
BOOK REVIEW ESSAYS

Civil Wars and Their Aftermath

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This essay reviews the following works:

Rebelocracy: Social Order in the Colombian Civil War. By Ana Arjona. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016. Pp. xxii + 401. \$33.99 paperback. ISBN: 9781107571594.

Rivalry and Revenge: The Politics of Violence during Civil War. By Laia Balcells. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017. Pp. ix + 285. \$29.99 paperback. ISBN: 9781107548213.

Resisting War: How Communities Protect Themselves. By Oliver Kaplan. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017. Pp. xi + 360. \$34.99 paperback. ISBN: 9781316612446.

Electing Peace: From Civil Conflict to Political Participation. By Aila Matanock. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017. Pp. vii + 320. \$34.99 paperback. ISBN: 9781316638811.

Mourning Remains: State Atrocity, Exhumations, and Governing the Disappeared in Peru's Postwar Andes. By Isaias Rojas-Perez. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017. Pp. ix + 330. \$29.95 paperback. ISBN: 9781503602625.

Politics after Violence: Legacies of the Shining Path Conflict in Peru. Edited by Hillel David Soifer and Alberto Vergara. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2019. Pp. x + 373. \$45.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9781477317310.

Democracy and Displacement in Colombia's Civil War. By Abbey Steele. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017. Pp. ix + 264. \$49.99 paperback. ISBN: 9781501713736.

Citizens of Memory: Affect, Representation, and Human Rights in Postdictatorship Argentina. By Silvia R. Tandeciarz. Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2017. Pp. ix + 304. \$120.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9781611488456.

Scholarship on civil conflicts has taken a turn for the micro. No longer content to focus on grand narratives, military strategy, and individual leaders, scholars across disciplines are increasingly turning their attention to the mass public. Why are civilians targeted during conflict? How do they protect themselves? How does violence affect communities for the long term? That long term—history's *longue durée*—is also getting increasing attention. Already a well-developed field within the humanities, memory studies is quickly being colonized by social scientists venturing into the realm of post-conflict legacies and memories. How do post-conflict societies grapple with, prosecute, and memorialize mass violence? And what are the effects of these memorial projects? Indeed, each of the books reviewed here, although they deal with different research questions, touches on the question of how conflicts shape the future, the legacies of civil war.

Unsurprisingly, scholars from different disciplines tackle these issues in very different ways. Civil conflicts are among the most complex political events that scholars study. Not only are there multiple armed groups, but also different civilian groups, complicated relationships between combatants and noncombatants, and a complex network of motives, interests, and passions in between. Moreover, it is hard to distinguish between the legacies of conflict and the effects of unrelated developments that occur after the conflict.

Humanists, historians, and anthropologists tend to embrace this complexity. For them, the intricate relations between different actors, their internal ambivalences and contradictions, and the contingencies of time and place are all integral to our understanding of these events and their aftermath. They are less interested in parsing among different factors than they are in providing a holistic accounting. Political scientists, in contrast, want to deduce parsimonious theories about how these events unfold, theories that generalize across time and space, at least among certain types of conflicts. Their task is to find the signal of simplicity through the noise of complexity.

Both approaches have their merits, and researchers in this enormous field of scholarship would do well to engage more across disciplines. Truly interdisciplinary research is difficult, if not impossible, to produce. But even scholars enmeshed in their own disciplines could learn from the fascinating research being done by colleagues in other fields. Whereas political scientists and economists have only recently discovered historical legacies and often pay little attention to historical contexts, historians and humanists have been analyzing them for ages. For them, legacy effects abound, in ways social scientists ought to recognize. Social scientific tools, meanwhile, have advantages in producing findings that generalize to a population, and humanists might consider them when discussing how political interventions, both during and after conflicts, affect mass publics. Career incentives often reward narrow disciplinary views, but expanding our field of vision will help us better understand how and why civil wars unfold as they do, how they shape individuals and societies into the future, and how those legacies themselves change over time.

Civilians and Wartime Violence

One dimension of violent conflict attracting growing attention within political science is the fate of noncombatants in civil war. Although scholars across the disciplines often describe wartime violence as chaotic or barbaric, political scientists increasingly see political motives and purposeful strategy. Of the books reviewed here, those by Laia Balcells, Abbey Steele, Ana Arjona, and Oliver Kaplan focus on different dimensions of violent conflict and the interface between combatants and noncombatants. But all four find politically motivated patterns in the choices these actors make.

In *Rivalry and Revenge*, Balcells focuses on the violence combatants perpetrate against civilians. This violence, she argues, can be direct—close-range violence perpetrated with small weapons—or indirect, violence wrought by heavy weapons from a distance. Crucially, direct violence necessitates the collaboration of civilians to identify targets, while indirect violence depends more heavily on military strategy.

