

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

real the voices, personal trajectories, dilemmas, hopes and sorrows that tend to remain hidden behind large numbers and official reports. From a teacher who was born, grew up and still works in the favela, to a mother who lost her eight-year-old son to a close-range police bullet, to two former Brazilian presidents (Cardoso and Lula), governors of Rio and senior officials in the area of national security, we are confronted with the problem as it is experienced and reflected upon by its key actors. The line-up of interviewees is impressive, and those studying these issues will find in this book a rich compilation of sources that brings together the multiple voices of favela-dwellers, community leaders, local and national government, the police and policy-makers.

Alves and Evanson show that favelas, while historically neglected by public policies and until very recently lacking in most basic state services, are nevertheless the outcome of an urban and economic environment in which it makes sense to build them and to live in them. Favelas have long moved beyond being shanty towns to become prospering and recognised urban areas receiving increased attention from the state. Inequality has plunged, there is less racism, and new investments from the national government's Program for Growth Acceleration have poured in. In addition, favelas enjoy far more social capital than other areas in the city as places where there has always been a strong sense of community and an impressive capacity for joint action and collaboration. Importantly, Rio as a whole depends on favelas – it is what it is because of the favelas and could not do without the work and proximity of favela-dwellers. All of this invites us to reposition the classic description of Rio as a 'split city' and recognise it is an integrated city, made by the multiple interconnections of its different areas and citizens.

Yet the undeclared war at the centre of the book is compelling evidence that the metaphor of the 'split city' cannot so easily be laid to rest. Everyday violence is intense and unequally distributed in Rio: favela-dwellers love their communities, but they know that between the drug trade and the police they stand little chance of surviving unscathed. There are issues of social representation, when the middle classes who live on the *asfalto* and the police see *favelados* as criminal and dangerous; there are issues of survival, when families cannot rely on the state for routes of socialisation for their children; and there are gigantic human rights violations, when the police invade homes, kill summarily and fail to investigate these crimes. What the imagination of Rio has named the *morro-asfalto* division is as real as ever for a favela-dweller living in Rio today (the 'morro' refers to the favelas in the hills, and the 'asfalto' (tarmac) to the richer neighbourhoods such as Ipanema, Leblon and Gávea in the southern zone of the city).

These issues are well explored throughout the book, particularly in the chapters containing the testimonies of favela actors and in the excellent overview of the police force, its history, its internal contradictions and its relation to the drug trade and favela communities. From the early 1980s onwards, the drug trade occupied peripheral areas of Rio and to some extent all major Brazilian urban centres. Traffickers settled and set up business, offering to these communities a parallel structure containing socio-economic opportunities as well as legal, cultural and psychological codes of conduct. The control imposed by drug bosses in the everyday life of Rio's favelas expands the notion of living in the crossfire to something more insidious; it is less immediate than a bullet but equally invasive and lethal. In this context favela communities have painfully learned how to live with the new 'kings of the hill' – how to adjust to the new rules of the game and the new orders within. In doing so, they have started to be seen by the police as criminal and dangerous. As I recently heard from an official of

the new *Unidades de Polícia Pacificadora* (Police Pacification Units, UPPs) that are attempting to stamp out drug trafficking and related crime and violence in Rio de Janeiro's favelas, 'we cannot deny that for the average police officer in Rio, all favela-dwellers are criminals'.

The triad favela–police–drug trade is made of a complex ecology wherein issues of economic survival, organised crime, identity and national security mingle and are difficult to disentangle. The UPPs undoubtedly represent a new possibility for the city, but as recently as 2007 the United Nations Human Rights Council produced a damning and embarrassing report on the abuses and violations commonly practised in the name of security. Alves and Evanson address this intricate scenario through a sensitive and unequivocal human rights framework that makes no concessions to the recent achievements of the Brazilian state. Through careful and detailed research and scholarship, this book makes a strong contribution to readdressing inequality in Rio and adds to the chorus of voices calling for a complete restructuring of the police apparatus in the city.

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Thomas Bruneau, Lucia Dammert and Elizabeth Skinner (eds.), *Maras: Gang Violence and Security in Central America* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2011), pp. viii + 309, \$55.00, \$24.95 pb; Robert Brennenman, *Homies and Hermanos: God and Gangs in Central America* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. xiii + 294, \$24.95, pb.

Over the past two decades, the northern tier of Central America (Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua) has been living out deep political and social contradictions. The ceasefires in the 1990s that ended the decades-long civil wars in the region were supposed to signal a brighter future for its citizens. At the very least, democratic transitions and consolidations were to bring political and economic stabilisation and an end to violent conflict. As even the casual reader of recent trends in Central American society and politics will note, such promises of a peaceful transition to post-conflict governance in the region have yet to be fulfilled. Instead, homicide, violent crimes, political instability and economic precariousness have noticeably increased, leading to perceptions of citizen insecurity and states on the verge of failure.

The phenomenon of gang violence is perhaps most emblematic of the failures of the Peace Accords and the diminished hopes of rebuilding a more just post-conflict society. *Maras* and *pandillas*, as various organised gang groups are known in Central America, have shifted from localised groups of disaffected and jobless young men who sought identity and support to a loose transnational criminal network that extends from major urban centres in the United States down through Mexico, into Central America and beyond. What had started out as multiple local groupings with their own names and territories has become more consolidated into the two largest gang franchises (and deadly rivals), the MS 13 (Mara Salvatrucha) and the Calle 18 (18th Street Gang). As local economies stagnate and political corruption further alienates citizens from effective governance, mara activity perpetuates palpable social and psychological insecurity. Two broad areas of concern emerge when focusing on the mara phenomenon. First, to what degree do maras, as a form of criminal violence, have