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Critical Debates

New Scholarship on Peru's Internal Conflict

Hillel David Soifer

Jaymie Patricia Heilman, *Before the Shining Path: Politics in Rural Ayacucho, 1895–1980*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010. Map, bibliography, index, 272 pp.; hardcover $60.

Maiah Jaskoski, *Military Politics and Democracy in the Andes*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013. Maps, bibliography, index, 322 pp.; hardcover $58, ebook $58.

Richard Kernaghan, *Coca's Gone: Of Might and Right in the Huallaga Post-Boom*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009. Bibliography, index, 320 pp.; hardcover $65, paperback $19.95, ebook $19.95.

Miguel La Serna, *The Corner of the Living: Ayacucho on the Eve of the Shining Path Insurgency*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012. Maps, illustrations, bibliography, index, 304 pp.; paperback $35; ebook $29.99.

Kimberly Theidon, *Intimate Enemies: Violence and Reconciliation in Peru*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012. Glossary, map, bibliography, index, 480 pp.; hardcover $75; paperback $29.95, ebook $29.95.

A recent wave of English-language scholarship in a variety of disciplines has shed significant new light on the internal conflict that gripped Peru in the long decade of the 1980s. Building on classic works like Stern 1998 and DeGregori 1990 and 2011 by drawing on more detailed local analyses, better access to zones where violence unfolded, a more diverse geographic emphasis, and greater temporal distance that improves historical perspective, these works provide a new opportunity to take stock of the state of our understanding of the rise of Sendero Luminoso, the dynamics of the internal conflict, and its legacies. Each book generates significant and distinct insights on these issues, and raises important questions that remain to be analyzed in future research. In discussing these works, this review also identifies some affinities and tensions between the Peruvian case and the "micro" turn in the political science scholarship on civil war, and some directions for future research in this vibrant area of scholarship.

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Explaining Civilian Participation

Close studies of the Sendero conflict show massive peasant mobilization both in support of and in opposition to Sendero, and thereby challenge efforts to clearly distinguish between armed actors and civilians. Villagers had significant agency in the conflict between Sendero and the state. The works of Heilman and La Serna, which compare communities in Huanta that resisted Sendero to those located in southern Ayacucho, where Sendero found support, carefully explore the roots of mobilization and countermobilization. In so doing, they fruitfully shift the focus of investigation from the well-trodden study of Sendero's origins to its trajectory of armed struggle. The microlevel focus of both books is also fruitful; it allows the authors to develop compelling explanations, deeply rooted in the historical particularities of community life, for patterns of violence and resistance in Peru's southern highlands during the early 1980s. Both also share a fundamentally political orientation that has come to mark scholarship on support for Sendero more generally, against classic accounts that emphasize socioeconomic structure, and against a turn to more cultural questions among historians. Yet these books develop distinct explanations.

Heilman traces a century of political history in the communities of Carhuanca and Luricocha, showing that the 1980s were "part of a long historical course of political thought, action, and reaction inside rural Ayacucho communities" (3). Carhuanca saw significant Sendero success; the movement held "total control" (4) for two years. By contrast, Sendero found no support in Luricocha, which instead saw significant counterinsurgent mobilization in the form of *rondas campesinas*. Comparing how national politics played out there, Heilman highlights an important contrast: whereas Carhuanca peasants had, since the 1920s, mobilized into political parties and movements that promoted radical reform, in Luricocha peasants remained disengaged from party politics, which was "hacendados' domain" (8). This same divergence characterized local responses to Sendero in the two communities, even as they shared many structural, social, and economic similarities.

To account for this difference, Heilman turns to the power of political memory. She argues that Luricocha peasants were "haunted" (39) by the massive repression of local uprisings in the 1890s, which taught them to steer "an extremely cautious political course, avoiding anything that smacked of political radicalism or rebelliousness" (40). Thus, the series of reformist political projects across Peru's twentieth century only found support in Carhuanca. Exploring the local history of the 1920s Tawantinsuyo movement, APRA's initial emergence in the highlands during the 1930s, Trotskyist groups and Fernando Belaúnde's Acción Popular during the 1960s, and the post-1968 military government, Heilman shows that each resonated with Carhuanca peasants, while in Luricocha peasants remained unpoliticized as movements gained adherence from local *hacendados* and middle-class professionals.

If her book has a shortcoming, it is the limited support for the role of historical memory; though her hypothesis is logically compelling, peasants' memories leave few traces in the documents of local archives that she draws on so skillfully to trace their political engagement. Nor is it clear how these historical memories are repro-

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duced and reinforced over time. Nevertheless, Heilman makes a convincing case that "Sendero Luminoso was nested inside Peru's rural political history" (194).

