

# Latin American Studies Center News



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## The Paradox of Local Empowerment: Decentralization and Democracy?

by Andrew Selee

Director, Mexico Institute, Latin American Program at the Woodrow Wilson Center

In the 1980s and 1990s, decentralization reforms swept across Latin America and the developing world as almost every country implemented measures to strengthen the authority and autonomy of local governments. Mexico was no exception. Mexico had been, at least in formal terms, one of the most centralized countries in Latin America. For most of the period from the 1930s to the early 1980s, a single party dominated almost all aspects of political life, including most elected positions. Over ninety percent of all public resources

in 1980 were spent through national government agencies despite the nominal existence of a federal system. By the new millennium, however, Mexico had become a multiparty democracy and well over a third of all public resources were exercised at the state and local level. State and local governments, which had appeared to be mere appendages of an overwhelmingly dominant central state, now had a degree of discretion in spending and policy-making they had not enjoyed in decades. Even more importantly, this process of decentral-

**Decentralization and Democracy continued on page 3**



Carlos Mascareño, Andrew Selee and Gary Bland at discussion on Decentralization and Democracy in Latin America



The University of Maryland, College Park

# CONNECTA: Upcoming Latin American Art Exhibit at UM

By Jackie Milad



Cecilia Garcia, *Anonimos*, Acrylic.

The Union Gallery presents CONECTA, an exhibition and artist collaborative project featuring emerging U.S and Mexican artists.

Artists will collaborate for a week in the gallery, September 18-25. The workspace will be open to the public, allowing visitors to see the development of the artwork in real time. The completed exhibit will be on display from September 25 to October 3, 2008. There will be an opening reception for the artists on September 25th from 5:00 – 7:00pm. The Union Gallery on the first floor of the Adele H. Stamp Student Union will host the event.

CONNECTA is a unique program that allows emerging artists from Mexico and the Baltimore/Washington D.C. area the opportunity to collaborate in the creation of original artworks, as well as forge lasting international professional associations.

They have been chosen as the inaugural group due to their commitment to their artistic

careers and to the promise of their work. Most of the artists are under 35 years of age and have never before had their work displayed in a gallery setting. For most, this will also be the first time working together in an artistic collaborative effort.

In conjunction with the Conecta 08 exhibition other programming is being planned in collaboration with the Office of International Programs and the Latin American Studies Center. The "Mexico in Maryland" program will include the following events:

September 22: Panel discussion and lecture with Andrew Seele, moderator

September 23: Lecture on Katherine Ann Porter by Beth Alvarez

September 24: Film "El Violin"

September 25: Maru Montero Dance Company: Folk Mexican dances

September 25: Ambassadorial Lecture Series: Mexican Ambassador Arturo Sarukhan

This exhibition is made possible by the additional support and effort from The Office of International Programs, the Latin American Studies Center, Multicultural Involvement and Community Advocacy, Department of Spanish & Portuguese and the Mexican Cultural Institute

Contributing artists:

Cecilia García (MX)

José Carlos Flores Zazueta (MX)

Bernardo Alatorre Tapia (MX)

Sasha Blanton (US)

Alyssa Dennis (US)

Juan Rojo (US/SPAIN) Current MFA student at the University of Maryland

Jackie Milad, Curator

Please visit the blog that has been created for the purpose of communicating ideas and images between the 2008 invited artists: <http://conecta08.blogspot.com>

## LASC Executive Committee

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ization took place in the context of a gradual process of democratization in which the country instituted truly competitive elections for the first time in decades.

Carlos Mascareño is a research fellow with the Latin American Studies Center at the University of Maryland, College Park. Based at the Center for Development Studies at the Central University of Venezuela, Mascareño's research has focused primarily on decentralization, civil society and democratic consolidation in Latin America. As he noted in a paper presented at the University of Maryland in April, proponents of decentralization have argued that it has the potential to improve democratic governance by making elected authorities more responsive, since they would be closer to citizens and better able to discern what their preferences were. In addition, decentralization would bring citizens closer to government, allowing them to know what their elected officials were doing and to interact with them more frequently. Decentralization would thus reinforce democracy by making government more accountable and ensuring enhanced opportunities for citizen voice. In short, democracy close to home would allow citizens a quality of politics that could not be achieved with democracy on a larger scale.