Balcells highlights some puzzling variation when it comes to combatants perpetrating direct violence against civilians. In the first year of the Spanish Civil War, anarchist militia executed thirty civilians in the northern Catalan town of Puigcerdà, but only three in the nearby town of Bellver de Cerdanya. Both towns were well behind the front lines and controlled by the same militia. Balcells uses this example to ask why civilians are targeted during wartime in some places and not in others. She argues that direct violence against civilians in conflicts like the Spanish Civil War has a political logic. Where one side in the conflict held firm control over a locality, civilians denounced their neighbors if doing so could weaken their political opponents into the future. Thus, it was in communities with parity between Nationalists and Republicans that civilians denounced their rivals and controlling forces perpetrated direct violence.

The idea that violence against civilians is partly driven by denunciations and betrayals by the civilians themselves is something Balcells picks up from Stathis Kalyvas.¹ But unlike Kalyvas, she points to political motivations. Kalyvas characterizes most violence against civilians during wartime as decidedly parochial—the result of local score-settling and petty rivalries that have nothing to do with the master cleavage of the conflict itself. Balcells describes civilians who are very much invested in the politics of the master cleavage, rationally working to maximize their future hold on power. At least at first. In later stages of the conflict, this initial rationality gives way to emotion, and civilian behavior comes to be motivated more by vengeance than by maximizing political gains. Balcells argues that “these emotions create new motives for violence, revenge motives, which add to the strategic motives” (37).

Balcells brings an impressive and persuasive range of quantitative and archival data to bear on her argument. Perhaps the foremost expert on the Spanish Civil War in political science today, she focuses primarily on that case, but also brings in data from the 1990s civil war in Côte d’Ivoire. Her argument takes seriously the dynamic nature of conflicts, beginning with political motives in the early stages of the conflict and then endogenously building in emotional motives for violence in later stages of the conflict. This is a major improvement over studies that treat entire conflicts as unitary.

¹ Stathis Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

But it also begs a broader perspective. War is a continuation of politics by other means, as the famous aphorism goes. And the dynamics of local conflict during civil wars are a continuation of political, economic, and social conflicts that predate the war. Prewar political mobilization is a precondition for Balcells, so she is well aware that political conflict during the Second Republic that preceded the civil war was, in some communities, deeply polarized and sometimes violent. But she takes this prewar mobilization to be exogenous, unrelated to political competition—although it seems plausible to think that prewar mobilization would have been more intense precisely in communities where political competition was more fierce. Moreover, since all of this political competition took place prior to the war, the onset of the conflict and uncontested territorial control by one side would have offered an opportunity to exact revenge against rivals from those prewar political conflicts.

This possibility raises a question that future applications of the logics of rivalry and revenge should also consider: at what point over years of interaction do the motives of actors switch from rivalry to revenge, rationality to emotion? Since we are interested in local-level dynamics among groups that have often lived together for decades prior to war, we may need to start looking well before formal conflict breaks out. By the time war comes, civilians may already be motivated by emotions.

Another question is how actors—both combatants and civilians—choose among different types of violence they can perpetrate. After all, executing opponents is not the only option they have, and Balcells notes that such violence can be costly. In *Democracy and Displacement in Colombia's Civil War*, Abbey Steele turns our attention to a different form of violence against civilians: displacement. Since the 1980s, an estimated six million people were displaced in Colombia's conflict. But Steele argues that this massive displacement is "not just an unintended byproduct of violence" (179). Rather, combatants use forcible displacement as a method of what she calls "political cleansing," a strategy for territorial control.

When combatants compete over control of a territory, one way to undermine their rivals is by getting rid of their civilian supporters. Doing this need not mean executing them, which can be costly. Instead, combatants might issue threats, destroy property, or kill a subset of the community, encouraging the rest of the community to flee. Rather than targeting individuals selectively based on specific denunciations, combatants punish entire neighborhoods, communities, or social groups. This collective targeting means that members of a group are considered guilty by association.

But how do combatants know which groups or which communities to target? There are many ways they might gather this kind of information: on the basis of membership in social groups known to support an actor in a conflict, or on the basis of a community's political affiliations. Perversely, in Colombia, they could look at recent local election results to see whether particular communities supported their political allies or rivals. In the mid-1980s, in an effort to resolve its long-running civil war, the Colombian government introduced local elections and allowed the leftist political party linked to the insurgency to participate. Far from being the panacea it was anticipated to be, Steele argues that these elections revealed civilians' loyalties. Armed with this information, right-wing paramilitaries now knew which communities supported them and which did not, and collective targeting and political cleansing skyrocketed.

