

Unsurprisingly, too, Hugo Chávez is yet again portrayed as a dangerous usurper of the public interest. The heterogeneity of the Chavista movement (constituted both by subaltern forces and emerging capitalist factions benefiting from state largesse, bureaucrats and professional sectors), the continued prevalence of market relations in Venezuela, and the pragmatic foreign policy of the Chávez government (at odds with his belligerent discourse) are silenced. So are the government's attempts to promote participatory forms of democracy and new poles of power (*consejos comunales, misiones sociales*) in a national polity historically conditioned by patrimonialism and crony capitalism.

The volume is therefore conspicuous not only for its comprehensiveness but also for its screaming silences. Its quality is not in doubt, but its façade of impartiality cannot veil its underlying political bias: it makes no mention of the fact that bastions of the conservative opposition in the state (senates, prefectures, municipalities, central banks) have hindered and redirected otherwise positive social and institutional reforms. It brushes under the carpet the vicious and sometimes brutal struggles of conservative and business forces against pink governments through such means as financing violent regionalist movements and initiating inflammatory referenda on regional sovereignty in the eastern departments of Bolivia, disrupting the proceedings of Bolivia's Constituent Assembly by various legal and extra-legal means in 2008, the respective coup attempts of 2002 and 2010 in Venezuela and Ecuador, and the successful 2009 coup in Honduras. These struggles have not only undermined alternative forms of governance, but have also unfailingly damaged polyarchy in the process.

Rather than concentrating merely on the 'concentration of power' taking place in the person of Chávez, an argument oblivious to the fact that highly centralised executive power is a hallmark of the region's constitutional orders, the editors would be well advised to promote analyses of the trajectories, shortfalls and potential benefits of Chávez's and other governments' attempts to alleviate the paradox of formal equality and real inequality through redistributive justice and the promotion of socialised forms of production and participatory forms of democracy. These attempts may be partial and likely to fail, but they cannot be buried under claims that authoritarian and anti-democratic 'tendencies' are the only forces at play in these social spaces.

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Olga González, *Unveiling Secrets of War in the Peruvian Andes* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011), pp. xvii + 307, \$30.00; £19.50, pb.

Olga González has written an original and insightful work on political violence from the perspective of a rural community in the Peruvian Andes. At the centre of the book is a story of two deaths, one associated with the onset of political violence and the other with its escalation. The first 'supposed death' was of an abusive, disruptive villager in 1981; this became a public secret, in that although generally known it could not be depicted or talked about and therefore could never be confirmed. The circumstances of this death and continued invisible presence of the dead man are the driving force of the narrative. Regarding the other death, of a local supporter of Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path, SL) in 1982, although the 'disappearance' was publicly acknowledged, secrecy continued to shroud the identity of the killers.

When engaged in fieldwork a decade later, González discovered that there was more to learn from enquiring into how these two events were remembered and forgotten than there was from seeking to unmask 'the truth'. Subjectivity was as much the business of history as visible facts. A tension existed between concealment and revelation, for she found that the more visible things became, the more noticeable was the aura of things invisible. 'Public secrecy', she realised, was a form of circulation narrative through which individuals could keep certain memories alive while awaiting the moment in which they could be revealed.

Clearly, the themes explored in this book are highly sensitive. The wording of the title, 'Unveiling Secrets of War', highlights its provocative and disturbing nature. We are in a complex politicised field where the researcher needs to tread exceedingly warily. Given the difficulties and ethical issues that immediately arise in the notion of 'unveiling', some writers have turned to fiction rather than ethnography so as to bring out the intimacy of violence and the ambiguities of social relations built on secrecy. Seen in this light, González's book is a remarkable achievement. An early chapter is appropriately entitled 'The Said and the Unsaid'. This can refer not only to the subject matter of the chapter, the intended forgetfulness of the widow of the missing *comunero*, but also to the author's delicate position. As researcher, she is compelled not only to respect but also to participate in the circulation narratives of public secrecy while seeking to unearth and examine them.