However, most of what we know about the relationship between decentralization and democracy is from the experience of the developed world. In most of those countries, the construction of democratic institutions and the extension of citizenship rights took place during a period of centralization, and decentralization has taken place after these rights and institutions have been largely determined. In contrast, in Mexico, as in much of the developing world, decentralization has coincided with a period of democratic transition. Therefore, local governments are being empowered at the same time that political institutions at all levels of government are being constructed and citizenship rights negotiated and expanded. We know very little about how decentralization affects democratic governance in contexts where political institutions are still under



construction and citizenship rights are often weakly defined and enforced.

Moreover, the causal argument about decentralization and democracy suggests that developing countries like Mexico were, in fact, strongly centralized and that decentralization represents a dramatic shift in how the state is organized. This is, as it turns out, only partially true. There is no question that the formal institutions of the state were, prior to the 1980s and 1990s, highly centralized in Mexico, as in many other countries in Latin America. However, the underlying logic of politics in Mexico, as in much of the developing world, was a bit more complex. The state relied on extensive alliances with power centers outside the state for its survival during several decades of one-party hegemonic rule. What looked to most observers like a monolithic centralized authoritarian state, in fact concealed a state that was much more diffuse and based on a series of informal power arrangements with key veto players in the political system. Formal power within the state was highly centralized while informal power, which sustained the legitimacy and effectiveness of the state, was deeply decentralized. In understanding how decentralization affects democracy we need to look at the transformation of not only the formal institutions of the state but also the informal power arrangements that sustained the old system. When we take these factors into account, as Mascareño has suggested, the relationship between decentralization and democracy may be less clear-cut.

*Students take notes during Mascareño's presentation: "Decentralization and Democracy in Latin America: A direct relation?"*

# LASC Certificate students Spring 08

## Laura Brewer Anthropology

Laura Brewer is graduating this May with a double degree in Spanish and Anthropology. Originally from Frederick, Maryland, Laura is interested in Latin American Studies because it is a natural combination of her two majors and emphasizes the human/cultural component behind the Spanish language. Laura has traveled to Mexico, Puerto Rico, Peru, Chile, and Argentina and has grown very passionate about Latin America. After graduation, Laura plans to pursue a career in Spanish teaching, where she can use the knowledge gained in the Latin American Studies Certificate program to teach her students about the cultures of Latin America. She'd also like to work with Latino immigrants in Maryland or perhaps even go abroad to South/Central America for awhile to work. In the program, Laura has enjoyed taking courses on the "Ethnography of the Immigrant Life" with Dr. Freidenberg, "Race and Ethnicity in Brazil" with Dr. Chernela, "Latin American Literature" with Dr. Demaría, and Central American Diasporas with Dr. Rodríguez.



## Owen Silverman Andrews Government and Politics

Owen Silverman Andrews is a Junior Government and History student enrolled in the Latin American Studies Certificate. Born in Manhattan, Owen's interests in Latin America stem from his travels throughout Mexico, Costa Rica, and Chile that keep him interested and engaged in the region. His passion is rooted in the intoxicating and vibrant past and present the culture emits. Furthermore, Owen enjoys exploring the parallels between American countries as having shared in a New World experience, but also marvels at the different paths each has taken. Owen owes much to the patience and encouragement of UM faculty. Dr. Mary Kay Vaughn's HIST 475 was especially enlightening, for that is where Owen encountered Mexican muralist Diego Rivera. Owen would especially like to thank Dr. Janet Chernela for her good faith as he writes his Capstone thesis, "Genocide By Other Means: Cultural Whitening in Brazil During the Vargas Years, 1930-45," and Dr. David Sartorius, whose personal interest and encouragement have been invaluable. Owen's dream is to one day work and live in Latin America, though more than one Latin Americanist has raised an eyebrow when Owen has related his interest in the US Foreign Service. There are bridges that need mending and others that need rebuilding. Many of the finest professors and TAs at UM are involved with the LASC Program, teaching courses they are truly passionate about; and for him, that makes all the difference.



# Latinos and Politics

By Katherine Vences



Representatives from our local Democratic and Republican parties were invited by the Latin American Studies Center and the Latino Student Union to discuss their views of the current political climate and the developing role of young voters.