Steele makes a compelling empirical case for this argument with an impressive range of evidence. Using quantitative data at both the municipal level for the whole country and at the individual level within one municipality, she shows how supporters of the leftist party were systematically more likely to be displaced. She also uses data from in-depth interviews and archival research to show how collective targeting and displacement emerged as a consequence of local elections. Steele writes with notable compassion for her subjects, weaving stories from her fieldwork into the narrative. The result is a book that is both persuasive and absorbing.

Democracy and Displacement is a major step forward in understanding the interactions between combatants and civilians during war. Kalyvas's well-known distinction between selective and indiscriminate violence omits violence that is targeted at specific groups but not specific individuals. Steele's notion of collective targeting adds an important analytical category, and her book offers a compelling explanation for its application. Moreover, she highlights how elections can have perverse consequences during conflict.

Reading Balcells and Steele side by side, one cannot help but wonder what explains the differences between their stories. While combatants in the Spanish Civil War selectively executed civilians denounced as rivals, armed groups in Colombia used collective targeting to cleanse territory and secure control. The conflicts themselves are different: a conventional civil war in Spain and an irregular civil war in Colombia. And Balcells focuses on rearguard zones while Steele examines contested areas. But is this enough to explain the differences? If killing civilians is costly and other options are available to combatants, why not exploit those other options? Indeed, Balcells and Steele have together written on displacement as a tactic used by

combatants in both contexts.² It would be useful to know more about how combatants choose between selective violence and collective targeting (and subsequent displacement) in their efforts to control civilian populations.

Steele's qualitative evidence also reveals instances in which communities resisted attempts at political cleansing. She highlights one so-called peace community that refused to be intimidated into fleeing and instead managed to organize collectively and dissuade combatants from using violence. Although she does not study this resistance systematically and calls such instances "rare" (203), she suggests that strong communal norms and external assistance were critical to the success of this community.

The phenomenon of community resistance is precisely what Oliver Kaplan takes up in his book, *Resisting War*. Whereas civilians are mostly victims (sometimes denouncers) in Balcells's and Steele's accounts, Kaplan's civilians have more agency: they determine—individually and collectively—how to respond to the threat of violence from armed actors. In Kaplan's account, civilians can protect themselves and retain their autonomy if they can act collectively. To do so, they need to have strong organizational capacity to maintain social cohesion. They might also benefit from external assistance—from churches or NGOs—that propels them to organize collectively.

Kaplan focuses on nonviolent community resistance in the Colombian context (a final empirical chapter also discusses other cases). When violent actors threaten a community, some members may choose to collaborate, others to flee, and yet others to remain silent and withdraw. This allows armed actors to gain power and control. But Kaplan argues that some communities have tactics at their disposal to resist this threat that range in their levels of contentiousness. Communities may, through social norms or pressures, incentivize their members to create a "culture of peace," strengthening communal bonds. They can implement local fora for resolving conflicts or investigating accusations; denounce aggression through public demonstrations or declarations of neutrality; implement early warning systems to share information about and avoid armed actors; or they can organize their own armed resistance to match and deter armed actors. "A community will select the most contentious tactic bundles," Kaplan argues, "when highly organized, when there is external support, and when there is moderate armed group pressure" (53).

On the other side of the equation is the extent to which the armed actor is swayed by the community's efforts. Kaplan refers to this as the combatant's "sensitivity" to civilians, a function of the group's founding ideology and norms, its relative dependence on civilians for resources, and the relative territorial security of the armed group.

Kaplan's empirical analysis is refreshingly self-reflective. He describes at length his process of data collection in settings where violence, though not ongoing, still casts a threatening shadow. Although his theory proposes multiple independent variables, Kaplan focuses primarily on a community's preexisting level of organization. In particular, he focuses on community organizations known as junta councils, which began to form in the 1960s and spread throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Although state sanctioned, the juntas were not imposed by the state, and Kaplan goes to some length to show that their effects on violence are not an artifact of selection.

Importantly, Kaplan moves us away from thinking of civilians as helplessly caught in the crossfire during civil conflict. And yet, we also know that preexisting community organizations can be co-opted to facilitate violence against civilians, as in Rwanda.³ Kaplan has convincingly shown that social capital and community organizations *can* deter violence, but how would we know a priori whether to expect community organization to generate more or less violence? This seems like a pressing question for future work.

