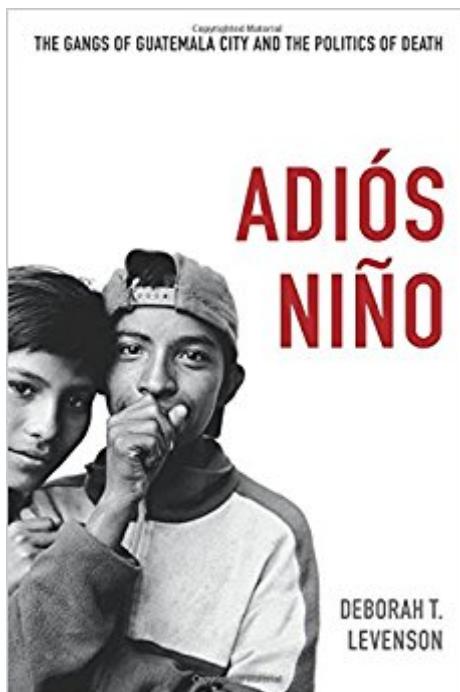


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# AdiÃ³s NiÃ±o: The Gangs Of Guatemala City And The Politics Of Death



## Synopsis

In *Adiós Niño: The Gangs of Guatemala City and the Politics of Death*, Deborah T. Levenson examines transformations in the Guatemalan gangs called Maras from their emergence in the 1980s to the early 2000s. A historical study, *Adiós Niño* describes how fragile spaces of friendship and exploration turned into rigid and violent ones in which youth, and especially young men, came to employ death as a natural way of living for the short period that they expected to survive. Levenson relates the stark changes in the Maras to global, national, and urban deterioration; transregional gangs that intersect with the drug trade; and the Guatemalan military's obliteration of radical popular movements and of social imaginaries of solidarity. Part of Guatemala City's reconfigured social, political, and cultural milieu, with their members often trapped in Guatemala's growing prison system, the gangs are used to justify remilitarization in Guatemala's contemporary postwar, post-peace era. Portraying the Maras as microcosms of broader tragedies, and pointing out the difficulties faced by those youth who seek to escape the gangs, Levenson poses important questions about the relationship between trauma, memory, and historical agency.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Adiós Niño is a first-class piece of social interpretation that plunges us deep into the darkness of the underworld. The result of incredible ethnographic fieldwork developed in dangerous conditions, it offers many methodological lessons for researchers." —Manolo E. Vela Castañeda, author of *Los pelotones de la muerte: La construcción de los perpetradores del genocidio guatemalteco* "A must-read account of how the gangs of Guatemala were shaped by war and politics. Chilling and

important."â "John M. Hagedorn, author of *A World of Gangs: Armed Young Men and Gangsta Culture*"I was blown away by this book, by its originality, textured detail, and penetrating, multilayered analysis of the history of Guatemalan gangs. The most holistic work that I have read on so-called 'apolitical' gang violence in Latin America, it is at once deeply empathetic, even to people who have committed vicious acts, and sharply argumentative. AdiÃ s NiÃ o will have a big impact on Latin American studies, urban studies, and violence and memory studies across the fields of history, anthropology, and sociology."â "Greg Grandin, author of *Fordlandia: The Rise and Fall of Henry Ford's Forgotten Jungle City* and *The Blood of Guatemala: A History of Race and Nation*"[An] extraordinary history of the gangs of Guatemala City.... Above all the ethnographic work of an oral historian, AdiÃ s NiÃ o subtly weaves into its analytical fabric an eclectic array of theoretical voices, from Enrique Dussell to Michel Foucault." (Jeffery Webber Los Angeles Review of Books)â œ[T]his is the book on gangs we need to read.â • (Naomi Glassman NACLA Report on the Americas)â œDeborah Levensonâ ™s AdiÃ s NiÃ o is to date the most historically nuanced work on Guatemalan gangsâ |. Levensonâ ™s work earns a place on the essential reading list not only of scholars interested in gangs and Central America, but of all those interested in human rights and the effects of their systematic suppression in impoverished societies.â • (J. T. Way Human Rights Review)â œThis book is a must read, not only for those who are interested in Guatemalaâ |. I donâ ™t know that I have seen a better explanation of what happens when revolutions fail, or a better explanation for why Guatemalaâ ™s contemporary youth gangs ought to be seen, as Levenson puts it, as 'orphans of the world' (98).â • (Karen Dubinsky Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth)â œThe book is beautifully writtenâ | superb.â • (Susanne Jonas American Historical Review)"AdiÃ s NiÃ o is simultaneously painful and important.... This riveting account is a particularly good book to teach, especially at the advanced undergraduate and graduate level: it grapples with many issues, and although it doesnâ ™t necessarily resolve them, it unmasks and demonstrates the rigors and some of the key components of the intellectual quest." (Jennifer L. Burrell American Anthropologist)[A] tremendous achievement. Any scholar of Latin America, urban studies, youth, crime, postwar politics, or memory will find rich theoretical and methodological interventions here. Levenson packs much insight into this slim, elegant volume, offering a surgical exegesis of the relationships between history, violence, and trauma.â • (Kristen Weld The Historian)â œ[T]his is a well-written and accessible work that incorporates a much-needed historical perspective to the study of street gangs in Central America. The volume will appeal to researchers of different disciplines â " notably history, anthropology and the political sciences â " who specialise in gangs, security, the quality of democracy and Central America.â • (Sonja Wolf Bulletin of Latin

