



David Nugent. *The Encrypted State: Delusion and Displacement in the Peruvian Andes.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019. 320 pp. \$65.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-5036-0903-7.

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Convinced that they were facing a serious threat from the Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana (APRA, American Popular Revolutionary Alliance), in 1949 Peruvian government officials in the remote provincial town of Chachapoyas resorted to coded messages to communicate among themselves. At first, officials only used the codes for their most important and sensitive business, but having convinced themselves that APRA activists had thoroughly infiltrated their ranks, they soon used encryption to communicate on a wide range of rather mundane issues. Nobody was beyond suspicion. APRA seemed to be everywhere, and everyone seemed to be a member of APRA.

This is a curious anecdote and raises fascinating questions. How did local government officials come to use codes that were more commonly reserved for international diplomatic communications or, more typically, spy craft? Who suggested the practice, and how widespread was it? How did local officials learn to communicate in code? Is this evidence of external, and perhaps even international, intervention in local affairs?

While these questions might be interesting to some, they are not the ones that drive anthropologist David Nugent's new book. Even though this story provides the title to his work, he dedicates only passing attention to the matter of encryption.

Instead, the emphasis is on state structures and state building.

In a heavily theoretical work that retreads all of the well-known literature on the subject (Philip Abrams, Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer, Michel Foucault, Antonio Gramsci, James Scott, Michael Taussig, etc.), this book intends to challenge existing conceptual frameworks which, according to Nugent, have failed to account for multiple and contradictory masks that, when removed, challenge the seemingly magical power of "the state." Instead, he points to what he sees as the remarkable emerging out of the routine. Nugent concludes that "the state" is neither an institution nor an illusion, but "a conflict-ridden and ultimately futile effort to transform the most violent, delusional, and coercive of practices into ordinary, unremarkable acts of administration" (p. 247). As with other works on the subject, Nugent embraces a highly essentialized notion of the state, as if it is an entity that can speak and act, when perhaps it would be more accurate to speak of government bureaucracy.

This theory is built around a discussion of what Nugent presents as the government's irrational and paranoid fear of APRA. Repression did not destroy APRA but instead drove the party underground. Nugent never explains why the government saw APRA as a threat, or even what

APRA wanted. For a theoretical work of this nature, those types of empirical questions are irrelevant. Rather, Nugent's intent is to demonstrate what we can learn about state formation in contexts such as this when such structures falter or fail.

Nugent describes government repression of APRA at a level that approaches absurdity. As the government drove the party underground, it ironically became a hidden threat. APRA activists discovered that the most effective means of eliminating a hostile government official was to accuse that person of the worst crime possible, and that crime in the eyes of a hostile government was belonging to their party. From the government's perspective, the party was nowhere and everywhere at the same time. The government's fear of APRA infiltration appears to draw from the plot of G. K. Chesterton's classic 1935 novel, *The Man Who Was Thursday*, in which all the members of an anarchist council are police officers who are spying on each other.

This book builds on Nugent's previous writings on Chachapoyas, a place where he has worked since 1982. He notes the changes in archival practices over the past thirty-five years and how irregularities in archiving practices reflect deeper irregularities in state practices. Archival citations do not emerge until well into the book, and when they do they appear it is in the form of long, undigested quotes from the correspondence.

Except for the final chapter, most of the book does not directly discuss APRA but rather government attempts to modernize Peru. Nugent describes these as violent, chaotic, and delusional. He never discusses the violent aspects, or at least anything that rises above the level of the institutionalized violence of an exploitative economic system and racist governing structures that one would expect for this time and place.

Instead, much of the discussion is built around conflictive and failed modernization

projects. In somewhat wordy and repetitive discussions, Nugent describes how the military attempted to draft nearly double the adult male population of Chachapoyas at the same time that the government attempted a similar draft to build a highway to Cajamarca. He characterizes their expectations as irrational and fantastic. If they had been successful, they would have effectively stripped the countryside of its labor force and in the process crippled its productive capabilities. For Nugent, this is a key example of how governments hide behind a mask that, when removed, reveals how the apparent magic of these structures quickly dissipates.

The military, as others have noted, saw military conscription as part of a nation-building exercise in which it would imbue patriotic ideals into an isolated rural population. From its perspective, the military existed above politics and was the only force that could save the country. The military's efforts collided head on with local hacienda owners who obviously did not want to lose their entire labor force.

The road drafts faced similar problems. While the federal government wanted a road that would tie Chachapoyas into its notion of "nation," the local ruling class wanted a road that would serve its own economic interests—and hurt those of its political opponents. Competition within a deeply divided ruling class is a theme that runs throughout the book, but given Nugent's interest in theory rather than ethnography we get little sense of who these "elites" are or what their political or economic interests are. Rather, he leaves us with abstract notions of dysfunctional governing structures.

The result is a book that says relatively little about APRA, or Peru for that matter. But that is not the author's intent. Rather, Nugent provides a deep dive into theories of state making, and it is in that realm that he makes his contribution and where this book will be best received.

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