Communities sometimes organize in response to violence. Kaplan does not rule out this possibility, instead suggesting that what dominated in the Colombian context were preexisting organizations. In Guatemala, Regina Bateson argues that levels of violence were directly affected by new community organizations.⁴ Communities that experienced intense violence during the civil war formed civil patrols, and those organizations fostered postwar collective vigilantism in the face of new threats. So again the question is why preexisting organizations might matter in some contexts and the incentives to form new organizations might dominate in others.

In the interaction between combatants and civilians, Kaplan shifts the focus away from the incentives for violence toward its deterrents. "Collective action for peace, and not just for violence," he concludes,

² Laia Balcells and Abbey Steele, "Warfare, Political Identities, and Displacement in Spain and Colombia," *Political Geography* 51 (2016): 15–29.

³ Scott Straus, *The Order of Genocide: Race, Power, and War in Rwanda* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006).

⁴ Regina Bateson, "Order and Violence in Postwar Guatemala" (PhD diss., Yale University, 2013).

“is possible even in settings of armed conflict” (300). This is surely an important departure from Balcells and Steele.

It also dovetails with Ana Arjona’s masterful *Rebelocracy*. Arjona highlights that combatants do more than just threaten violence, they also govern and sometimes prefer to allow communities to govern themselves. “Armed actors,” she highlights, “do not only kill, but also create institutions, endorse ideologies, form alliances with local actors, provide public goods, recruit, and, in so doing, transform the societies in which they operate” (2). Whereas Kaplan focuses on the capacity of civilians to deter combatants, Arjona emphasizes the strategic incentives of combatants in choosing how to govern.

Combatants can leave local communities without governing institutions (*disorder*), leave local affairs to existing leaders (*aliocracy*), or govern directly (*rebelocracy*). Their choice has to do with their time horizons and—mirroring Kaplan—the quality of preexisting local institutions, especially those that resolve disputes. When rebels have internal disputes or high levels of competition with other combatants, their time horizons shorten and they become more likely to produce disorder. But in most cases, Arjona argues, rebels have longer time horizons and prefer to install a rebelocracy. They can generally do so, except in communities with strong preexisting institutions that help civilians organize resistance. In those instances, we see aliocracy.

Arjona’s book is a tour de force. Her nuanced empirical strategy brilliantly leverages multiple types of data—including quantitative data on community-combatant relationships, in-depth interviews, surveys, and focus groups—and methodological approaches for descriptive and causal inference. She offers readers not only a persuasive empirical case for her theories of rebel governance but also a deep and insightful look into the local nonviolent behavior of combatants.

We have learned a great deal in recent years about violence against civilians in civil war, and the books by Arjona, Balcells, Kaplan, and Steele contribute enormously to that. But the literature now offers us a host of possible explanatory variables, and while some clearly seem to matter in some contexts, others seem to matter more in different contexts. In political science in particular, studies of civil conflict often privilege the case of Colombia, although the region (unfortunately) offers many other—though perhaps less well documented—cases worthy of analysis. How well do our theories hold up in these other contexts? As we continue to better understand these important phenomena, a crucial task seems to be figuring out how different variables stack up against each other, and when we would expect to see some factors matter more than others. Certainly, if we wish to use our new understandings to inform policy interventions in ongoing or new civil conflicts, we need to know which of our findings we would expect to travel to these new settings.

One new setting for Latin America is the dramatic rise of criminal violent organizations. To what extent can we apply what we know about *political* violent actors’ use of violence against civilians with the interaction between civilians and *criminal* violent actors? Steele and Kaplan both mention the rise of criminal groups in Colombia in their conclusions, and speculate about the extent to which their findings generalize to them. But the next generation of studies of violence against civilians in Latin America surely needs to address this question head-on.

Legacies of Conflict

Kalyvas writes that civil wars, “are notorious for being a past that won’t go away, *ce passé qui ne passe pas*.”⁵ In the short term, that past can make itself felt by relapsing back into civil conflict. In *Electing Peace*, Aila Matanock shows that “conflict recurred after 40 percent of settlements signed in civil conflicts between 1975 and 2005” (4). Why do some settlements last and others fail? Matanock argues that a key ingredient is the inclusion of electoral participation provisions, clauses that ensure that both insurgent groups and government parties be allowed to compete for power in elections.

A major obstacle in enforcing peace agreements is the fact that it can be difficult for combatants to credibly commit. Rebel groups may be reluctant to lay down their arms—their primary source of political power—if they cannot be assured that the government will fulfill its end of the bargain. And given that rebels and the government are fighting a civil war, they are unlikely to trust each other much. One well-known solution to these commitment problems is for an external third party to enforce the agreement. But this external actor needs, in Matanock’s words, “credible leverage and sufficient information to threaten a cost for noncompliance by both sides over time and therefore to provide external enforcement” (38). That is, they need to be able to offer rewards for compliance and punishments for noncompliance, often in terms of foreign aid or international inclusion, but sometimes militarily. And these external actors need to be able to monitor compliance with the agreement.

