

JENNIFER SCHIRMER: *The Guatemalan Military Project: A Violence Called Democracy*. Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998.

Jennifer Schirmer's book on the Guatemalan military, *The Guatemalan Military Project: A Violence Called Democracy*, is an important work for understanding the historical and political evolution of nations hitherto under the influence or control of the armed forces. She contends, and I fully agree, that since the military structured and arranged their own "exit" from politics, their view of society and politics still pervades state institutions and mechanisms. In general terms, the Guatemalan state still sees internal security as paramount in any attempt to build consensus.

While some may say that societies which have seen armed conflict need time to undergo a complete demilitarization, this does not begin to address the issue of how the military see themselves in such a scenario. In fact, little has been written that delves into the Guatemalan military's "precise thinking and strategy" (p. 1) for stepping into and out of politics. "In this book," she says, "officers reveal in their own words their habits of mind regarding opposition, national security doctrine, democracy, human rights, and law" (p. 1). Schirmer's book thus constitutes a much-needed institutional perspective that sees the army as an evolving entity, with its own goals and perspectives, rather than an appendage to elite politics.

In order to get at and into the "mentalité of the military officer," (p. 4) the author employed the ethnographic method. During the period 1984 to 1996, she interviewed fifty military officers, including six Defense Ministers and three Heads of State, as well as a number of politicians (among them, one former president), lawyers, journalists, and human rights workers, to name but a few. Based on this evidence, she provides us with a study of the subculture, ideology, and views of this corporate body. The particular time period is crucial for understanding the evolution of the Guatemalan army and politics. The first half of the nineteen eighties allowed the military the necessary time to reinvent themselves and set up the country—both at a national and international level—for a perceived change in the political regime, while merely realigning the political players. After assessing what had come before, they proceeded to institutionalize a view of society that stressed order and security above civic participation.

It is in the *Thesis of National Stability*, a document drafted around 1987, that we see the military break with the past. The thinking that informs the *Thesis* emphasizes social and economic inequalities within the nation, but does not dwell on the role of foreign ideology (i.e. communism) as the sole cause of Guatemala's turbulent past. However, instead of concentrating on

understanding the national reality, emphasis is placed on stifling definitions of social stability. The role of justice is a good illustration of how the army sought to protect society from itself. In an unprecedented manner, the constitution of 1985 gave priority to war management over civil liberties. The end result was a "securitized law," or a law which makes no separation between the political and the juridical, but constantly qualifies or denies the rights of citizens deemed to be in conflict with security interests (p. 135). Military arbitrariness, in short, became the *written* law.

The modification of the national charter would find echoes in new, "kinder" means to address Guatemala's ongoing problem of ethnic diversity. Instead of denigrating the country's Mayan heritage, the army used symbols and terms that were meant to exalt the past: *kaibil*, for example, used in reference to the special armed forces, was a Kekchú term for warrior. By appropriating the past in order to validate present needs, an imaginary obedient Mayan was born, who was everything but subversive. The consequences of this shift in paradigm were predictable, given state hostility toward Indigenous rights in Latin America. Those who were categorized as not fitting the mold of this "sanctioned" Maya were massacred "in order to save them from subversion or denouncing the victim or accuser of the army's brutality as guilty of subversion rather than addressing the accusation" (p. 117). If ethnic difference is considered to be some kind of "subversive" activity, when will Guatemala see peace? The words of one intelligence colonel left this reviewer cold: "We don't know who our next enemy will be, but we are told that, traditionally, one must consider peasants as potential enemies in the immediate future" (p. 273).

I could continue discussing how the Guatemalan state itself has become instrumental in replicating military values throughout society, but the examples I have cited above provide a good sense of Schirmer's argument. The book is an excellent one, although there are a few minor aspects that I feel could have used improvement. The presence of typographical errors in the text points to editorial oversight. The maps, and some of the tables, were difficult to follow because of excessive information. The various symbols used to denote places and events—arrows, triangles, lines, for example—become indistinct, since they are all colored in varying degrees of black and gray.

My last remark is not meant as criticism of the book, but rather aims to draw attention to the larger subject of research on militarism in the Latin American polity. I wish the author had compared the development of the Guatemalan military to past and present military regimes in Latin America. Undoubtedly, the Guatemalan army has had the time to evolve and adapt, and hence provides a solid case study. But the question of how the institutional views of this corporate body conflict or connect with changing

social and political realities is one that is not relevant to Guatemala alone. Be it in Guatemala, Chile, Peru, or Colombia, the armed forces are still effective players in the political arena. And while the armies of these nations do not remain visible for the same reasons, there is one trend which is applicable to all of Latin America. Increasingly, armies are being called upon to support, or serve as a substitute for, police forces. In sum, it is clear that the Guatemalan experience deserves a more comparative approach, since it has much to tell us about the social price that must be paid for integrating state security with war management.

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MAXWELL A. CAMERON and PHILIP MAUCERI (eds.): *The Peruvian Labyrinth*. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997.

Tras la publicación en 1975 de *The Peruvian Experiment: Continuity and Change under Military Rule* y en 1983 de *The Peruvian Experiment Reconsidered*, editadas respectivamente por Abraham F. Lowenthal y Cynthia McClintock, *The Peruvian Labyrinth*, que ahora compilan Maxwell A. Cameron y Philip Mauceri, continúa esta importante empresa editorial destinada a analizar desde varios puntos de vista académicos la política, la sociedad y la economía peruana actual. El prefacio, que provocativamente está redactado por los editores de las dos primeras publicaciones arriba señaladas, apunta a un balance comparativo entre los gobiernos del general Juan Velasco Alvarado y del ingeniero Alberto Fujimori, destacando las diferencias entre ambos proyectos autoritarios, aunque la mayor similitud haya sido intentar conformar un modelo de sociedad al margen de los partidos políticos y por encima de las instituciones democráticas. Lowenthal y McClintock concluyen de un modo pesimista que si Velasco fracasó en este intento en 1975, el deseo del fujimorismo de continuar el mismo camino más allá del 2000 puede conducir al Perú a un atolladero político de consecuencias imprevisibles. De ahí que el cambio de título entre los dos primeros libros y este último no sea un mero recurso editorial; el experimento peruano ha desembocado en un peligroso laberinto político e institucional.

En la introducción, los editores de *The Peruvian Labyrinth* anuncian que la intención del libro es dar cuenta de la drástica contradicción política entre el Perú de la década de los ochenta y el de los años noventa, mediante ocho ensayos que, como punto en común, centralizan todo el protagonismo alrededor de la figura de Fujimori en detrimento de Alan García o Fernando