

## Book Review

– *Beatriz Allende: A revolutionary life in Cold War Latin America*, by Tanya Harmer. University of North Carolina Press, 2020

In 2011, Tanya Harmer made her reputation by publishing a fine book examining Allende's Chile, the demise of the short-lived Chilean transition to socialism, the tensions within the Unidad Popular and other leftist movements, the role of the Chilean military and civilian opposition, and the influence of third parties like the United States and Cuba. She made abundant use of primary archival sources and private documents of significant actors, and substantial oral history interviews with directly related Chilean family members, politicians and advisers, and Cuban political officials.

Nearly a decade later she publishes the biography of Allende's daughter Beatriz, using the same research style and quality, and the rich data provided by family and personal friends, *intimi* and directly related Cuban and Chilean politicians and operators. She uses 'Beatriz' in order to avoid confusion with her father 'Allende' while following her life and time (1944-1977) in ten chapters in chronological order, from her youth years ('Awakening', chapter 1) to her suicide in 1977 ('Disillusionment', chapter 10). It is the same combination of oral history and the consultation of multiple primary documents and archives that makes reading this new book so attractive.

In her introduction to the book Harmer claims four objectives: 1) the social and political revolutionary changes in Chile during the "long sixties" personified through the life history of Beatriz Allende; 2) the politization of an entire generation of the Chilean youth, again exemplified through Beatriz' personal development; 3) the evolution of the 'old' (Socialist and Communist) Left and the 'new' Left, influenced by the Cuban revolution but also moving to the Lar and Armed Left on their own; and 4) the significance of a undoubtedly authentic revolutionary in the radical milieu where masculine role-patterns were predominantly present. To do her justice, Harmer accomplishes these intentions. It is a book about Beatriz' rich but complicated and ultimately tragic life in Chile as a student at the medical faculty of the University of Concepción, her relatively short career as surgeon, and young professional in the sixties, her growing importance as her father's confidante and adviser, her role during Allende's

presidential campaign and during the three years of his government (1970-1973), and especially as a bridge builder between the government parties within the Unidad Popular and the movements of the Far left, and eventually, the last four years of her life in Cuba as a never wholly comfortable refugee.

One of the appealing characteristics is the detailed information about her personal growth as a revolutionary doctor, an influential actor in the assistance to Guevara's ELN in Bolivia, the rescue of some of its Bolivian and Cuban survivors, and the support – in Chile and Cuba – of the third generation of the ELN after Guevara's death. Harmer splendidly evokes the evolution of the radicalization of an entire generation of Chilean young people and university students: the ambience of a 'revolutionary calling', of 'belonging to', of sharing the same idea of changing the world, listening to the music of Violeta Parra and Victor Jarra, and being convinced that making a revolution is easy and will be accomplished within a couple of years. In the early 1970s I lectured in Lima both at the Católica and at San Marcos, the former being the university for the elite and the latter that for the poor, and I could observe – and sympathize with – a very parallel process during the Velasco years.

There is a conflicting ambiguity, even a duality between her "Chilean" and her "Cuban" private and public personalities. Her wish to be true *guerrillero* like Guevara as a member of the Chilean ELN, her political skills as the de facto leader of Allende's electoral team and as his trusted adviser, and as the heir of father's way to socialism under democratic conditions. One of Beatriz' minor tragedies is her role in Fidel Castro's reframing of Allende's suicide as a political murder.

Throughout the book one can discern four lines of analysis: the self-development of a sometimes tormented revolutionary icon, but always as the daughter of an even more notable revolutionary hero and martyr; the tragic life of a (courageous) *guerrilla* fighter *manqué* who as a woman was denied participating in combat (a privilege of her male *compañeros*); a lover and maybe mother *manqué* during her second marriage to Cuba's intelligence operator Luis Fernández Oña; and the slow but consistent process of alienation, depression and disillusion as an always loyal guest and appreciated evacuee in Cuba, especially during the ongoing sovietisation process in the mid-1970s. Although Harmer does not mention it, there is a clear similarity between the personal life of Chilean-Cuban Beatriz Allende and Cuban Haydée Santamaría, whose suicide in 1980 also cause a shock in the Latin American Left (her biography was reviewed in the ERLACS issue 102, October 2016).

To rephrase the words of Che Guevara who during many years was Beatriz' role model, Harmer wrote a superb book about the 'sad but luminous days' of a female revolutionary, by one way or another entangled in the predominantly masculine word of the 'real fighting', denied to participate for being a woman and a valuable heiress of a lost way to socialism.

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