

Book Reviews

Intimate Enemies: Violence and Reconciliation in Peru

Kimberly Theidon, 2013, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, ISBN: 9780812244502, 488 pp., Hb. £49.00.

Reviewed by David Orr

In the 1980s and early 1990s, Peru was convulsed by conflict between the Maoist revolutionary group Shining Path and the armed forces. Nearly 70,000 people died, while the lives of many more were severely disrupted. The ravages of those years have been amply documented by the country's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), a massive project drawing on thousands of testimonies from those most affected. Yet, as Theidon argues, such a large-scale undertaking necessarily tends to impose its own logic on the accounts gathered and to efface more 'experience-near' meanings. *Intimate Enemies* restores to centre-stage the narratives of individuals from the peasant communities of Ayacucho, the region which suffered the brunt of the violence, thereby enriching our understanding of the themes discussed in the TRC's report and shedding new light on how practices of reconciliation developed or faltered in its wake.

Theidon takes as her subject the community psychology and individual experiences of villagers who survived the destruction only to find that they then faced the enormous challenge of reconstructing meaningful lives together, frequently alongside those who had perpetrated humiliation, torture, rape or killing against them or their loved ones. In the course of her discussion, she raises a number of questions that will be of interest to anthro-

pologists and others working in post-conflict situations well beyond the Andes. The global discourse of 'trauma' underlay the TRC's work and informed psychological interventions in Ayacucho as it has in so many other parts of the world; Theidon brings it into juxtaposition with her informants' embodied idioms of health and affliction, and the significance they placed on forgetting. In doing so, she adds to the scholarly literature challenging the cross-cultural appropriateness of trauma. She explores how communities found ways to reincorporate the *arrepentidos*, or 'repentant terrorists', through such means as the signing of *actas* (quasi-legal agreements/declarations), the use of evangelical discourse around forgiveness, or conceptual frameworks that emphasized their 're-humanization'. Yet while the considerable achievements made through such forms of social reincorporation are highlighted, the narratives of many individuals nevertheless show that their success is never absolute. Many community members still harbour significant resentments, despite – or perhaps because of – the fact that reprisals are so scarce, and the book ponders the limits to the acceptance that society can enforce without more meaningful reparations.

Although she in no way neglects men, Theidon gives most prominence to how women experienced the conflict and its aftermath. This gender perspective is illuminating, showing how norms of motherhood, womanhood and widowhood shaped female subjectivities in an environment where widespread sexual violence and bereavement affected families dramatically. She questions in particular whether men's dominance of the public decision-making processes around recognition of guilt, and hence recon-



ciliation, presents an almost insurmountable obstacle to acceptance for some of the women.

The book paints the timeline of the conflict only in broad strokes; readers seeking a history of Shining Path's insurgence in Ayacucho must look elsewhere. The emphasis here is firmly on what people have to say about what they lived through and its effects on them; many of these stories are murky and partial, as is only to be expected in the close aftermath of such a vicious conflict. Yet the attentively described accumulation of ethnographic detail ultimately turns this into a strength, as it reveals far more about what it is like to live through the remaking of a social world under such conditions than a more ordered 'objective' account could ever do. Theidon's writing is evocative and accessible, but sensitive to the harrowing stories she describes. *Intimate Enemies* will be of interest to anthropologists and others working in post-conflict areas or on community reconciliation, whether in Latin America or elsewhere in the world.

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Facing the Torturer

Francois Bizot, translated by Charlotte Mandell and Antoine Audouard, New York: Alfred A. Knopf: 2012, Hb. U.S.\$25.00, ix, 212 pp., ISBN: 978-0-207-2350-5.

Reviewed by David Lempert

The setting in French anthropologist Francois Bizot's book, *Facing the Torturer*, puts us right at

