

This is a wonderful book that deserves to be published in Spanish as soon as possible. Its fans can hardly wait.

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Death in the City: Suicide and the Social Imaginary in Modern Mexico. By Kathryn A. Sloan.
Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017. Pp. 272. \$29.95 paper.
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Through an examination of suicide, Sloan explores early twentieth-century norms and fears in Mexico City. Other authors have written about death in Mexican culture, but few have written about self-murder. Using dozens of examples, Sloan counters popular tropes about Mexicans having a cavalier relationship with death. She argues that many people who killed themselves put considerable thought into how they constructed their deaths. She further argues that Mexican intellectuals worked within a worldview, shared by many of their counterparts in the industrializing West, that expressed concern about suicide, which they saw as a regretful byproduct of modernization.

There are additional arguments woven into the book's periodization. Sloan compares and contrasts the last decade of the Porfirian era (1900–10) with the years following the Mexican Revolution (1910–20). She concludes that there was considerable continuity, especially regarding an emphasis on modernization and the prominence of sociological approaches to understanding suicide. She also points out differences, mainly that the newspaper operations coming out of the revolution moved away from sensationalizing suicides on front pages and away from acting as amateur detective agencies. Nonetheless, journalists from both eras posited that Mexico was plagued by a “suicide fever,” even though Revolution-era newspapers might downplay arguments about the fall of Western civilization.

The book has a thematic approach, but each chapter has its own additional arguments. Sloan explores statistics, opinions, and methods of suicide; the forensic gaze and body politics; media influence; medical approaches to mental health and the understanding of self-murder; public spaces; and, finally, mourning and bloodstains. She argues that there was some credence to certain claims about suicide: that economic difficulties following the revolution influenced suicides among men; that broken hearts led many people to suicide, especially women; and that suicide in Mexico was more prevalent among the youth. Sloan posits that bodies had significant power and meaning, even after death. And despite talk of objectivity, gender and class biases figured prominently in scientific, journalistic, and legal reports on suicide.

Sloan addresses a couple of topics that will be familiar to scholars of Mexico. She gives considerable attention to the artistic renderings of José Guadalupe Posada. She discusses the suicide of María Luisa Noecker, the daughter of a well-to-do German businessman. The famous bullfighter Rodolfo Gaona was suspected of “deflowering” the young woman, prompting her suicide. He was never convicted of wrongdoing. There were two other suspects, Rodolfo’s brother Enrique and Cirilo Pérez, an acquaintance of María’s. Enrique admitted to having sex with María, but medical examiners concluded that he and Cirilo could not have had sex with her because both men could not have achieved a hard-enough erection, an impairment caused by syphilis. The bullfighter was apparently full of virility and not full of syphilis, but had an alibi. Sloan does not solve the mystery, but concludes that the experts used in the case were driven as much by judgments about honor, class, and morality as by physical evidence.

One issue with the book, a problem that Sloan discusses, is the statistics she uses. In addition to newspaper articles, she relies heavily on 157 official suicide reports. Although this is a significant number of cases, it surely does not represent a clear picture of the true number of suicides during the 30-year period she studies. And it can be safely assumed that many suicides were covered up, especially among prominent families. The book also suffers from redundancy at times; the same causes of suicide, and even the same suicides, crop up throughout the text. But, overall, the book is excellent.

This book is an important contribution, not only to the study of suicide in early twentieth-century Mexico, but also to the history of science and medicine, media studies, intellectual history, and the study of public spaces. There is a lot that scholars across specializations will find of interest. It is well-written and intriguing enough to work in undergraduate and graduate classrooms.

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Routes of Compromise: Building Roads and Shaping the Nation in Mexico, 1917–1952. By Michael K. Bess. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017. Pp. xiv, 206. Illustrations. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$60.00 paper.
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In 1946, a committee of local worthies in Monterrey approached President Miguel Alemán to present their case for a highway to Paredón, Coahuila, arguing that construction would be cheap, as the Ferrocarril Central Mexicano had over time cleared, graded, and then abandoned the route. The president agreed and transferred