As Heilman does, La Serna strives to situate the violence of 1980s Ayacucho in "a deeper, more complex history of indigenous peasant struggle and survival" (2). As does Heilman, La Serna compares two communities, both of which were sites where violence erupted with Sendero's instigation of its armed struggle: Chuschi, "the symbolic birthplace of the insurgency" (2), and Huaychao, where the first *ronda campesina* was formed. But unlike Heilman's emphasis on national political movements, La Serna's account centers on "local relationships and conflicts" (12) within and among highland communities.

La Serna situates the civil war "within a deeper history of local power relationships for a full generation" before its onset (15). He first argues that support for Sendero bloomed where local community leaders were seen as unable to guarantee order and as more abusive then effective. In Chuschi, where Sendero began its armed struggle in May 1980 with the infamous burning of the ballot boxes, local systems of justice had failed to cope with social trespasses, such as cattle theft and petty crime, making community members amenable to Sendero's promises of "radical justice" (149). By contrast, where customary authority retained a degree of legitimacy—even though it was tinged with fear and submission, as La Serna describes it in chapter 3—Sendero was met with "fervent and even violent resistance" (16). Huaychao peasants had experienced little security crisis in midcentury, and local leaders and community institutions were seen as flawed but effective (60). Thus villagers saw Sendero "as a threat to their local experiences and cultural understanding of power, justice, and local networks" (193), and when Sendero arrived, it was met with a violent reaction. Villagers killed seven militants, sent representatives to the district capital of Huanta to report their actions, and girded themselves for further confrontation. This incident saw the birth of the *rondas campesinas* that would become so central to Sendero's defeat in the highlands.

In addition to tensions within communities, parts of the Peruvian highlands were also marked by tensions and violence between peasant communities. These underpin the second plank of La Serna's account. He traces Chuschi's longstanding conflict with the neighboring community of Quispillacta, which he depicts as an "inter-ethnic struggle for control over land, livestock, women, and religious symbols" (60) that erupted in massive violence at various points. Chuschinos expected community leaders to effectively defend their interests in this conflict; the leaders' failure to do so compounded the legitimation crisis generated by their ineffectiveness and abuses and provided further fodder for support of Sendero. Huaychao had no such tensions with neighboring communities, meaning that its traditional authorities and community notables did not confront this additional challenge.

Both Heilman and La Serna thus trace the roots of peasant responses to Sendero back into the past. Yet La Serna finds the critical divergence between cases falling only in the generation before Sendero's arrival. One wonders whether La Serna's portrayal of an acute crisis that arrived at midcentury can withstand the exploration of broader continuities in Peru's southern highlands found by scholars

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including Heilman and Méndez (2005). The juxtaposition of La Serna with these accounts raises the question of whether institutional weakness in midcentury Peru was really an acute crisis and not a longstanding chronic problem (Soifer 2015). Yet even as they diverge in the specific critical juncture they identify, these studies provide a series of powerful challenges to the recent move in political science toward more strategic and fluid accounts of civilian loyalties during civil war (Kalyvas 1999), and they should spur further investigation of these questions elsewhere in Peru and in other cases of internal conflict.

The Third Fire

In addition to peasant mobilization on both sides of the conflict, as Theidon writes, "there was a third fire, comprised of peasants themselves" (5). Theidon's book attempts to grapple with the implications of the violence in the Peruvian highlands during the years of internal conflict that was perpetrated not by armed actors but by villagers against one another. She explores violence, its underpinnings, and its legacies for these communities, in which peasants looked back on the war as a period in which "we killed our own." She also investigates the reasons for silence about this type of violence in postwar accounts, such as that produced by Peru's Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Logics

To some extent, Theidon's treatment of this intracommunal violence represents a continuity from La Serna's account. But intracommunal violence escalated sharply with the emergence of Sendero, and Theidon's account includes at least four logics for this increase. First, as Gross (2001) found in postwar Poland, "some people became quite wealthy looting and killing their neighbors" (Theidon 268). Second, in communities like those in Huanta examined in part 3 of her book, formal community decisions to reject Sendero were followed by the killing of its sympathizers among local residents as a demonstration of loyalty to the army (202). Third, other instances of internecine violence had a less strategic element: Theidon argues that the conflict generated "chaos" in many highland pueblos by driving out state institutional presence and killing communal authorities, leaving leadership in the hands of younger and less legitimate figures (212). In the absence of either formal or informal institutions that could resolve conflict or administer justice, violence escalated. Furthermore, because low-ranking Senderistas were recruited or impressed from local communities, killing "terrorists" meant killing "poor campesinos just like us" (254). This meant that the *rondas campesinas*, which played such a central role in defeating Sendero in the highlands, killed few high-ranking terrorist leaders and instead took as victims many who might have otherwise joined their ranks. Theidon provides insightful discussions of how allegiances, memberships, and associations shifted over the course of the conflict and were renarrated after fighting ended.