⁵ Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, 35.

This is where electoral participation provisions offer a crucial advantage. Elections are relatively easy to monitor: there is an entire industry of nonpartisan, international election observers ready to monitor whether elections in fact conform to agreed-on provisions. Elections also serve as “focal points,” specific times when actors will monitor compliance (of the entire peace agreement, not just the electoral participation provisions) and react to the information they receive from international observers. “No mechanism other than electoral participation provisions,” Matanock argues, “continues to draw in external engagement over time and at such low cost” (59).

The end of the Cold War facilitated greater external engagement to enforce peace agreements. Such agreements thus became more common, and electoral participation provisions showed up in nearly half of them. During the same time, international election observation and international democracy promotion programs both increased dramatically, as did the link between them: Matanock shows that states regularly cut democracy aid to countries when they received negative international election observation reports. But the spread of election observation and democracy aid varies by region, and Matanock leverages this variation to show quantitatively that as these external forces increased, so too did electoral participation provisions become more common in peace agreements. Consistent with her theory, when external actors could more credibly monitor and punish noncompliance, combatants were more likely to include these provisions to help enforce peace.

Through archival research and elite interviews, Matanock traces how electoral participation provisions helped actors in El Salvador and Guatemala overcome commitment problems and achieve peace agreements. She also demonstrates how external actors monitored post-conflict elections and enforced the provisions of the peace agreement. In both cases, though, external actors—the US government and the United Nations—seemed to be monitoring many aspects of the peace agreements, well beyond the electoral “focal points.” Matanock shows that they used electoral participation as a punishment device for sanctioning noncompliance, but this seems quite different from the book’s main theoretical claim. Imagine that electoral participation provisions had not been included in the peace agreements, but elections were subsequently held in which both sides of the conflict competed. Would the US and UN monitor the other peace provisions any less? Would they not use electoral participation as a punishment device?

One striking implication of Matanock’s argument is that while elections in these contexts may build peace, they do not necessarily build democracy. Peace agreements with electoral participation provisions are essentially elite pacts, not unlike the ones forged in Colombia and Venezuela following midcentury civil conflicts, or even those that initiated democratic transitions from military dictatorships elsewhere in the region. They are evaluated by external actors “using distinct criteria that favor stability over democracy” (269). For Matanock, this stability-democracy trade-off is not epiphenomenal. It is an explicit feature of electoral participation provisions and their attractiveness to armed actors: “electoral participation deals are effective *because* they are somewhat undemocratic elite pacts” (269, emphasis in the original). This is an important corrective to the facile popular perception that elections are good for democracy. Moreover, it highlights that lasting conflict resolution and democratic regime stability after conflict often come at a price. Both the conflict itself and its resolution leave lasting legacies.

Matanock studies whether conflicts recur within five years of a formal peace agreement. But civil conflicts often cast a much longer shadow. *Politics after Violence*, a volume edited by Hillel Soifer and Alberto Vergara, examines the long-lasting repercussions of Peru’s internal armed conflict of the 1980s and 1990s. To what extent, they ask, has contemporary Peruvian politics been shaped by the conflict? And what are the political and institutional legacies of that conflict?

Contributions to the volume argue that Peru’s internal armed conflict has had both direct and indirect effects. Among the direct effects, they focus on how the killing and intimidation of leftist politicians and grassroots organizations weakened political parties and civil society, how violence in the countryside accelerated urban migration and obstructed social and economic development, how the counterinsurgency shaped the state’s coercive institutions, and how the conflict shaped Peruvians’ political attitudes about law and order. More indirectly, they argue that the conflict helped give rise to Alberto Fujimori’s authoritarianism, which broadly shifted Peruvian politics in a neoliberal direction, weakened leftist political parties, and fragmented the right. On a more positive note, they also argue that the end of the conflict and subsequent efforts to press for justice strengthened the capacity of human rights organizations.

Perhaps the most innovative chapter is Soifer and Everett Vieira’s, which looks at the lasting effects of the conflict on Peru’s state capacity. We generally think of civil wars as weakening or undermining state capacity and the quality of state institutions. But Soifer and Vieira convincingly argue that the Shining Path’s threat to internal security strengthened some state institutions—in particular, the police, the military, and the

intelligence apparatus. Responding to the demands of counterinsurgency, these coercive state institutions centralized and unified their activities and, importantly, attained substantial autonomy from government oversight. The conflict also substantially extended the reach of the Peruvian state. Soifer and Vieira show that provinces with greater Shining Path activity in 1989 saw increased state presence in 2007, “a clear pattern of investment in public good provision in conflict-affected areas” (128). These findings offer an important corrective to the conventional wisdom about civil wars and state capacity.

