



Tanya Harmer. *Beatriz Allende: A Revolutionary Life in Cold War Latin America.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020. 384 pp. \$34.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-4696-5429-4.

Reviewed by Debbie Sharnak (Rowan University)

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Commissioned by Evan C. Rothera (University of Arkansas - Fort Smith)

On October 13, 1977, the *New York Times* published a brief column titled “A Daughter of Allende Is a Suicide in Havana,” which reported the death of Salvador Allende’s daughter, Beatriz. The dispatch, located on the paper’s twenty-fourth page, was short on detail about her life and noted that “Miss Allende was about 40 years old.”[1] In fact, Beatriz Allende was thirty-five years old.

Both this inaccuracy and the *Times*’s relegation of its report on her death to its back pages exemplify two examples of Beatriz’s marginalization, which Tanya Harmer aims to correct in her impressive new biography, *Beatriz Allende: A Revolutionary Life in Cold War Latin America*. For Harmer, Beatriz constitutes a vehicle to explore women’s roles in Latin America’s Cold War between the 1950s and the late 1970s. (Throughout the book, Harmer refers to her subject by first name to avoid confusion with her father, who was the president of Chile from 1970 to 1973.) As Harmer notes, Beatriz, like many women of her time and place, are overlooked in histories of Chile and Latin America generally, a reflection of “historians’ predilection to focus on male leaders of political parties and their institutional histories” (p. 264). In tracing Beatriz’s life and her involvement with key domestic and international events, Harmer moves beyond studying just state-to-state relations or prominent male figures to examine

how Cold War Latin America affected everyday people. In this, Harmer shows how women were protagonists and important historical actors in their own right.

Harmer reconstructs Beatriz's life using an impressive array of oral histories with Beatriz's closest friends, fellow militants, lovers, and family members, in addition to personal correspondence, memoirs, newspapers, and archives in seven countries. The book is chronologically organized into ten chapters, which span from her political awakening as a teenager to her untimely death as an exile. Harmer examines Beatriz's family life during Allende's political prominence, her education, and her impact on and importance of youth politics. She covers Beatriz's challenges navigating her commitment to the global revolutionary fervor of the long 1960s after the success of the Cuban Revolution and her fierce loyalty to her father and his own electoral road to the presidency. The book also probes Beatriz's formal role as a private secretary in his administration, as well as her informal position as a bridge between Allende and the Movement of the Revolutionary Left (Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria [MIR]), a far-left group in Chile, as well as other revolutionary groups in the region. Finally, Harmer traces Beatriz's post-coup exile to Cuba and her role as global solidarity organizer against Augusto Pinochet's regime until her suicide in 1977.

In addition to refocusing the historical lens on people who typically have been sidelined, *Beatriz Allende* has several other historiographical contributions. First, Harmer expands the chronology of Chile's revolutionary moment and its violent end. Beyond looking at national chronologies and divisions by presidential administrations, Harmer takes into account major domestic and international influences, tracing a longer history of mobilization and ideas about the struggle between different versions of modernity that extended beyond the US-Soviet Cold War frame and that were integral parts of a longer part of Chilean and transnational historical influences. Harmer's book also spotlights the role of young people in politics and society as a heterogeneous set of voices that mobilized at unprecedented levels for a variety of causes, challenged the status quo, and

contributed in substantive ways to the debates and questions of the era. Finally, Beatriz's life provides a window into the histories of Chile's lefts and the porous relationship in which many people floated and intersected with various ideologies and movements. Beyond a history of the parties, Harmer exemplifies how Beatriz's own navigation between groups' evolving strategies and ideologies offers a window into the interconnected, entangled, and also fragmented ways everyday people collaborated, struggled, and divided in the lead-up to Allende's presidency, his actual time in office, and the subsequent period of repression and oftentimes exile.

As suggested by Harmer's variety of sources, this book is rich in detail. Harmer's use of personal correspondence and extensive interviews enabled her to illuminate connections between politics, shifting love affairs and friendships, and intra-party struggles of the revolutionary fervor in this period. These detailed narratives propel the book forward. Perhaps no example better illustrates this as well as Harmer's reconstruction of Pinochet's coup from Beatriz's perspective. Harmer lays out the preparation and foreboding of the coup's imminence and relays how Beatriz, then seven months pregnant, fled to the palace upon hearing of the military's advancement, her unsuccessful plea to her father to remain at La Moneda, and the frantic negotiations of her eventual exit from the country with her daughter and Cuban husband. Once in exile, Beatriz confronted the tragedy of a failed revolutionary project, which she had devoted her life to, and her beloved father's death. This detailed story is a testament to Harmer's research, as well as a window into the reverberations of the coup's effects on all of those involved in Allende's revolutionary project.

Harmer uses Beatriz's experiences in exile to spotlight the tension of the post-Allende period and challenges of solidarity activism abroad. This is particularly true from a human rights perspective. From her perch in Cuba, as well as travels around

Latin America, the US, and Western Europe to garner support for her cause, for Beatriz, human rights was far from Samuel Moyn's idea of a replacement of lost ideals or a "last utopia." Instead, she remained committed to her revolutionary principles, and human rights were "merely one way Beatriz conceived of fighting for the utopian revolutionary future she had set her sights on almost two decades before and still upheld" (p. 248). Indeed, rather than extol the hope and promise of human rights, four years into exile, Beatriz grew increasingly pessimistic about her own revolutionary hope and the possibility of human rights activism to dislodge the military junta. Beatriz, instead, felt impotent against the consolidated Pinochet rule that was compounded by her own personal turmoil of being unable to escape her own identity as Allende's daughter and as a woman with certain familial responsibilities. It is this combination that Harmer so poignantly conjectures led to Beatriz's eventual suicide.

Ultimately, *Beatriz Allende* is an important and fascinating read. It reconstructs the extraordinary life of a woman in the context of significant domestic and international changes of the era. In this way, Harmer perhaps makes a case for Beatriz to be a prime candidate for the *New York Times* project, *Overlooked*, which is a series of obituaries about remarkable people whose deaths went largely unreported in the *Times*.^[2] In a new iteration, the paper might get her age right as well as shine a light on a woman who offered a deep contribution to an extremely tumultuous and transformative period of Chilean and international history.

Notes

[1]. "A Daughter of Allende Is a Suicide in Havana," *New York Times*, October 13, 1977, 24.

[2]. "Overlooked," *New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/spotlight/overlooked>.

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