Ana Sol Gutiérrez and Jocelyn Peña-Melnyk, representing the Democratic Party, along with Charles Ramos and Armando Camacho, representing the Republican Party, formed the panel which assembled on March 5 in St. Mary's Hall. Mark H. López, former UM faculty member in the School of Public Policy and current Associate Director of the Pew Hispanic Center, served as moderator.

Panelist introduced themselves and provided a quick outline of their political career and background. All four guest speakers hold prominent political roles in the area. Both Republicans are successful business owners who also hold civic positions. Ramos is President and CEO of CR Dynamics, a contact center firm in Baltimore. He was also recently elected to the Baltimore Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. Camacho is President of Bud Miller and Associates and is also a liquor commissioner for the Prince George's County Government.

The Democratic representatives were both female government officials from the region. Ana Sol Gutiérrez is a systems engineer

by day and a Montgomery County legislator by night. Jocelyn Peña-Melnyk is currently employed as a State legislator for District 21. She had previously worked as a prosecutor and College Park councilwoman.

An almost inevitable political debate ensued concerning each party's legitimacy over the other. Gutiérrez and Peña-Melnyk reminisced about their

beginnings as passionate citizens in their communities and defended their "for the people" approach regarding the government's function in society. Conversely, Camacho expressed his support for a limited government and often remarked that "Hi, I'm with the government and I'm here to help you," was one, if not, the most terrifying phrase he has ever heard. Ramos supported Camacho's distrust of the government by arguing that not only is the institution "inept" but also extremely wasteful.

Gutiérrez and Peña-Melnyk mentioned often the need to give back and be "socially responsible." According to Gutiérrez, everyone becomes politically active by birth. The first step in getting involved is finding an issue to be passionate about.

The panel provided a great illustration of each party's general platform and beliefs. Representatives argued over military spending, income redistribution and tax cuts, among other issues. However, all four panelists agreed that what the country needs most is for the younger generations to become more involved in the political system. Whether by searching online, attending a town hall meeting or contacting a local representative, the current young generation has the ability to sway votes and get their voices heard.

*Mark H. Lopez (center), Democratic (Left) and Republican (Right) representatives during the Panel at UM.*

# Mexico in Black and White: A Re/Vision of Elena Garro and Octavio Paz

By Stacy Keogh and Sandra Cypess



Both Elena Garro (1916-1998) and Octavio Paz (1914-1998) are well known in the Hispanic world, but Garro is not as well recognized as Paz among English-speaking communities. Dr. Sandra M. Cypess, Professor of Spanish Literature at the University of Maryland, has embarked upon a book project that aims to introduce the work of Elena Garro to a greater audience that cannot easily access her work in Spanish. Since both Paz and Garro wrote about issues that relate to gender, ethnicity, and Mexican national identity, it is important to compare Garro's work and ideas with those of her more recognized former husband, Octavio Paz. Many critics have studied their works individually, but few studies compare the perspective of both writers, and no books exist in English that focus on them. Cypess's book project, tentatively titled, *Mexico in Black and White: A Re/Vision of Elena Garro*

and Octavio Paz, offers a unique perspective in the way she organizes their ideas and major themes.

The idea for this comparative study arose from Cypess' research for her previous book, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature: From History to Myth*, as well as from the several essays she published on Garro's work. For the new book, Cypess utilizes war as the central theme around which to present the similarities and differences of these two prolific authors over the course of the twentieth century. In the first four chapters -one each on the Conquest, the Mexican Revolution, the Spanish Civil War, and the Tlatelolco Massacre of 1968- she analyzes the written work and the critical commentaries that have been published on Paz and Garro, and discusses the nature of their place in the Latin American canon. In the final chapter, tentatively titled "Uncivil Wars," Cypess proposes to deal with the texts that are considered by the critics to be *roman a clef* (an underlying message behind the fictitious story presented in the novel). Cypess's argument is more nuanced than previous works; she will show that Garro may have taken advantage of that easy association as a way to attack patriarchal Mexican culture in general and argues that Garro's novels, in which she supposedly thinly disguises her own experiences, attacks Octavio Paz as a machista bully.

