Michael Taussig, *Law in a Lawless Land: Diary of a Limpieza in Colombia*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005, 222 pages.

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The recent capture of the leaders of Colombia's two most notorious guerrilla organizations, reported decreases in the country's homicide rates, and a well-televised ceremony in 2003 depicting the surrender of arms by a group of paramilitaries may lead one to believe that Colombia is finally at peace. And it may lead one to believe that the 2005 paperback edition of Michael Taussig's *Law in a Lawless Land* is unnecessary. Nothing could be further from the truth. For Taussig's book highlights how a culture of terror is deeply embedded in people's everyday lives. Taussig argues that Colombia's culture of terror is based upon the constant production of fear, uncertainty, and ambivalence. This is so much the case that one never really knows who next will be murdered, tortured, intimidated, or run-out-of-town. Unsurprisingly, this culture of terror is operationalized by the existence of paramilitaries who are "soldiers who are not really soldiers but more like ghosts flitting between the visible and invisible, between the regular army and the criminal underworld of killers and torturers."

Colombia's culture of terror is not new. *Law in a Lawless Land* describes its intensification—one that surprises even Taussig, who has been investigating it for over three decades. Taussig is shocked by the now brazen nature of killing and its acceptance by "many honest and honourable citizens." The culture of terror, once marked by anonymous killing, is now carried out in broad daylight, a public spectacle for all to see. To try to understand this situation Taussig has written a diary about his two-week stay in 2001 in a town under paramilitary control. His diary details his most recent fieldwork experiences, their connections to past experiences, their relation to the quotidian nature of Colombia's culture of terror, and their linkages to the long-term existence of the paramilitaries.

Taussig fleshes out the links between Colombia's current culture of terror and the recent history of paramilitaries (aka "the paras"). The paras, initially formed in the 1930s as a private police force by Conservative party supporters, were created to deal with cattle-rustling. They were later deployed to destroy the rising popularity of Marxian notions of social justice and the establishment of left-leaning guerilla organizations. By systematically murdering Liberal officials, Liberal supporters, trade union leaders and priests, the paras were able to instill fear and uncertainty into the hearts and minds of many Columbians. Fear and uncertainty were exacerbated by the participation of the local police and the National Army in the "Liberal ethnocide"—a situation that blurred the usual lines between legitimate State force and illegitimate paramilitary force.

Despite the consolidation of Conservative Party power, the blurred lines between legal and illegal force continued as paramilitaries were deployed time and time again. In the 1960s they were deployed to help landowners evict peasants from their farming lands; in the 1970s they were deployed to quell rebellious peasant and Indian movements; in the 1980s they were deployed by drug cartels as protection against aggressive left-leaning guerillas; and in the 1990s they were deployed to track down and murder guerilla sympathizers. In the new millennium, paramilitaries have been charged with the task of "cleansing" towns and cities of the *delincuentes*, the undesirables. The undesirables are not, however, simply lefty-guerillas, insurgents or rebels. They are, rather, thugs, gang members, prostitutes, beggars, the mad and other relatively defenceless individuals. They are the victims in Taussig's never ending stories of people shot at open-air markets, knifed in pool halls, gunned down in the streets and murdered at bus stops.

Clearly, the cleansing, or what is called the *limpieza*, has linkages to the past. It also differs from the past, however, because it is supported by both the rich and the poor. This is partly explained by the ambivalent meaning of limpieza which refers to the heinous practice of slaughtering undesirables at the same time that it refers to the traditional practice of spiritual healing. Such healing "not only neutralizes deadly force," writes Taussig, "but enhances a sense of self in place and time." This double meaning helps explain the very public nature of limpieza and its general acceptance. It also helps explain the simultaneous fear and embracement of the paramilitaries who are, recall, charged with the job of cleansing Colombian society.

There are other ambivalences, uncertainties and double meanings as well. Taussig highlights how the continuous circulation of rumour, as opposed to fact, feeds Colombia's culture of terror. He frequently hears rumours about who, where, and when the paramilitaries plan to attack; about the immoral character of youth gangs who reign in the dangerous barrios on the edges of town; about guerillas and police officers. Even more, he explores the ambivalent line between the law and the lawless. Taussig tells us, for example, about a "lawful" handling of the murder of a *vicioso*—a "worthless druggie." He is shocked by the callous disregard for human life by police, lawyers, and state officials who think it acceptable to dump a vicioso's corpse at the local cemetery without regard for due process. This is the moment that Taussig begins to fully comprehend the "real meaning of violence" in Colombia, a meaning that reminds him of Nietzsche's famous words on the matter:

> Nietzsche suggests that criminals become hardened by observing that they and the police use the same methods, except with the police, the methods are worse because the police excuse their actions in the name of justice. What sort of methods? "Spying, duping, bribing, setting traps," says Nietzsche, "the whole intricate and wily skills of the policeman and the prosecutor, as well as the most thorough robbery, violence, slander, imprisonment, torture, and murder, carried out without even having emotion as an excuse."...Nietzsche helps me understand how the vio-