Isolating the effects of the conflict is fraught. This is partly because of the many other changes that took place in Peruvian politics and society before, during, and after the conflict: the economic crisis of the late 1980s, Fujimori’s extraordinary rise to the presidency and his successful economic agenda, and the global commodities boom between 2002 and 2013, to name just some. The chapters vary in their ability to address these potential confounders, and the degree to which they engage them at all. For instance, several chapters focus on indirect effects of the conflict via *fujimorismo*. Fujimori’s political strength, his ability to shut down Congress, call for a new constitution, and create an effective “new Right” are thought to be consequences of the internal armed conflict. But much of Fujimori’s popular appeal came from the success of his economic policies. And had the 1990 election taken place just a month earlier, Mario Vargas Llosa would likely have become president instead. Despite the same ongoing internal armed conflict, it is hard to imagine that he too would have rewritten the constitution to centralize presidential power.

Multiple contributors point to the fact that leftist political parties and politicians today are still branded as “terrorists” or somehow linked (however falsely) to the Shining Path in an effort to discredit them. Even 2016 presidential candidate Verónica Mendoza, notes Steven Levitsky, “was bombarded with accusations of terrorism (even though she was only a child during the [conflict])” (315–316). This rhetorical strategy is surely a legacy of the conflict, but it’s harder to tell whether it uniquely discredits leftist politicians. Had the conflict never happened, would the contemporary Peruvian Right not have equally successful rhetorical devices to discredit the Left? Paula Muñoz’s chapter makes a compelling case that the political Left was substantially and enduringly weakened by the internal armed conflict—especially by the refusal of some leftist politicians to disavow violence and the subsequent schism of Izquierda Unida. But even in the early 1980s, the Left was not especially institutionalized or politically powerful. And given the dismal success rate across the region for new leftist parties,⁶ it is not especially surprising that it too collapsed.

Part of the inferential difficulty has to do with the fact that *Politics after Violence* is a book about a single case. How much we can learn about the general political legacies of conflict from the case of Peru? As Christopher Blattman and Edward Miguel noted nearly a decade ago, “the social and institutional legacies of conflict are arguably the most important but least understood of all war impacts”⁷—and this remains true today. But to make progress in this field, we will need to compare the Peruvian experience to others, both within and outside the region. *Politics after Violence* offers some fruitful hypotheses to test comparatively: Do civil conflicts build capacity in certain state institutions?⁸ Do they weaken some sectors of civil society (e.g., grassroots organizations) while strengthening others (e.g., human rights groups)? And do they move public opinion to the right?

Post-conflict Collective Memory

Studying historical legacies is always challenging, because legacy arguments are “resolutely causal.”⁹ Some of the contributors to *Politics after Violence* claim explicitly that the legacies of Peru’s internal armed conflict are partly contingent on how contemporary politicians, media, and so-called “memory entrepreneurs” construct and contest the legacies of the conflict. If so, then even apparent “legacies” of the conflict may be as much a product of postwar political choices as they are consequences held over from the conflict itself. Indeed, scholars often view efforts to grapple with the past to be as much about the present.

In *Mourning Remains*, Isaias Rojas-Perez examines how actors in Peru reckon with the legacy of the internal conflict. He focuses specifically on exhumations of the remains of individuals who were killed, and how those exhumations are understood by different actors. The state, Rojas-Perez notes, views these efforts from

⁶ Steven Levitsky, James Loxton, and Brandon Van Dyck, “Introduction: Challenges of Party-Building in Latin America,” in *Challenges of Party-Building in Latin America*, ed. Steven Levitsky, James Loxton, Brandon Van Dyck, and Jorge I. Domínguez (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 1–48.

⁷ Christopher Blattman and Edward Miguel, “Civil War,” *Journal of Economic Literature* 48, no. 1 (2010): 42.

⁸ See Rachel A. Schwartz, “Civil War, Institutional Change, and the Criminalization of the State in Central America” (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin, Madison, 2019).

⁹ Alberto Simpser, Dan Slater, and Jason Wittenberg, “Dead but Not Gone: Contemporary Legacies of Communism, Imperialism, and Authoritarianism,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 21 (2018): 420.

a legal and bureaucratic perspective. For state actors, the exhumations rely on forensic anthropologists, scientific methods that yield unbiased evidence, and a certain clinical detachment. They are a means of discovering legal evidence for judicial proceedings against perpetrators.

