the risks not only to his life, but to the life of others, to the tricks of memory and the way past images from his own life pop into the mind of the observer who is suspended between cultures and worlds: the intellectual and the poor, the city person and the peasant, Colombia and the United States. If only others were as self-reflective when they claim to understand the multi-dimensional realities of Colombia. But what does he tell us about Colombia today?

In 2005, I was also in paramilitary and drugs trafficking controlled towns of Colombia, of the Atlantic Coast and the Valle. Taussig captures the assault on one's rationality when one visits an urban centre which is ruled more or less overtly by armed right wing men:

> 'In *Prisoner of Love*, Genet writes that 'essence of theater is the need to create not merely signs but complete and compact images masking a reality that consists in absence of being. The void'.And that's how the paras come across in this town. A void that kills. The brazenness of the killing today takes your breath away, in broad daylight, in the street – the exact opposite of anonymity. This is not some remote hamlet where there are no police or law courts. This is a town just forty-five minutes by road from Cali, with 40 police, 5 judges, 3 district attorneys, a jail with 120 prisoners, and an elaborate judicial system. The triumph of the paras over all this is extraordinary' (p. 133).

Taussig wrote these words in 2001. By 2005 what he witnessed has spread to many other places and embedded itself so that the paramilitaries are not just a void which kills, but a void which controls often mundane forms of social interaction. Even as they were gathering in the demobilised camps created by President Uribe, the evidence I found of their social control and political influence in 2005 in Sincelejo, not a small village but the departmental capital of Sucre on the Atlantic Coast, was resounding in the silence.

It is good to read these two books together. We need Aviles political analysis, and we also need Taussig's observations in the field. What does it mean to be a citizen living in the midst of a violence which the state (and a modernising state with strong aspirations to credibility in the global economic and political arena) fails to address and even tolerates in the name of what it considers a greater evil, in other words the guerillas. In Taussig's diary we understand better the 'multiple realities' of lived experience in Colombia's war torn towns. We understand how an ordinary person can welcome the paramilitaries when 'the Colombian state cannot protect them from anything, not just from the guerilla. From murder to traffic accidents, kidnapping or being mugged for your tennis shoes, the state is powerless whether you are rich or poor' (p. 30). The paramilitaries are a cheap source of *de facto* security and summary justice. But what monster has been created in the bowels of society and state, and how much will it prolong the anguished search for a real peace in Colombia?

Department of Peace Studies, University of Bradford JENNY PEARCE

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Angelina Snodgrass Godoy, *Popular Injustice: Violence, Community and Law in Latin America* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), pp. xvii + 233, $50.00, $19.95 pb.

Despite the fact that virtually all nations of Latin America are formally democratic, having left behind systems of authoritarian rule and institutionalised violence

decades ago, violence continues to characterise the region's sociopolitical landscape. Perhaps most surprising to scholars of democratisation, for whom the shift to democracy was supposed to bring an expansion of and deepening respect for basic civil and human rights, in many Latin American countries the turn to democracy has actually been accompanied by an increase in violence among civil society actors. In many poor and marginalised communities in both rural and urban areas, the lynching of criminal suspects has emerged as a quotidian social practice, a means of enforcing local conceptions of justice in the absence of official state law and legal institutions, and of communicating with a neglectful state. Such a situation is especially frightening given the denunciations of basic civil and human rights that typically accompany such events, as citizens clamor for a stronger hand (*la mano dura*) in dealing with the threat of crime.

This reality is the starting point for Angelina Snodgrass Godoy's *Popular Injustice: Violence, Community and Law in Latin America*. Godoy is concerned to explain the prevalence of demands for a *mano dura* and its relationship to democracy and civil society in Latin America, with a special focus on Guatemala, where she has conducted sociological research and worked as a human rights scholar and promoter since 1996. Going well beyond the question of lynching itself, Godoy offers an analysis of the relationship between democracy, violence and community in contemporary Latin America; she suggests that lynching is a particularly revealing testament to the breakdown of the social ties that constitute community, the incompleteness of democratisation and rule of law in the region, and the perils of living in a world increasingly divided along lines separating 'us' from 'them.' The result is a fascinating and at times deeply moving book that sheds light on some of the most important social and political issues currently facing Latin American governments and populations.