González could not make the locality she chose for her research anonymous. Sarhua is a peasant community and district capital in the department of Ayacucho that became enmeshed in political violence at an early stage of the conflict. The community is well known in Peru, for it has long been distinguished by a strong artisan tradition of painting, the *tablas pintadas* – painted boards – being representations of local people and scenes from everyday life. Sarhua artists resident in Lima had also depicted graphically the main events associated with the onset and escalation of political violence. In particular, they had collaborated in producing a series of 24 paintings with accompanying explanatory texts known as *Pirag causa*, translated as 'Who is Still to Blame?' In these, only the second of the deaths is directly represented.

The book has two particular strengths. First, González focuses on the stories and representations of the villagers of Sarhua; they are the protagonists of the drama. However, in a deft way she frames the events surrounding the killings in relation to broad tendencies that at the time were seriously undermining the autonomy of Andean communities. Due to the breakdown of local authority systems, both traditional and bureaucratic, it had become less possible for villagers to protect the community against outside threats or to resolve internal conflicts in a timely manner. The consequence had been increasing vulnerability and exposure to the personal ambition and greed of a villager (prelude to the first death), to retaliation by Peru's armed forces and to the allure of promises initially made by SL activists (that preceded the second death). González assiduously explores the temporal-spatial juncture where an internal conflict (no longer resolvable locally) became interlaced with destructive powers from outside the community – the military and a Maoist political party employing strategies of violence.

The second strength is González's choice of methodology. She was able to deploy the pictorial representations made by local artists of the events surrounding the killings by showing villagers copies of the *Pirag causa* series. Being in a private collection, these had not been seen in the community before. The pictures served as both a reference point and an entry point to awakening memories: what and who were

depicted in such careful detail; what was noted in the accompanying texts; but what might be misrepresented and what was missing or removed from representations that purported to be 'the truth'. The conversations stimulated by the pictures, along with her explorations of the ambiguous realities coming through in accounts of the dreams and actions of non-human maleficent beings, allow González to explore a second juncture. This is between the visible and the invisible in relation to the silences and gaps surrounding violent events.

González's approach in this book has great value for the study of political violence in Peru and elsewhere. She refutes the pervasive image of passive communities being invaded by violent outsiders and being duped, or cowed, into supporting a political party preaching revolution. The critical point she makes is that armed conflict became a reality in Sarhua due to an irresolvable internal conflict. An abusive community member, after an uprising against him that threatened to deprive him of his livelihood, had accused five fellow comuneros of being terrorists and made an official request for their arrest. This unleashed violent retribution by the *Sinchis*, the counterinsurgency police. The internal conflict and brutal reaction to it then helped create conditions in which villagers might look expectantly at the glittering rhetoric of social justice and pronouncement of a moralisation campaign by proponents of the SL – but this was short-lived. In contrast, what González demonstrates with great skill is the ambivalence and longevity of public secrecy, perceptible in its own invisibility, that is part of the reality of war.

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Maria Helena Moreira Alves and Philip Evanson, *Living in the Crossfire: Favela Residents, Drug Dealers and Police Violence in Rio de Janeiro* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2011), pp. x + 240, \$32.95, pb.

As Alves and Evanson make clear midway through this excellent and informative book, Brazil's human rights record has not improved since 1985, when the country moved from a military dictatorship to a constitutional democracy. Quite the reverse, on the base of sheer numbers things have become worse. Those tortured, killed and 'disappeared' during the darkest and most severe 'Years of Lead' of the military regime are comparatively few if we consider the tens of thousands of young, mainly black *favela* dwellers who have been killed by the undeclared – but fought on an almost daily basis – war between the police and drug dealers in the favelas of Rio. The idea that concern with favelas in Brazil has always been 'a thing of gringos' is acknowledged by many in the country; I myself have heard it again and again while working in Rio, in conferences, at seminars and informally in the restaurants and bars of the city. To this day, and despite the push for visibility that new favela movements are forcing into Rio's much-divided urban landscape, there is considerable indifference and even a certain feeling of 'normality' surrounding the massive violation of basic rights taking place in the city's poor communities.

The calling of attention to this situation and the examination of it in all its multifaceted complexity are two of the many merits of *Living in the Crossfire*, a comprehensive, informative and at times harrowing study of the institutional, political and human costs of uncontrolled state violence in territories of poverty. In opting for a format that retains first-person accounts and verbatim interviews, the authors make