> lence of law is not only a question of guns, handcuffs, and gaols, but, far worse, what gives that violence its edge and its lip-smacking satisfaction is deceit in the service of justice...[I]s it so surprising that the paras and the police are virtually the same? (p. 47-49)

The ambivalent or uncertain lines between the law and the lawless, between fact and rumour, between legitimate and illegitimate force, help us to better understand the deep-going nature of Colombia's culture of terror. Taussig's diary teaches us about terror from the perspective of the people who deal with it on a daily basis. In this sense, his diary opens up a world for us that goes beyond the impersonal nature of statistics, journalistic articles, and international reports. But Taussig's work does more than explain Colombia's culture of terror from the ground up. Indeed, to grasp its pervasiveness Taussig, following Walter Benjamin, looks at the everyday world in relation to past events and its manifestations in the present. This is a departure from the usual form of writing history according to which the past is treated as a series of cause and effect moments that have already happened. It is also a departure from those histories that treat the past as that which will soon be superseded by something better. The past cannot simply index the progress of the future. Taussig's work casts doubt on the idea that the capture of Colombia's guerilla leaders, a decrease in homicide states, and the surrender of guns, signals the beginning of peace and prosperity. Instead, his diary reveals the extent to which a long-standing culture of terror, based as it is on fear, uncertainty, and ambivalence, continues to reproduce itself. His diary recalls Walter Benjamin's famous "Angel of History" who sees the connections between past catastrophes and its continuation in the present. Taussig is this Angel (however masculinist!) who understands that we should not see the past in relation to the promised future. The Angel teaches us that there can be no change in Colombia without first attending to pervasiveness of fear, uncertainty, and ambivalence. For without seriously understanding this culture of terror, there can be no real progress, there can be no real peace, no real prosperity, and no real hope for Colombia. In this respect, *Law in a Lawless Land* is a brave and heart-wrenching attempt to make Angels of us all.

Andrew Apter, *The Pan-African Nation: Oil and the Spectacle of Culture in Nigeria,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005, 296 pages.

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> *Nigerian attacks cause oil prices to spike* The *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), February 21, 2006
>
> *Shell appeals Nigerian fine for polluting delta* The *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), February 27, 2006

Oil, the state, democracy, justice. An intellectual and realpolitik game of the moment is to find (define) the dots and the causal arrows that connect these words. The real world on-the-ground consequences version of the game involves resistance, sabotage, hostages and more. It is also a game of metaphors and other literary devices. "Black gold" is perhaps the most clichéd.

The fungible quality of oil, its slipperiness as a commodity is a mimetic duplication of its slipperiness as a material. The whole process of retrieving oil and making it useful is closeted in technology; labour is sophisticated and highly specialized, transportation and refining are processes that require both physical force and mediating equipment. About the only time we might touch oil is when we get a bit of gasoline on our hands at a self-serve pump. That it fouls the lands of the people who live near its wells is the most direct example of the injustices oil creates. The complexity of mineral rights and the legalities of ownership, access, lease conditions, royalties and environmental laws and regulations does not obscure the immediate environmental damage in particularly vulnerable ecosystems such as the Niger River delta in Nigeria. The nexus of the state as owner of the resources and protector of its citizens and the environment has been a fulcrum of temptation for the politicians, military officers and civil servants charged with mediating and managing the international and local financial and political forces that hover around a commodity, so easily convertible to wealth. In his case study of Nigeria, Apter concludes that money has lost its status as a signifier, a symbol of value, in the sense of what is good, and the state its credibility as an arbiter of justice.

The final section of the book "La mise en abîme" (the story within the story) is two chapters, which deal with two sequences of events at the nadir of Nigerian history, the annulled election of June 12, 1993 and its aftermath, and the hanging of Ken Saro-Wiwa in 1995 after a sham trial before a military tribunal. In the "Politics of Illusion" (ch. 7) Apter devotes 10 pages to 419[1] scams, a leitmotif of the politics of illusion in Nigeria. (Reader, you know what this is. You have received e-mails with too-good-to-be- true offers of easy money, usually in exchange for assisting in the transfer of vast sums from dormant bank accounts.) The 419 scam, of course, plays on the dialogical relationship of the greed of the mark (Goffman 1952) and a self-referential negative stereotype, projected by the con artist, of Nigerians and Nigeria, as a people and a nation, who regard state money or money in a bank as wealth seeking an owner. Money is perhaps the sign of all signs, epitomizing value and so much else, and very often so much less.

The 419 scam is the theme for the Apter's brilliant dissection of the politics of Ibrahim Babangida, the military president, nicknamed "Maradona" after the deft Argentinian footballer, in an ironic salute to his rapid and subtle Machiavellian political manoeuvering. Babangida left politics ignominiously in a chaotic failed transition to elected government. General Sani Abacha staged a coup and became President and Commander-in-Chief. He imprisoned Chief Moshood Abiola, arguably one of the most popular national figures in Nigeria