In her introductory chapter, Godoy frames her analysis around these central questions: 'How can increasing democratization in the political sphere be reconciled with broad support for the denial of due process rights and other "core" civil rights? Why are these apparent disjunctions growing in contemporary democracies? And what are their consequences for political order and democracy itself?' (p. 8). Godoy answers these questions with an eye to democratisation theory and the familiar forces of social exclusion, neo-liberalism and structural adjustment that have negatively impacted supposedly democratic societies in Latin America. In deeply unequal societies that neo-liberalism has helped to perpetuate, the formalities of democratic governance (including a rule of law and the functioning of legal institutions) become tenuous and strained, as those pushed to society's margins struggle with prevailing and ongoing economic and social inequalities which weaken state legitimacy and basic social cohesion. Given the fear and insecurity that crime, vulnerability and inequality foment, compounded by a deep mistrust not only of the state but of one's fellow citizens, violence remains as one of the few apparent options available to the marginalised for fighting crime and creating 'justice,' while perhaps enabling them to find a voice in the public political arena.

Chapters two and three explore the history of the thirty-six-year Guatemalan civil war and the legacy of violence and terror that authoritarian rule, genocide and guerrilla warfare have bequeathed to the highland Maya people. Supplementing historical research with richly cited informant testimonies, Godoy traces the destructuring of rural communities and the transformations of state and civil society

that the war produced. These resulted in the debilitation of both state legitimacy and of local forms of traditional justice making, leaving the countryside without any effective means of collective self-government. In such a context, people have turned to violence as a way of asserting some kind of control over local reality, and for enforcing their own views of the nature of right and wrong. Godoy effectively demonstrates the deep roots of contemporary lynchings in the violence of the civil war era, but also highlights the ironies inherent in the calls of Maya community members for the return of militarised systems of 'justice' administration to deal with the problem of local crime. She further details their rejection of human rights campaigns, which many view as implicitly or explicitly collusive with criminal activity. Thus, rather than romanticising Mayan forms of traditional justice or portraying Mayan lynch mobs as brainwashed by state violence, Godoy actually depicts lynching as a form of violent agency for those who have themselves been brutalised – a much more complex (if depressing) interpretation than that provided by any overly simplistic indigenous-people-as-innocent-victims frame.

In chapters four and five Godoy expands her analysis to other parts of Latin America, offering a more synthetic explanation of the cross-cultural appeal of lynching. Working against the basic Durkheimian premise that punishment of crime represents a reaffirmation of collective norms and values, Godoy suggests instead that lynching violence actually reflects the profound lack of collective solidarity (or 'social capital') in these communities. In poor rural and urban neighborhoods, where bonds of trust and mutual cooperation have been frayed by violence, poverty and marginality, violence remains as the only avenue by which a sense of community can be constructed. Lynching, Godoy effectively argues, is the '"lowest common denominator" of social control for communities in crisis that lack the social capital to construct an alternate form of justice' (p. 118). Godoy does not provide nearly the depth of historical or ethnographic detail for other societies as she offers for highland Guatemala, and at times one wonders how the interpretations in these later chapters square with the idea of lynching as post-crisis phenomenon presented in the discussion of Guatemala. Nevertheless, her explanation of lynching as an extension of 'neo-liberal penality' is convincing for the contexts she describes.

The book's concluding chapter extends the analysis of violence, democracy and rights beyond Latin America, demonstrating most compellingly the ways in which the United States' ongoing 'War on Terror' partakes of the same binary logic of us/them, the same willingness to trade rights for security, and the same tendency towards unbridled authoritarian violence as that which characterises Latin America, past and present. Godoy observes that while the USA may not be heading toward genocide, 'in the name of defending democracy we may be handily dismantling the building blocks upon which our democracy was built' (p. 179). This is a powerful if not altogether original argument, and a fitting comparative note on which to conclude. With its combination of ethnographic, historical and sociological analysis, its comparative approach, and its careful consideration of often difficult material, this book should appeal to students and scholars of Latin America from a variety of backgrounds and disciplines.

Rutgers University DANIEL M. GOLDSTEIN