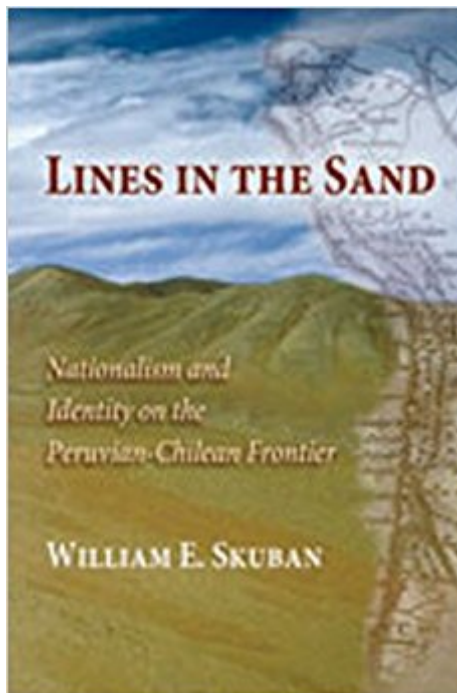




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Lines In The Sand: Nationalism And Identity On The Peruvian-Chilean Frontier



Synopsis

Following the War of the Pacific (1879-1883), Chile and Peru signed the Treaty of Ancón (1884) that, in part, dealt with settling a territorial dispute over the provinces of Tacna and Arica along the countries' new common border. The treaty allowed Chile to administer the two provinces for a period of ten years, after which a plebiscite would allow the region's inhabitants to determine their own nationality. At the end of the prearranged decade, however, the Chilean and the Peruvian governments had failed to conduct the vote that would determine the fate of the people. Over a quarter of a century later, and after attempts by the U.S. government to mediate the dispute, the two countries in 1929 decided simply to divide the area, with Arica becoming a part of Chile and Peru reincorporating Tacna. Against the backdrop of this contested frontier, William Skuban explores the processes of nationalism and national identity formation in the half century that followed the War of the Pacific. He first considers the national projects of Peru and Chile in the disputed territories and then moves on to how these efforts were received among the diverse social strata of the region. Skuban's study highlights the fabricated nature of national identity in what became one of the most contentious frontier situations in South American history.

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Customer Reviews

Skuban's study highlights the fabricated nature of national identity in what became one of the most contentious border disputes in South American history.

William E. Skuban is an associate professor in the history department at California State University, Fresno.

The Peru-Chile war in the late 19th century might today have a comic opera tinge, to a reader from outside South America. Yet the author reminds us that in its time, it was a deadly serious affair. Albeit with a relatively small death toll. In today's context, look at the Falklands War between Britain and Argentina. But the book is really about the aftermath of a war. When 2 relatively young countries were still trying to build national identities and cohesion. They had obtained independence from Spain earlier in the 19th century. But how to distinguish each from its neighbours? There are parallels with the massive decolonisation that followed World War 2. Especially in Africa, where borders might have been arbitrarily drawn by external entities. Another comparison is with Australia. It obtained independence from Britain in 1901. But its enduring birth identity would be forged in World War 1. However, the strongest analogy between Peru and Chile can be seen in the Indo-Pak strife. Three wars fought over a disputed border. These wars had the effect of undergirding nationalisms in both countries and providing governments with added popular support.

A beautifully written study that is far too timely. Readers will learn a great deal about how nations are constructed and reconstructed in the aftermath of war. Scholars of identity and nationalism will be interested as will those who look at South America. The author should be commended for making an obscure period and complex topics such as nationalism and identity so accessible.

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