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Silences

By showing the extent of this violence and the reasons for its absence from postwar reckoning, Theidon lays bare the immense challenges communities have faced since the violence ended and the shortcomings of efforts to promote national reconstruction. She highlights in particular the tensions between the national-level project of truth, pacification, and reconciliation and local, community-level struggles with the social, psychological, and physical legacies of the conflict. As she writes, much of the violence did not fit into the framework of "two distinct groups: victims and perpetrators" (325) that truth commissions construct. The result is that top-down projects of national reconciliation "may unintentionally complicate local processes of social repair" (361).

The visits of the Truth Commission, for example, saw villagers make strategic decisions about what information to share, leading them to downplay intracommunal violence and the rapes and other atrocities committed by the army. As they gave testimony in communal assemblies, villagers also had to grapple with the fact that these gatherings included ex-Senderistas. An even more fundamental concern Theidon highlights is that the therapeutic understandings of truth that underlay the TRC's mandate clashed with the more performative understanding of speech ("words can be lethal") held by villagers (116).

Top-down models of reconciliation came in various other forms, including the Fujimori-era Law of Repentance (which also receives interesting treatment in Kernaghan's account of communities in which it was instituted even as Sendero remained an active presence), and the initiatives of military commanders, who often required communities to document the attacks they suffered as a condition for rebuilding their villages. Theidon also reveals the gendered dimension of national reconciliation, reintegration, and reconstruction efforts, showing that these have tended to reinforce inequalities that already exist and have failed to consider how they "might exclude the most marginal members of these communities" (172), including widows.

Legacies

At the local level, a distinct set of processes unfolded as violence dragged on. At some point, highland peasants came to realize that some model of coexistence had to be forged. Theidon fruitfully points out and discusses in detail the immense gap between coexistence and forgiveness. Though revenge remains an important emotion (373), especially among the more marginalized, it is tempered by the common knowledge that coexistence depends on people "remembering to forget" that they now lived side by side with those involved in the violence they suffered (269). The reintegration of both those who joined Sendero and those who served in the armed forces has been little studied; Theidon shows how this adds yet another layer of complexity to the struggle to reknit the bonds of community life. The divergent wartime patterns in communities that supported or rejected Sendero created distinct

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postconflict challenges. Communities developed diverse strategies to promote reintegration and bring violence to an end; Theidon shows that these were hampered both by the enormity of the task and by national reconstruction efforts that interfered with local practices.

Yet even as individual and community trauma remains intense, perhaps the most striking puzzle about the postconflict highlands—especially in comparison to other settings in which insurgents and state actors inflicted atrocities on civilians and in which those civilians themselves were active and significant participants in the violence—is that lethal violence has fallen back to a very low level. Theidon points to this toward the end of her book, writing that highland communities "have been remarkably effective in staying the hand of vengeance" (377). Yet she, too, falls short of a satsifying explanation, highlighting instead the material, psychological, and physical devastation that remains at the individual and community levels and directing her attention away from this important positive element of the postconflict highlands, one that demands further investigation.

Life During Wartime

Though the works discussed thus far, as well as many others, provide important insight, a striking gap in the study of Peru's internal conflict remains: there is little systematic study of the conflict itself. Kernaghan's book provides a rare exception. It diverges from most scholarship on Sendero by shifting the geographic focus to the Upper Huallaga Valley, where his fieldwork centered on the town of Aucayacu, known to Senderologists for its appearance in an infamous song about the quota of blood needed for revolution (Gorriti 1999, 106). Even as coca was cultivated in many parts of the country, this region was the epicenter of Peru's boom in cocaine production, which lasted from the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s. Kernaghan argues that the cocaine boom eroded "the town's political and legal authorities" (60) years before Sendero appeared, via corruption, which drove the collapse of trust in public institutions. Sendero arrived in the region after the coca boom was well underway, driving out the state and seeking profit and support from the provision of security and the adjudication of disputes.

Kernaghan paints a multilayered picture of life during wartime in this troubled and tense environment. Particularly interesting are his accounts of how local residents navigated the sense of threat posed by the conflict, which remained high even as the level of violence was fairly limited. The whole region was characterized by "fractured space" (59) of the kind described by theorists of the microdynamics of violence (Kalyvas 2006). Much local knowledge, nicely described as "social meteorology" (236), was required to understand conditions across the region, which were not easily apparent to outsiders, including journalists, state officials, or Kernaghan himself.

