



The Blood of Victoriano Lorenzo: An Ethnography of the Cholos of Northern Cocle Province, Panama

Nina K. Müller-Schwarze

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People living in northern Cocle province, Panama, are proud to be independent. Hereditary leaders make decisions in consensus, a practice understood as continuous from pre-Columbian times. The term cholo, derogatory in some contexts, is valid here to discuss self-determination. Victoriano Lorenzo led the "War of a Thousand Days" (1901-1903) that is understood in northern Cocle as a fight for indigenous land rights. While state bureaucracies later labeled the region an "area of extreme poverty" and imposed programs seeking to eradicate "poverty," local oral history narratives focus on the interdependence of the natural environment and the human community. The indigenous political structure found liberation power through Catholic theology, and participated in a social movement that stopped a planned expansion of the Panama Canal. This book presents a new understanding of the people and their social structure, informed by extensive archival research and by oral history interviews the author conducted while living in northern Cocle for approximately four years.

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