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*Los Zetas Inc.: Criminal Corporations, Energy, and Civil War
in Mexico* by Guadalupe Correa-Cabrera (review)

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Carlos Monzón in 1974, racist critics were quick to highlight his foreignness and blackness and seriously questioned his national loyalty to Mexican boxing. Curiously, a gender analysis was missing from this chapter. Allen could have further explored how his Afro-Cuban identity intersected with his masculinity. Did Nápoles' Cuban boxing style (compared to the Mexican warrior boxing style) and his libertine lifestyle lead to more criticism about his "soft masculinity" and fragile Mexicanidad? (187). Despite this omission, *A History of Boxing in Mexico* makes a significant contribution to Mexican sporting history and deserves recognition for its rigorous archival research, nuanced gender analysis of Mexican prizefighters and exploration of an often-neglected topic in Mexican history. This book should certainly reinvigorate interest in Mexican sports, particularly in relation to teaching courses in Latin American history, Chicana/o Studies and sports history.

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Reference

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Guadalupe Correa-Cabrera. *Los Zetas Inc.: Criminal Corporations, Energy, and Civil War in Mexico*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017. 379 pp.

Los Zetas Inc. is the catchy, eponymous title of Guadalupe Correa-Cabrera's ambitious recent book about a notorious Mexican criminal organization. The central argument is that Los Zetas are a categorically new criminal phenomenon in Mexico, and perhaps also in the world. For Correa-Cabrera, the Zetas are not just a drug "cartel," but a transnational corporation with a structure, business logic, and day-to-day functioning not unlike Walmart, Nike or Coca-Cola. Los Zetas, she argues, are exceptional and have transformed Mexican criminal activity due to various actions, namely: their innovative use of a highly-trained military wing of killers and enforcers; the large-scale employment of shocking forms of violence as a means of political intimidation and dominance not just as simple retribution; their

corporate entrepreneurial structure; their original social media tactics; their expansion into all manner of criminal activity not just drug trafficking; their creative adaptation of various modern technologies; their willingness to conquer new regions and territories; their lack of rootedness in a traditional region; their takeover of the distribution and sale of raw materials such as oil; their decentralized, horizontal hierarchy; and their reliance on networks rather than family ties (1–12). Correa-Cabrera's theoretical framework, the transnational corporate business model, is a unique understanding of the Zetas and organized criminal groups in Mexico. *Los Zetas, Inc.* is a state of the art study of organized crime and drug trafficking studies in Mexico.

The book has many virtues, including its exhaustive data collection, and the extremely useful compilations of chronologies and timelines, organizational charts and maps. Yet Correa-Cabrera's interpretations require further discussion here, because her constant invocation of the uniqueness and innovation of Los Zetas seems to create its own set of conceptual problems. In this regard, her book suffers from a flaw characteristic of much of the literature on "cartels" or organized groups in Mexico: localism. Even in the capable hands of the great reporters on Mexican narco issues such as Jesús Blancornelas and Ricardo Ravelo, or top researchers, whichever group the author or scholar is writing about at the moment (be it the Sinaloa Cartel, the Juárez Cartel, the Arrellano Félix brothers, etc.) is described as the largest, the most violent, the most original, the most dominant, the biggest threat, and so on. Despite the brilliance of Correa-Cabrera's analysis, the book reads as if Los Zetas became the model that most big criminal organizations in Mexico simply copied or learned from in order to catch up. Yet a closer reading of the history of organized crime in Mexico reveals that most, if not all, of the characteristic features of Los Zetas' model have been employed to an extent by other Mexican crime groups. In this regard, the differences between Los Zetas and groups such as the Sinaloa Cartel, the Juárez Cartel, and the Jalisco New Generation Cartel are more a matter of degree and emphasis than categorical distinction. Indeed, much of the rhetoric and analysis about the transnational corporate nature of Los Zetas has also been applied to the Chapo Guzmán and the Sinaloan criminal organizations. Equally, it would be hard to argue that the various crime groups in Juárez were less violent than Los Zetas. Additionally, numerous other criminal entities in Mexico combine drug dealing/trafficking with other lucrative rackets such as kidnapping, extortion, human smuggling, prostitution, and takeover of land and other natural resources. There may

be just as much continuity as change in Los Zetas' "model." Finally, we might question why, if the Zetas' innovations were so successful, the crime group came apart so quickly, unlike the "traditional" organized crime entities she discusses who muddled through and survived despite government crackdowns and U.S. law enforcement campaigns. However, Correa-Cabrera does break new ground in her insightful analysis of how Los Zetas captured oil and other hydrocarbons (157–185). Moreover, her discussion of how the primary beneficiaries of Los Zetas criminal maneuvers were ultimately legitimate transnational capitalist corporations is an extremely fruitful new line of analysis. So also is her discussion of the civil war-like character of recent violence in Mexico.

In conclusion, whichever side one falls on Correa-Cabrera's incisive polemical arguments, *Los Zetas Inc.* merits close study by all scholars of Mexican politics, organized crime, energy issues, human security, and governmentality. It is a major book that should be required reading in social science classes on contemporary Mexico.

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