the heart of the dilemmas facing anthropologists in action today, meeting peoples living with insecurity and fear. Bizot, a former French colonial soldier in Algeria in the 1960s, was studying Khmer Buddhism when he was taken prisoner by the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia in 1971 in their M13 camp on suspicion of collaborating with the CIA. He was freed on orders of Khmer Rouge leader, 'Brother Number 1', Saloth Sar (Pol Pot), and at the plea of his jailor, French educated, Chinese-Khmer math teacher, Kang Kek Iew/Kaing Guek Eav ('Duch'), four years his junior, and against the wishes of 'Brother Number 4' Ta Mok. It was Duch who later headed the famed French high school turned torture chamber in Phnom Penh, Tuol Sleng, now a museum. Duch was identified in 1990 when he was helping run an orphanage camp for an American Christian organization and quickly sought contact again with Bizot, perhaps believing that Bizot would serve as an intermediary. Yet, it was Bizot's testimony, presented in this book, that helped lead to Duch's conviction of crimes against humanity in 2010. After more than U.S.\$60 million in expenses, Duch has been the single convict at the Cambodian Khmer Rouge trials begun in 2008 that sought to criminalize the Khmer Rouge but none of the other actors responsible for deaths in Cambodia (from French colonialism, American bombing causing some 500,000 deaths, Vietnamese colonialism, Chinese colonialism or others).

This is a book that raises intriguing questions. As an anthropologist, should Bizot take 'sides' and testify against his 'informant' or is there some moral duty even to mass murderers (who may be 'criminally insane' whether or not the courts say so; and why in this case did they not say so)? What role should he play in trying to help heal conflict or to expose the cultural conditions of colonialism and terror from other countries (such as the French) that may have 'created' the Khmer Rouge? As an anthropologist studying 'Buddhism' and representing French colonial institutions like the

Ecole Francaise, as well as a former colonial soldier, what is his duty to fully reflect on his own biases? (Indeed, Bizot tells us that he was already biased against the Khmer Rouge and in favour of the colonial dictatorship. He 'hated' the revolutionaries 'right away' because they 'wanted to replace everything I loved about Cambodia', whatever that was (22). Anthropologists are not supposed to 'hate' before fully explaining the full context, but he did and does now. 'No compromise was to be considered: the guerillas were either terrorists or people of uncommon virtue: it was all about which side you were on.' (56))

Should Bizot not have a responsibility to speak out on the implications of imposed Western-style legal proceedings (that claim to have a purpose of rehabilitation/punishment, protection, and education but that here simply targeted a sick (psychopathic) old man whom they called sane (!)) while addressing no other crimes and no other psychological needs of the country or victims? Should he not help create understanding of motives of all sides that can help us identify with all of the parties involved and try to then act to rebuild Cambodian culture? Should he have a duty to do so?

This book has great potential but it fails. It is filled with hype but no substance. Perhaps it reflects the failure of our profession to address the real questions of our time. The writing style is stream of consciousness and dramatic but offers almost no introspection other than the author's guilt feelings about viciously killing his own dog, Sarah, in 1963; something he tries to link with Duch's acts. At the same time, he says nothing about his activities in Algeria, France's colonial legacy in Cambodia, or the acts or mindsets of the Americans and others, as if he wishes to sanitize that history (!). U.S. General William Westmoreland said he had to 'destroy Indochina's villages in order to save them'. That sounds little different from the justifications used by Duch, but Bizot makes no comparisons to mindsets of government

ideologues (fanatics) and their violence in his (our) culture then (or today). Along the way he tosses out, with little introspection, intriguing comments on culture, including his own participation in cannibalism at a Khmer cremation (52), on the failure of the U.N. oversight, and on the horrors of refugee camps under the Thai military (and their difference from those of the Khmer Rouge, which he acknowledged were run more effectively).

Bizot claims his purpose is to 'shed light on what we have in common' with Duch, showing that he's 'just like the rest of us' (19) but, instead, Bizot does what he criticizes, almost dutifully, aiding the courts in assuring retribution for the execution of his two assistants. He paints Duch as a robotic ideologue and caricature, who 'lived between demons and corpses' (32), filled with 'moral degradation' (28) and ultimately in a 'trap' that 'closed over him' (160) in an organization of angry young men requiring more and more violence to demonstrate their obedience in a hierarchy of fear. He could try to help us understand the Khmer Rouge 'other' and put their behaviours in cultural and psychological context, but he refuses.

Bizot is right that we need to understand the minds of torturers and tortured to truly recognize ourselves in the 'other' and to try to then heal our world. We live in a world filled with traumatized peoples and are inclined to repeat these cycles of violence by sanitizing them and compartmentalizing them as part of patriotism and loyalty so that they are justified. This should be the work of anthropologists in action, but Bizot fails. Far better are novelists, biographers, journalists and film-makers who take us inside the minds of the monsters who are us.

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