American Research)"Deborah Levenson presents a refreshing depiction of these supposedly transnational gangs, essentially turning this characterization on its head. A trained historian with broad and deep knowledge of Guatemala, Levenson assembles a wide array of data and information she has accumulated over decades of work in Guatemala into a convincing argument. The result is a complex, rich portrayal of gangs in Guatemala...." (Cecilia Menjivar Contemporary Sociology 2015-05-01)

Deborah T. Levenson is Associate Professor of History at Boston College. She is the author of *Trade Unionists against Terror: Guatemala City, 1954-1985* and a coeditor of *The Guatemala Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, also published by Duke University Press.

good product

This is an excellent book with detailed statistics and exploration of how gangs began in Guatemala and why. Very educational

As an ex-rat this book was a revelation. It helps to understand the difficulties that poor children have in this country, even if they want to "better" themselves. It does not offer solutions. It is scholarly which can make it hard to follow.

That Guatemala is plagued by ongoing political and social problems is, sadly, not surprising, but for scholars who have dedicated their lives to trying to understand the roots of this violence and why it persists can be incredibly difficult and disheartening. The shift from state-sponsored forms of violence, largely perpetuated against the country's indigenous population, to more amorphous kinds--assassination, theft, assault, rape, and murder--by shadowy figures, drug cartels, and gangs is not limited by gender, ethnicity, politics, or even class. Violence in Guatemala is omnipresent and elusive, as criminals are rarely caught and authorities are more corrupt than not. It is into this murky and, often, inaccessible world that Deborah Levenson takes readers with her book *Adiós Niño, The Gangs of Guatemala City and the Politics of Death*. Levenson's deep understanding of Guatemala's history, especially of Guatemala City and of labor organizations, comes through many years of experience in the very problem-filled neighborhoods she writes about. *Adiós Niño* goes beyond an historical analysis of the causes of gang violence and avoids falling into reductionist and sensationalistic tropes of gang members' identities and behaviors to generate fear or pass moralistic

opinions. Instead, Levenson humanizes the gang members and families that are described in the book. Without shirking from addressing the truly horrible crimes committed by the gangs, she shows the economic, political, and social conditions that fomented them and continue to incubate future gang members. Using interviews, conversations, and oral histories, she provides an empathic portrait of gang members, their families, and friends to present a nuanced understanding of Guatemala City life inside and outside of gang life. She illustrates how gang members have complex multifaceted identities that straddle legal and illegal, as they participate in informal, formal, and underworld economies and politics. What makes Levenson's book so convincing and her so successful at describing gang members and their lives is the way she sews together her own personal experiences with that of a toolbox of mixed methods, including oral histories, interviews, archives, and ethnography, to research this topic. This information is then interpreted using a diverse set of analytical tools to explain what is happening. Adiós, Niño does not fall easily within one academic genre but bridges several, history, politics, ethnographic, sociology, while remaining elegantly and clearly written. Levenson's book, Adiós Niño, The Gangs of Guatemala City and the Politics of Death, is a fascinating and troubling (in the best way) study. It is a wonderful model of how to use and go substantially beyond one's earlier research. She treats the difficult theme of extreme and endemic violence, carefully, and shows how violence radiates through society. At the same time, her book is not without hope. Gang members do leave their lives of crime behind, lead productive lives, and even help yet other gang members to find alternative ways to live.

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