## 2009-2010 Post-Doctoral Fellowship Competition

We are pleased to announce the competition for residential fellowships for Fall 2009 and Spring 2010. For the current round, the Center will welcome proposals that focus on culture and democracy, governance and civil society, literature and ethnicity, and migration from Asia to Latin America.

For further information and applications contact us or visit our website at:  
[www.lasc.umd.edu](http://www.lasc.umd.edu)

# Professor Mary Kay Vaughan is honored with Guggenheim Fellowship

By Mary Kay Vaughan and Stacy Keogh

Mary Kay Vaughan, Professor of History, has recently been honored with a 2008 Guggenheim Fellowship for her ongoing research work in Latin American History.

Professor Vaughan has been funded to complete a book entitled: *Pepe in the Enchanted City: Intimate Paths to Mexico 1968*. This biography of the prominent Mexican painter José Zúñiga explores the broad education—schooling, family, church, radio, movies, recreational centers—that contributed to a new generational sensibility in Mexico City youth articulated in mass protests against an authoritarian government on the eve of Mexico's hosting of the Olympic Games. In examining not only the rational but the affective, sensual and sexual dimensions of this generation's education in Mexico City, Professor Vaughan adds to scholarship on this aspect of a more global

generation that rebelled against war, repression, racism and injustice in many cities of the world in 1968.

Professor Vaughan is a historian of education, gender and modern Mexican culture. Her monograph, *Cultural Politics in Revolution: Teachers, Peasants, and Schools in Mexico, 1930-1940* (University of Arizona 1997) won the Herbert Eugene Bolton Prize for best book in Latin American history in 1997 and the Bryce Wood Award from the Latin American Studies Association for the best English-language book on Latin America in that year. Since then, Professor Vaughan has co-edited two books, *The Eagle and the Virgin: Cultural Revolution and National Identity in*



*Dr. Mary Kay Vaughan  
has been one of the pillars  
of the Latin American  
Studies Center since 1989*

*Mexico, 1920-1940* (Duke, 2006) and *Sex in Revolution: Gender, Power, and Politics in Modern Mexico* (Duke, 2006).

**Visit our website at: <http://www.lasc.umd.edu>**



We encourage you to contribute to our Web Calendar of Latin America-related events in the Washington, D.C. area. Please send pertinent information regarding place, date, and time, as well as the title of the event and a brief description, to: [lasc@umd.edu](mailto:lasc@umd.edu)

# Graduate Student explores "transnationalism" in Salvadoran Community

By Katherine Vences



Ronald Luna has been at the University of Maryland for almost 14 years. He received his bachelor's and master's degrees here in 1998 and 2001, respectively, and is now pursuing a PhD in Geography. In addition to being a graduate student, Luna works in the Geography Department as a teacher and academic advisor and also helps coordinate the annual Career Fair on campus.

Luna immigrated from El Salvador in 1986. Although he left his country of origin, the Salvadoran culture continues to influence his life. Luna's academic

focus is based on "transnationalism" and the relationships that immigrants build when they come to the United States. For his master's degree, Luna researched the role of "fútbol" in the Salvadoran community and how it is used to build what he calls "cultural spaces."

For his PhD, Luna decided to touch upon another very important aspect of his life: religion. Over the past few years, Luna has conducted extensive research on the development of Evangelical and Protestant churches in the DC area; particularly those which have originated in El Salvador and have stayed true to their denominations and international linkages. In his study, Luna has tried to find parallels between the two and has attempted to

explain the factors which lead to transnational church networks. Thus far, Luna has found that there are few churches with links back to El Salvador, although they are largely formed by immigrants. According to Luna, no permission is needed to establish immigrant churches, which may explain their growth. Luna has also found that some of these Evangelical and Protestant churches that were thought to have originated in El Salvador were in fact the result of U.S. missionaries sent to Latin America in the early twentieth century.

Preserving a Latino identity in the United States is very important to Luna, who believes an essential part of doing so is learning the language. "I think church helped me maintain my identity as I was growing up here. Everything around me was English, but church was always in Spanish." Luna and his wife, who is from Puerto Rico, plan to do as much as

possible so that their children become familiar with both cultures.