For the actors involved in Peru's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the exhumations were aimed at returning the victims' remains to their families for proper burial. They saw this as part of a political project of post-conflict reconciliation and nation-building through testimony and truth. As Rojas-Perez notes, "the project of offering recognition to ignored victims of violence through proper burial was born with the notion that it would help to bridge the historical gulf that has separated white/mestizo, Spanish-speaking mainstream Peruvians from indigenous, Quechua-speaking peoples" (30). For commissioners, those killed by insurgents and those killed by the state were all to be treated as equal victims, bringing all into the political community.

Most of the book, though, is interested in the contrast with how the Quechua-speaking mothers of the disappeared understood and experienced the exhumations. For them, Rojas-Perez notes, their lost loved ones are heroes, not victims. Engaging in the everyday practices of mourning and memorializing of their communities, these mothers "make a claim, in their own terms, on history and political community" (15). They do this by using the exhumations to provide them with a material site that offers the possibility of mourning, by retelling their stories and reclaiming the past, and by investing the site of mass killing with "other-than-human agency" (221). As a result, the mothers inhabit these spaces with "their own projects of justice and political and historical reckoning with atrocity" (255).

Mourning Remains thus reminds us that national efforts at collective memory necessarily interact with cultural understandings, power relations, and deep-seated inequalities. Even when they are intended to reconcile and heal wounds, these political projects may be resisted by the affected communities and understood within local contexts.

Despite its general claims, *Mourning Remains* focuses empirically on a narrow set of cases and observations. The exhumations Rojas-Perez studies take place primarily at Los Cabitos, a former military complex in Ayacucho that during the conflict served as a detention center. The complex included a furnace where dead bodies were burned, something fairly unusual among the unmarked and mass graves generated by the conflict. This also makes the site unusual because it was far more difficult for the forensic team to uncover identifiable remains. Moreover, the focus on this case means that the book studies only cases of deaths perpetrated by the state. Perhaps the Quechua-speaking mothers would engage with the exhumations of victims of the Shining Path similarly, but it seems likely that state actors would behave differently in such a context. And given that the Shining Path is estimated to have perpetrated more killings than the state, these contexts seem relevant.

It is also striking that Rojas-Perez treats and describes "the Quechua-speaking mothers"—sometimes linking them to "Andean people"—as a monolithic group. During the conflict, indigenous communities in fact responded to violence in heterogeneous ways. As in Colombia, some communities responded by organizing peacefully, others with violence. Some communities were mobilized and thrust into committing violence by the Shining Path. Some suffered at the hands of one side, then at the hands of the other. All of these different experiences likely shaped how these indigenous communities engage with exhumations of their lost relatives. Moreover, the mothers Rojas-Perez studies are in fact part of a formal organization of mothers of the disappeared formed in the 1980s in Ayacucho. This suggests that they are a self-selecting group of especially politically active women, although Rojas-Perez says little about that aspect of their backgrounds.

Silvia Tandeciarz also studies recent memorial efforts in *Citizens of Memory*. Focusing on projects to recollect Argentina's dictatorship and memorialize the disappeared, Tandeciarz covers an enormous amount of ground, from memorials to visual art to film to literature to pedagogy. Among the many recent works are Buenos Aires's Parque de la Memoria; the Espacio Memoria y Derechos Humanos in the former ESMA, the Navy Mechanical School that during the military regime served as a detention center; Marcelo Brodsky's photo essay and exhibition *Buena memoria*, and Lucila Quieto's visual installation *Arqueología de la ausencia* (1999–2001); films including María Inés Roqué's *Papá Iván*, Albertina Carri's *Los rubios*, and Nicolás Prividera's *M*; Tomás Eloy Martínez's final novel, *Purgatorio*; and some of the student work produced by Jóvenes y Memoria, an annual educational experience organized by Buenos Aires's Provincial Commission for Memory.

All of these works are part of a second wave of efforts to recollect the traumas and abuses of Argentina's dictatorship, one that began with the renewed political and judicial attention to the era under Presidents Néstor Kirchner and Cristina Fernández. Many of them are in fact produced by the children of the regime's victims, representing a new generation's efforts to grapple with Argentina's violent past.

Like other scholars of cultural studies, Tandeciarz takes a critic's eye toward these memorial interventions and provides us with interpretations of their effects on the audience, the viewer, the reader. Born in Argentina in the 1960s, she comes to these works with her own relationship to Argentina and the dictatorship: her family left for the United States in 1972 but returned regularly. But while at times she reflects on her own reactions to the works she evaluates, the relationship of those reactions to her own history are unfortunately left unsaid.

