or failure depends on the developmental theoretical position taken and on whether reform is considered a purely technical–bureaucratic process or a political project. Finally, the Conclusion

reiterates the centrality of the (failed) education project in Salvadoran politics within the holistic approach taken: ‘In this sense a study of the education reform reveals the characteristics of a regime that created the conditions for the war, nurtured the consolidation of its own enemies, and ultimately, in the words of Karl Marx, “created its own gravediggers”’ (p. 261)

While the corporate interests involved in promoting the reform could have received greater attention, the historical merit of the book undoubtedly consists in revealing the heterogeneity of the different forms of oligarchic–military rule over time. However, despite the clear statements throughout the book about the atrocities committed by the elite–military apparatuses, the differentiated and balanced analysis can frequently be read as adopting an apologetic tone, as downplaying or relativising the violence against opponents. This may, however, be subject to interpretation by the reader. Of greater importance to me is the book’s contemporary relevance, providing a fundamental background reading for capturing the complexities of Salvadoran politics and society in the twenty-first century, such as the historical–structural constraints within which the current Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN, Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front) governs: by using education as a case study of the political economy of modernisation, the book contributes to the critical issue of what education does for what development, at present discussed within the progressive left in countries such as Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Nicaragua and Venezuela and El Salvador itself. Affirming that the modernisation paradigm has always been more an ideological construal than a theory, the book draws new attention to neocolonialism and imperialism, largely removed from today’s mainstream ‘international development’ and ‘international education’ literature. In this respect, the failure and societal rejection of the excessive promotion of television for education delivery in El Salvador – substituting the teacher by ‘a monitor’ – should be of interest to those who today propagate, but also to those who oppose, educational ICT within the same modernist–capitalist rationale. Especially Chapter 6 offers material for ‘lesson learning’ – political, rather than technical, that is.

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