In the future Luna would like to further explore how immigration helps generate theories of motivation among the immigrant community. Luna states:

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*"If we don't understand why our parents came, we'll never understand what makes us different." -- Ronald Luna*

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"You can do whatever you want to the border, people are going to come no matter what because just knowing their situation might be better in the U.S. than in Latin America, that's going to drive them to come." Furthermore, Luna sees the importance of studying how immigrant groups maintain their cultural identity in the U.S. and why some groups create cultural spaces while others do not. According to Luna, "If we don't understand why our parents came, we'll never understand what makes us different."

After he receives his PhD, Luna's only wish is to continue teaching and advising at the university. "I love teaching...this is what I see myself doing."



# New Latin American Arrivals to UM Libraries

by Stacy Keogh

*In from the Cold: Latin America's New Encounter with the Cold War*

Edited by Joseph M. Gilbert and Daniela Spenser

Duke University Press 2007

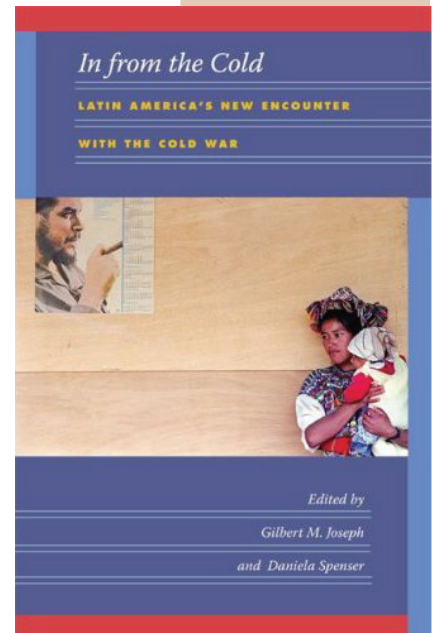
456 pages

A collaboration among eleven North American, Latin American, and European historians, anthropologists, and political scientists, this volume attempts to facilitate a scholarly cross-fertilization. In the process, *In From the Cold* shifts the focus of attention away from the bipolar conflict, the preoccupation of much of the so-called new Cold War history, in order to showcase research, discussion, and an array of new archival and oral sources centering on the grassroots, where conflicts actually brewed.

The collection's contributors examine international and everyday contests over political power and cultural representation, focus-

ing on communities and groups above and underground, on state houses and diplomatic board rooms manned by Latin American and international governing elites, on the relations among states regionally, and, less frequently, on the dynamics between the two great superpowers themselves. In addition to charting new directions for research on the Latin American Cold War, *In From the Cold* seeks to contribute more generally to an understanding of the conflict in the global south.

The contributors are Ariel C. Armony, Steven J. Bachelor, Thomas S. Blanton, Seth Fein, Piero Gleijeses, Gilbert M. Joseph, Victoria Langland, Carlota McAllister, Stephen Pitti, Daniela Spenser, and Eric Zolov.



## Briefly Noted

Our calendar for Fall 2008 is very exciting, please save the dates:

Sep. 22-26: "Mexico in Maryland Week"

Nov. 10-14: "Argentina in Maryland Week,"

highlighted by the November 12 opening of the Mirta Kupferminc-Saúl Sosnowski exhibit: "Borges and the Cabala: Seeking Access."

During Spring 2008, the LASC brown bag series included:

- "Mexican Wars in Black and White; a Re-Vision of Octavio Paz and Elena Garro" by Dr. Sandra Cypess;

- "Orientalismo en la literatura

- hispanoamericana" by Dr. Axel Gasquet;

- "(Para) Socialist Phantasms: On the Near Drowning and Rescue of Cuba's Godot" by Dr. Laurie Frederik Meer.

Congratulations to Dr. Judith Freidenberg (Anthropology, LASC Executive Committee Member) who received the 2008 President's Commission on Ethnic Minority Issues Award. Dr. Freidenberg received this award for her dedication and outstanding contributions to the community, helping UM to become an institution of excellence through diversity.

The Latin American Studies Center appreciates the contribution of Stacy Keogh

**Briefly Noted continued on page 10**

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during her short period as editor and member of the Center. Stacy holds a BA in History and Spanish from George Fox University, and a MA in Sociology from the University of New Mexico. She traveled extensively in Central American and the Caribbean. She will continue her doctoral studies at New Mexico. LASC wishes her well in her new endeavors.



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