Kernaghan's account dovetails with Theidon's in uncovering violence committed by local residents against one another. A teacher informant tells him, "the problem wasn't really Sendero. . . . The whole world did whatever they wanted, and then

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they blamed it on Sendero" (201). Given the intimate nature of the violence that residents endured, one imagines that postconflict reconstruction, reconciliation, and reintegration here would face many of the same challenges Theidon notes in her set of southern Ayacucho communities.

Perhaps the most illuminating part of Kernaghan's book is its depiction of what seems to have been a successful counterinsurgency initiative carried out by a certain Captain Esparza, who would later become notorious on a national level for his human rights abuses. Kernaghan describes how Esparza emphasized an "uncompromising severity," a "quality or image of rectitude" that "signaled to people that the authority of the state—and not merely its violence—had returned" (194). Defeating Sendero seems to have required, or at least to have gone along with, the creation of "a people the state could call its own" (196) and a restoration of the symbolic center of the town, the plaza and its weekly flag raising. By threat of force, Esparza created a "collective disobedient of Sendero rule" (197) and forced people to take sides. In the town of Aucayacu itself, this show of control appears to have worked. Yet its limits are also revealed: when Sendero hung a flag on the riverbank in full view of the town, Kernaghan describes how Esparza responded by ordering residents of the rural areas where the insurgents still held sway to form a *ronda* and thus demonstrate their loyalty to the state. Not only did residents refuse, revealing that Sendero still held enough sway to shape their behavior, but human rights groups in Aucayacu intervened on their behalf.

Kernaghan's account of how residents positioned themselves in relation to the armed actors contrasts with those offered by La Serna, Heilman, and Theidon, who find that community support or rejection of Sendero had historical roots. Kernaghan seems to suggest instead that the gradient of Sendero support was purely geographic: more remote regions, further from the regional capital of Tingo María or more removed from the Marginal Highway, were more likely to be controlled by Sendero. The de facto boundaries of state reach also had an urban-rural gradient: though in Aucayacu and other towns the state generally held sway, the countryside was not under its control.

This urban-rural difference also marked Sendero's control, in a way. It had different kinds of presence in the two regions: towns were "forward positions," but the countryside, including the other bank of the Huallaga just across from the port of Aucayacu, was in more permanent Sendero control. One possible explanation for this difference is that because of the narco boom and its remoteness, this was a "settler region" (120), meaning that none of the local history of conflict, rivalries, and alliances that Heilman and La Serna explore in accounting for Sendero's differential success in mobilizing communities operated here. Future scholarship could draw on this variation in the depth of local tensions to integrate these two types of accounts to more fully understand local-level patterns of civilian behavior during internal conflict.

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From Society to the State

Jaskoski sheds light on the legacies of the Sendero conflict from a very different direction, providing a unique look at how its legacies shape state institutions.[1] She paints a comparatively crude image of the insurgency, neglecting the insights of the other texts discussed in this review. Her image of Sendero mirrors that held by the army officers she studies: Sendero centers on savage violence mixed with appeals to socioeconomic grievances, and grows steadily stronger over the course of the 1980s as its control of territory spreads toward Lima and other economic centers.

But Jaskoski's book nevertheless makes an enormous contribution to the study of the conflict and its legacies because her object of analysis is the army as an organization, particularly the rise and fall of military autonomy and its effects. She describes how the initial phase of counterinsurgency under Belaúnde saw the army operating autonomously, pursuing a two-pronged strategy of its own design that combined military confrontation and socioeconomic development initiatives. When Belaúnde refused to fund the latter because of the mounting burden of austerity policies, the army did so with its own funds, drawing on the broad emergency powers it was eventually given in guerrilla zones (42). Jaskoski shows the army's consistent protection of its political and juridical autonomy in guerrilla zones, which it saw as necessary for the effective pursuit of Sendero, for the design and implementation of its counterinsurgency strategy, and for the process of learning and strategic refinement that characterized the early years of its intervention.

Threats to this autonomy manifested themselves most centrally in efforts by Alan García's administration to impose accountability for human rights abuses committed in the course of counterinsurgency. These led the Peruvian military to the choice of mission underperformance that lies at the center of Jaskoski's account, as the army opted to remain in the barracks and shirked orders to patrol and carry out counterinsurgency operations. Fearing that soldiers and unit leaders would be vulnerable to prosecution for what the army saw as unavoidable mistakes, high-ranking officers decreased army presence in guerrilla zones, and lower-ranking officers demanded specific written orders from their superiors before responding to requests for patrols or other counterinsurgency activity. Only with the restoration of its autonomy when García relaxed his human rights policy in later years did the army return to the field; military officers Jaskoski interviewed believed that this autonomy gave it the ability to pursue Sendero effectively.

