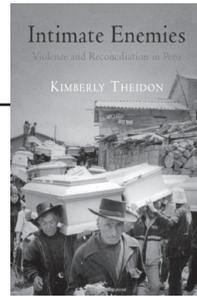


BOOK REVIEW

María Eugenia Ulfe,

Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú



Kimberly Theidon, *Intimate Enemies: Violence and Reconciliation in Peru*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012. 488 pp.

Fausta looks down to her body and finds the potato she has put inside her vagina—a way to protect herself from rape and harm. She seldom speaks, especially to men—only talking to male relatives. She prefers to sing, and her sweet, soft voice embodies her sadness. Fausta suffers from a syndrome known as “the milk of sorrow.” The illness was transmitted from her mother who was sexually abused during the early stages of her pregnancy, and produces fear and difficulty in establishing relationships with other human beings.

Fausta, the main character of the Berlin Bear awarded film *The Milk of Sorrow* (2009), is inspired by a narration that appears in Kimberly Theidon’s book *Entre Prójimos* (2004). In *Intimate Enemies* (inspired by *Entre Prójimos*), Theidon talks to Salomé Baldeón from Accomarca whose testimony speaks to the Milk of Sorrow syndrome. Salomé describes the suffering she felt as soldiers came into her community and the massacre in nearby Lloqlepampa occurred. She says that her husband escaped to avoid being killed. She was pregnant and had to deliver the baby on her own. She tried to leave her baby in the mountains to die, but her cries were so loud that she returned to get her. Salomé continues: “That’s why I say my daughter is damaged because of everything what happened, and because of my milk, my blood, my *pensamientos*” (43). Salomé feels pain in her body for transmitting sadness and sorrow to her baby.

Intimate Enemies is a multisite ethnography carried out by Theidon with the support of local, young research assistants in seven Andean communities in rural Ayacucho, in the provinces of Huanta, Vilcashuaman, and Victor Fajardo. Her voice, her assistants’ voices, and those of the people

she talked to intermingle in delicate tones to speak about life in war times, the fractures and their fragments, and the possibilities and limits of social repair. The research areas correspond to two distinctive parts of Ayacucho that were caught in different degrees of violence. Huanta corresponds to the Northern region of Ayacucho. Shining Path used to patrol and control the area, and late in 1982, the Navy arrived and brought terror with them. But as Theidon explains, in Northern Ayacucho what you saw was the destruction and resurrection of evangelical churches. In the central region of Ayacucho, which corresponds to Vilcashuaman and Victor Fajardo provinces, there was less infrastructural damage. There, most of the Shining Path members were *lugareños*—people born and raised in the same villages. People in those communities felt both remorse and resentment towards their relatives and neighbors.

The Central-South region of Ayacucho is where the Shining Path had its “Principal Committee”—revolution spread from Chuschi, a rural community located in Cangallo, in 1980. This Central-South region of Ayacucho is the place where Shining Path controlled entire villages since late 1982 and had gained support from the population in the initial years. In *Intimate Enemies*, there is an intention to show the particular local histories and relations that were established during the period of violence and how *comuneros* (peasants) responded to this violence.

It is in the body that human beings carry the layers and sediments of our memories. Memory is “achingly bittersweet,” says Theidon (40). And, *llakis* (songs) are embodied states of mind of sorrow and pain, private and yet collective. *Llakis* are *pensamientos* that speak about trauma, violence, deprivation, death, and pain. Privileging speech as an act, Theidon’s ethnography is about how people speak of terror—it is about the use of language and narrations, but also the use of the body as the carrier of memories. Trauma, she writes, is embodied, and people become ill after traumatic experiences.