Perhaps the most radical of the works Tandeciarz studies are those that “problematiz[e] the victim-perpetrator binary” (235). Prividera's film *M*, for instance, follows his quest for information about the disappearance of his mother, Marta Sierra, days after the 1976 coup. Sierra was not actively involved in the armed insurgency of the 1970s, and the story of her disappearance turns not on her militancy or activism but on her associations and friendships with Montoneros. Tandeciarz notes how Prividera's film highlights “the measure of responsibility the guerrilla leadership bears for the blood bath that took the lives of so many” (148). By its utopianism, by adopting violence, by giving the military the excuse it needed to take power, the insurgency and especially its leaders were not just victims. But a true reckoning with the moral complexity of the insurgency—the educated, middle-class leftists endangering the poor communities they sought to help—is still elusive in discussions of the dictatorship in Argentina. A “serious political critique of radical Peronism,” Tandeciarz aptly notes, “is still pending” (148).

Tandeciarz's interpretations of the works she encounters are of course those of a learned cultural critic, a student of art and literature who comes to a space like the Parque de la Memoria or views a film like *M* through a scholar's eye view. Given her focus on the emotions that these memorial works provoke, though, one wonders how general that affect really is. Critics often have views that diverge from those of the general public. Are others likely to experience these works the way Tandeciarz does? In a recent article on Chile's efforts to memorialize the victims of the Pinochet regime, Ariel Dorfman recounts the warning of a survivor: “One way of erasing the past is by remembering it in the wrong way.”¹⁰ Is Tandeciarz's interpretation of these interventions enough to persuade us that they memorialize the past in the right way?

In the end, Tandeciarz is largely optimistic about the affective power of the memorial works she studies. These interventions, she argues, “contribute to the development of new political subjectivities invested in the construction of a less violent future” (xxvi); they “are transforming sites of repression into sites of hope” (xxxviii); they “facilitate both personal connection and inter-generational dialogue” (84); they “make us care” (204); and they move their audience “to reflect on the legacies of the past and to reaffirm their own power of intervention in the construction of a more inclusive future” (212). The most persuasive of these claims involves the Jóvenes y Memoria youth program. In that case, Tandeciarz takes a somewhat more ethnographic approach, attending one year's culminating festival and speaking to the student participants herself. In other cases, though, one again wonders whether the scholar's hopeful conclusions about the power of these efforts to mobilize a new generation really obtain in the broader population.

Social scientists are the ones who tend to concern themselves with describing and analyzing how people respond to political initiatives like memorial efforts. Unfortunately, there is very little social-scientific work on how people experience artistic and memorial interventions in post-conflict settings. What research exists suggests that the general public sometimes experiences memorials in ways that diverge from both the artist's intentions and critical assessments.¹¹ But it is difficult to know whether Tandeciarz's optimistic evaluations would hold up to social-scientific scrutiny. Surely these are questions social scientists should address, and fields where the humanities and social sciences ought to complement each other.

So much of the field of memory studies is based on theories of how truth-telling and grappling with the past (Germany's famous *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*) ought to help us avoid the mistakes of the past, ensuring that, indeed, *Nunca más*. But Tandeciarz seems to ignore the possibility that all of this grappling redeems more than it stimulates. The Espacio de Memoria y Derechos Humanos in the former ESMA may become a site for laying wreaths and school trips, a place you have to visit once—but having visited, you have done enough, you are absolved from further action. This, after all, has concerned many critics of museums and memorials to the Holocaust. Indeed, to the extent we know anything about the impact of memory and truth-telling on postwar publics, the effects on balance may be more negative than positive.¹²

¹⁰ Ariel Dorfman, “Chile: Now More Than Ever,” *New York Review of Books*, August 16, 2018, 55.

¹¹ See Noam Lupu, “Memory Vanished, Absent, and Confined: The Countermemorial Project in 1980s and 1990s Germany,” *History and Memory* 15, no. 2 (2003): 130–164.

¹² See Noam Lupu and Leonid Peisakhin, “The Legacy of Political Violence across Generations,” *American Journal of Political Science* 61, no. 4 (2017): 836–851; David Mendeloff, “Truth-Seeking, Truth-Telling, and Postconflict Peacebuilding: Curb the Enthusiasm?,” *International Studies Review* 6, no. 3 (2004): 355–380.

Within the humanities, the field of memory studies is by now large and sophisticated. But as political science and other social sciences continue to focus more on individual behavior and turn increasingly toward the aftermath of conflict and violence, we ought to engage much more across the disciplines. How do individuals respond to these memorial projects? Under what circumstances do they spur engagement, reconciliation, or—less happily—renewed violence? We need a great deal more research on the impacts of post-conflict interventions, from the political to the juridical to the artistic, and the many overlaps between them.

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