Jaskoski provides a different perspective on state weakness during Peru's internal conflict: it was not that the army lacked the capacity to carry out counterinsurgency but that state leaders were unable to compel it to do so. Yet one wonders how this account of military behavior can be reconciled with those sketched by ethnographers like Theidon and Kernaghan, who describe a much more robust, if far from truly effective, series of interventions carried out by military commanders even during the times when Jaskoski describes such substantial underperformance of counterinsurgency missions. One also wonders about the military's role in establishing and supporting the *rondas campesinas*. Did com-

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manders believe that this type of intervention also required autonomy from human rights pressures?

Readers might be struck by the fact that Jaskoski's officers see the human rights violations committed in the course of counterinsurgency as a function of the inability to distinguish, and not the army's unwillingness to do so, as described by Theidon and Kernaghan and the broader literature. It is also notable that she finds a robust cohort effect dividing more junior officers from those who served during the 1980s (87–97). The latter were far more likely to see accusations of abuses as unfair and to believe that "it was difficult to distinguish between civilians and counterinsurgents" (93). One implication of this strong cohort effect might be that the institutional trauma of the Sendero conflict might fade more quickly, yet one wonders whether there are mechanisms of intergenerational transmission of trauma in organizations like those that Theidon describes in families and communities. A more complete history of counterinsurgency during the Sendero conflict might incorporate Jaskoski's account with an examination of the full range of military activity to address some of these questions.

Institutional Legacies

Yet the most illuminating part of Jaskoski's study explores the legacies of counterinsurgency for the army. After Fujimori's fall, military autonomy was substantially reduced as it was made more accountable to civilian justice and as its authority in conflict zones was limited. Jaskoski shows that under these conditions, the army has once again chosen to avoid the possibility of leaving its members vulnerable to accusations of human rights violations by refusing to carry out either counterinsurgency or policing missions, in spite of the ongoing Sendero presence in a few portions of the country. In the 2000–2007 period, counterinsurgency efforts were "minimal" (73), increasing somewhat only once autonomy was restored during García's second term.

Because they engage neither in counterinsurgency missions nor in policing, Peruvian army units have been available for hire to do security work for private companies, which provide resources directly to army units in return for control over base locations and patrol routes. Thus the location of army activity is strongly influenced by private interests, especially those of mining and oil companies. Jaskoski's systematic analysis of the dynamics of this private contracting is an important contribution to our understanding of Peru's civil-military relations.

The broadest pattern she finds, however, is that army units stay on their bases instead of patrolling, citing the need for approval from superiors for any counterinsurgency action they take, even when this approval is not legally necessary. Jaskoski finds this surprising in light of what she sees as significant societal demands for military protection. Yet one wonders how to interpret these demands through an analysis of local politics in these communities, and whether her claim that a more robust counterinsurgent presence could increase the popular standing of the army would be sustained. But that question goes beyond her focus on the military's behavior itself to investigate how that behavior is viewed by civilian society. Thus it suggests

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the payoffs from an integrated examination of the legacies of conflict for both state and society.

Conclusions

The books discussed in this essay approach Peru's internal armed conflict from different disciplinary perspectives, asking distinct questions and exploring distinct facets of the conflict. The work of historians like Heilman and La Serna reveals that the dynamics of the conflict itself are marked by striking continuities with the past. This balance between continuity and disjuncture presents a complex and nuanced portrayal of the origins and legacies of the conflict. Thus these books raise important questions that might well be explored in future research that investigates how their accounts resonate with experiences in other parts of Peru and in other postconflict settings.

The accounts of Kernaghan, Theidon, and Jaskoski reveal how the conflict opened new wounds in Peru and left society and state institutions fundamentally transformed in lasting ways. Building on these books, political scientists can pursue much-needed integration of the Sendero conflict into their analyses of contemporary Peru, showing the extent and limitations of its impact on distinct aspects of politics and society and moving beyond our current failure to grapple with the political legacies of the conflict in a nuanced and careful manner.

Notes

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1. Jaskoski also diverges from the literature on the Sendero conflict more generally in placing the Peruvian case in comparative perspective. The rarity of such comparative studies is a striking gap in scholarship on Sendero and on contemporary Andean politics more generally. See Weinstein 2006 and McClintock 1998 for exceptions.

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