

**Cynthia E. Milton.** *Conflicted Memory: Military Cultural Interventions and the Human Rights Era in Peru*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2018. xv + 276 pp. \$79.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-299-31500-9.

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Cynthia Milton is a professor of history and the Canada Research Chair in Latin American history at the Université de Montréal. She has published extensively on topics relating to the Andean nations and specializes in issues of memory, truth, and violence. In her latest book, *Conflicted Memory: Military Cultural Interventions and the Human Rights Era in Peru*, she examines how a Latin American military has attempted to appropriate the tropes of memory and human rights to advance its own counternarrative and understanding of the conflict within the public sphere. This runs counter, she argues, to the more widespread trend of victims and their advocates being the ones advancing the cause of memory in post-conflict democracies. As expounded by Milton, the Peruvian case is fascinating due to its anomalous characteristics in the broad picture of Cold War-period insurgencies and counterinsurgencies in Latin America. Rather than act as a bulwark for elite rule and preservation of the social status quo, the Peruvian military in the late 1960s and early 1970s took power to embark on an ambitious plan for agrarian reform and (at least temporarily) crippling the old landholding elite. This was followed by another reversal: unlike the right-wing dictatorships that characterized Chile, Argentina, and Brazil, the Peruvian administrations that had to face the Shining Path insurgency in the 1980s

were democratically elected civilian governments. Finally, and unlike most other cases in the region, the insurgent forces committed more human rights violations than those of the state—though the latter are still estimated to have committed a large amount. The atypical nature of both the conflict and the postconflict context make this a valuable book to be put in conversation with scholarship on violence and memory across regions.

*Conflicted Memory* is divided into five chapters, with each exploring the different cultural interventions through which various members of the military have sought to regain the initiative regarding “memory” after years of mortification due to their association with the misdeeds of the Fujimori regime, a Truth Commission report that held them responsible for numerous human rights violations, and the sacking and criminal prosecution of several of their members. While keeping some of the tropes of heroism and saving the nation from the scourge of terrorism, these actors also appropriate some of the mechanisms and vocabulary used by human rights groups. In this manner, their soldiers are *also* victims of the conflict: not only victims of a system that led the country to a “fratricidal war” and victims of their war wounds—both physical and mental—but also victims of an uncaring country that has hung them out to dry and subjected them to cruel and

humiliating human rights prosecution by the courts. Much like human rights advocates, these military advocates also highlight the importance of memory to prevent another such tragedy from ever happening again (as opposed to the more common “passing the page” rhetoric used by the military in other postconflict societies). The memory they are trying to put forward, however, is different from that of human rights groups; while they lament the “excesses” they admit happened, for the most part these are downplayed or resolutely described as the actions of individuals, rather than any systematic policy. Milton analyzes the articulation of these tropes through books published by members of the military (chapter 1), the army’s attempt to give an institutional response to the Truth Commission by publishing its own “Truth Report” (chapter 2), the fiction of soldier-writer Carlos Freyre and the memoirs of the particularly intriguing Lurgio Gavilán—a former child soldier for Shining Path turned Peruvian army soldier who later became a Franciscan novice and social scientist (chapter 3), the security forces’ somewhat desultory (and old-fashioned) attempts to enter the field of museology (chapter 4), and finally, the haphazard ways in which semi-formal, decentralized censorship by the military takes shape in a context without formal censorship laws (chapter 5).

A study like Milton’s must take care to fairly represent the arguments of its subjects, yet still analyze them from a critical perspective. I believe she has done so successfully. While some of the military actors she refers to come across as fairly sympathetic characters (such as brigadier general Marco Merino and lieutenant colonel Carlos Freyre, both of whom appear willing to at least acknowledge acts of violence on the part of the military and engage in dialogue with scholars and victims’ advocates), she still dissects the lack of scholarlyness of many of the books published by military apologists; the uncritical, unimaginative, and not altogether accessible museography of the security forces; and the disingenuous emphasis on

dishonest individuals or communications difficulties in explaining the “excesses” committed by the military. Another positive characteristic of *Conflicted Memory* is that she not only engages with her Spanish-language sources as objects of study, but also with much of the Spanish-language scholarship on the conflict and the issues of memory arising out of it—whose absence in the writings of English-language scholars is a common criticism among scholars in Peru. I find the inclusion of even Peruvian BA theses from the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú in the bibliography especially remarkable and commendable, and yet cannot help but wonder if there was nothing worthy of inclusion among the BA theses written at the Universidad Nacional San Cristóbal de Huamanga, which was, after all, the epicenter of the Shining Path insurgency. Also, while some passages of *Conflicted Memory* might seem like page-by-page descriptions of the contents of some of her primary materials (the chapter on Freyre and Gavilán comes to mind), the nature of the study probably makes this unavoidable; and yet, the fascinating content of Freyre’s and Gavilán’s books too makes these sections eminently readable. Finally, Milton does well in identifying different groups and generations *within* the military to present a nuanced vision of the many different ways memory is contested within the institution as well, thus avoiding the easy pitfall of representing them as a monolith.

There are a few minor quibbles, however. Even though the case presented by *Conflicted Memory* is of universal interest due to its unique nature—and its inclusion in the University of Wisconsin Press’s globe-spanning Critical Human Rights series underscores this—language-wise it appears to be geared more toward an exclusively Latin Americanist audience. Short phrases in Spanish, as well as cartoons (pp. 173, 183), remain untranslated in their entirety, making it slightly more difficult than necessary for scholars of violence and memory from other regions to fully grapple with the material presented by Milton.

Also, while the author's point that "the urban landscape bears the names of the nation's military heroes" (p. 189) is completely valid, it is unfortunate that two of the three surnames she chooses (Miró Quesada and Pardo) are actually associated with civilian patricians (journalists and presidents) rather than soldiers.

Overall, *Conflicted Memory* is a fascinating read whose appeal will not be limited to Peruvianists or Latin Americanists. Now that a paperback edition is scheduled for publication in January 2020, this book can be more readily assigned for discussion in graduate seminars—or advanced undergraduate seminars—on memory, human rights, or Latin American history.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <https://networks.h-net.org/h-war>

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