Theidon asks “What do people suffer from? What aches and why? Whom do they hold responsible and what should be done with them? How do people talk about what is wrong with their world, and how might it be set right?” (36). There is no linearity in the narrations she collected; instead, there is a flow and intertextuality of voices. Criticizing the victim-centered orientation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2001-2003) in Peru, she focuses on the polyphony of voices that speak about violence and how they reconcile intimately—in private—the “silence pacts”

and the ritualistic *actas conciliatorias* (agreements) that some comuneros perform in order to continue with the flow of life.

Theidon finds that speech is also engendered. And she pays close attention to those narrations that speak of gender relations in violent times. She considers that there is an “economy of war” and women are sometimes the hidden and damaged treasure. They are the ones who stayed in the communities, survived, and yet suffered the most brutal ways of humiliation and violence, even using pregnancy as a strategy for survival. What she finds are intricate ways for speaking about women who know what happened in the villages, those called the *locas* (the crazy women). Madness becomes a category to speak of life turned upside down. These women are the transgressors of order. Yet, they were the ones who stayed in their communities and had to denounce the disappearance and death of their relatives (mostly men, as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Final report showed). These women, survivors of their deceased relatives, had to get involved in what, previous to the armed conflict, were considered men’s tasks like agricultural work. Most importantly, these women assumed political responsibilities in their villages. They are *locas* because they speak out loudly about events and people that do not appear or are not mentioned in official records; these women are *locas* because they use gestures and their bodies to say things.

Warmisapa (the raped woman) is another social anomaly related to these gendered relations in violent times. These women become the representation of silence in village life. They are the embodiment of the subverted notions of fitness and order. And in those cases, Theidon asks, “how does one attempt to ‘repair’ the unspoken?” (140).

Diane Nelson’s words come to my mind when reading Theidon’s book. Because as the book proposes and Nelson says: “Memory formation is nothing if not a conflictual mobile process: less a static repository of meanings from the past than a radically contested dynamic of rethinking relationships between the past and the present, potentially bringing out tentative links, new readings, or alternative interpretations” (2011:340). Grounded in historical context, Theidon brings testimonies and narrations that speak about gender, ethnicity, illness and health, pain, sorrow, as well as truth and hope in reconciliation amidst violence, poverty, and social discrimination. These narratives show the intricate ways of how memory works and how memory is loaded with meanings that appeal to the senses in many different ways.

As an anthropologist working on issues related to violence, Theidon knows that it is impossible to maintain neutrality, describing her position as

already caught. Conducting fieldwork during times of armed conflict requires tremendous time—people will not speak with you if you arrive asking. Additionally, one simply cannot observe...There will come a point when you must take a stand. People remind you that you are far too implicated not to, just as they reminded me. (20)

And, she took a stand in several moments during her work: her proximity led to her inclusion on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's research team in Ayacucho that investigated the period of armed conflict and authoritarianism in Peru (1980-2000).

It is interesting to note that in her analysis, most of the testimonies compiled by Quechua women, instead of speaking in first person ("I"), prefer "ñoqayku"—the collective voice for "we," a word rife with internal divisions but at the same time a reflection upon the possibility of having a community or a communal life where victims and perpetrators live together. Thus "ñoqayku" is constitutive, both in terms of what is said and what is silenced. Silence and forgetting are other ways to speak of memory, especially of "memory politics."

In *Intimate Enemies*, Theidon pays close attention to the heterogeneity of voices that are part of the "gray zones" left in rural Andean villages turned upside down by a traumatic recent past that is marked by a distant, dense, and conflictive historical relationship with the Peruvian State. As a result, this book is an important effort to understand post-conflict societies and their intentions to rebuild their social fabrics. ■

References:

- Nelson, Alice. 2011. "Marketing Discontent: The Political Economy of Memory in Latin America." In Ksenija Bibija and Leigh Payne, eds. *Accounting for Violence: Marketing Memory in Latin America*, 339-364. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Theidon, Kimberly. 2004. *Entre Projimos: el conflicto armado interno y la política de la reconciliación en el Perú*. Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos.

Copyright of Anthropological Quarterly is the property of George Washington Institute for Ethnographic Research and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.