

Week 1: Military Dictatorships and Democratic Transitions

Welcome back!

To recap:

- Last time, we discussed the international context created by the **Cold War**, which shapes Latin American politics and governance from about the 1950s onwards (starting with intervention in Guatemala in 1954);
- this picture really accelerates into 60s (after the Cuban Revolution in 1959 and the 1961 Bay of Pigs operation and 1962 missile crisis); paranoia in Washington about the potential spread of communism and “subversion” in the region is at height in 60s/ early 70s...
- we thought in the seminars about the significant, direct/ indirect influence of the US in, for example, training *contras* in Nicaragua, El Salvador and elsewhere in Central America...and the very destabilising effect in Lat Am of most of these interventions.

This week:

- we're going to think about the way that this Cold War context helps usher in a series of **military dictatorships** in the 1960s-80s.
- I'm going to focus on the case of the Southern Cone: **Brazil (1964-85), Argentina (1976-1983), Chile (1973-1989)**.
- We'll consider:
 - **how** the military came to take power;
 - **features** of military rule, particularly the broadly **neoliberal economic** policies that all three regimes saw as a main justification for being in power;
 - and then spend the 2nd half of lecture, and also the **seminars**, thinking about the dynamics of the **transitions back to democracy** that marked the endings of all 3 regimes - especially the role of particular **civil society groups**, that then ended up shaping the way politics was conducted AFTER the dictatorships. (This week in seminars, you can choose between several texts to discuss in class depending on your interests.)
- Thus, although this is a very **bleak period in Lat Am history**, there are also some important and hopeful **transformations** that come out of it. This period is recent, well within living memory, important therefore for understanding Latin American realities today, which Ben will discuss next week.

How do the military end up taking power in the first place? First, we need to think about:

The military as an institution:

- Not just this week, but during the whole C20, **we can't fully understand Lat Am history and politics without considering the role of the MILITARY as a developing institution in its own right.**
- The military develop a strong **corporate identity**, become increasingly **professionalised** and better **funded** over C20, and have strong sense of **national duty to direct, uphold, or strongly influence civilian governments** (they have a political view of their own).
- **For much of the century, even when a govt is technically "civilian,"** military often have major role in ushering it in or "inviting" it to leave office, **i.e. as a power-broker or "king-maker"**. And most civilian politicians have to **keep the military happy, behind the scenes.**
- **For example:** the case of Mexico and the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (the PRI): **senior military figures are generally incorporated into government apparatus** (no need for direct intervention by military because the "soft authoritarianism" of the PRI keeps them happy).
- **Or another example:** **Perón** in Argentina and **Vargas** in Brazil were both military men themselves; and both in the end were **ousted by the military.**

Differing views within Latin American militaries

- **The military are NOT a monolithic entity.** They have **differing views** about the extent to which they should hold political power themselves, and also differing views about the direction their countries should be going in.
- By the 60s/70s: there are different philosophies within military about **extent** of need to intervene in politics of their countries.
- Some (e.g. in Argentina, **Jorge Videla**, who is in control initially, from 76 to 81) want to just be "guardians"/ gatekeepers, period of military rule followed by a brokering of a new civilian government.
- Others, like **Galtieri**, who takes over from 1981 in Argentina, are more "hard line," think **Latin America needs a sustained period of almost "punishment", rigorous overhaul of economy.**
- At the level of **individual nation states**, the military are increasingly **well-funded...**
- **This is partly a vicious circle:** the more powerful they are, the more national civilian politicians have to buy them off by raising their budgets. You can see this process happening under most of the populist governments in the early to mid decades of the century: when a new leader comes into power, it's typical to find that they raise military budgets.
- **But they are also trained internationally and armed through international arms deals:** by the 1960s, of course, this means more than

anything else **the United States** (and here's one really important connection to last lecture's cold war theme). So, we would expect at least a significant sector of military to be very influenced by broad "cold war" thinking.

What brings the military to power?

- Context of Cold War is key;
- **this is about more than just the direct influence of Washington: it's also about the conditions within NATIONAL politics**, influenced by the Cold War, that allow this to happen.
- On political scene in most Lat Am countries by mid 60s, there is **very little centre ground**; politics are very **polarised** between left and right so consensus is hard to achieve;
- meanwhile, a cold war mentality makes politicians who try to hold on to power democratically using the old "populist" techniques start to look suspiciously "subversive," both to the civilian and the military right.
- For example: last years of civilian rule in Brazil in '63-4: president **João Goulart** tries to curry favour with workers and peasants by implementing 100% wage increase, agrarian reform, and granting **votes to illiterates**; military and Right get suspicious that this smacks of 'communism'; he loses their backing;
- **Another important factor is the economy**. Each of our 3 countries is in **dire economic situation** when the military take power, suffering from **hyperinflation** and major **external debt** – much of this is the legacy of the **fast industrialisation** that they have all witnessed. The **populists** can't easily deal with this through the kinds of **stabilisation programmes** that the IMF calls for, because their political platforms are precisely about growing the state, offering wage hikes to workers and so on.
- Also, although we're not talking about the kinds of civil wars and massive interventions unleashed by Washington on Central America, as we saw last time, **there is very significant direct US influence**. The US acts covertly to destabilise left-leaning leaders; it funds right wing parties and military/civilian coalitions; and when the coups happen it immediately recognises the new military governments. **[here are some images by way of illustration: Jorge Videla of Argentina at the White House with President Jimmy Carter; and Pinochet also with Carter; and interesting from a UK perspective, a Mirror headline "Right Wing Dictator Meets General Pinochet," on the long friendship between Pinochet and the UK's Margaret Thatcher.**

[end of part 1]

[part 2:]

Features of military dictatorships:

- All of them involve **repression of civil liberties; clamping down on institutions of democracy like congress, parliament**
- And: torture, disappearance, exile of political dissidents.

BUT **differences** between case studies, and **within** each country:

- **Brazil** takes 4 years to ramp up to “full” dictatorship by 1968 and there are 5 very “hard-line” years, then from 1973 a process whereby the moderates gradually gain the upper hand and censorship eases. Congress continues to function, but is ‘purged’/ managed by the military.
 - **Chilean dictatorship under Pinochet:** more immediately vicious and extreme – thousands tortured, at least 6 concentration camps, and one in every 100 Chileans was arrested at least once under the regime. [see 2x images, violence in Chile]
- **Argentina:** more vicious and immediate. **30,000 “disappearances” of Argentinians during the “dirty war” of first years of dictatorship. Congress closed from the beginning. Still strong memories of this stuff in Lat Am today.** [see image of recent commemorations of victims of the dictatorship]
- see this **clip** from BBC travel programme about the city of Buenos Aires, made only a decade ago, in 2010: it shows viewers around this beautiful Lat Am city, but it also explores the still living memory of torture in the spaces of the city [watch 3-4 minutes from about 6.30 in: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ln2lcBj-rS0>]

[end of part 2]

[Part 3:]

The economy under the military dictatorships

All the military regimes are broadly “neoliberal” economically.

Neoliberalism is a new **economic orthodoxy** that sweeps across Lat Am and elsewhere in the 1970s/1980s. Its intellectual home is the University of Chicago; many Latin American economists trained there – in Chile they are known as the “Chicago boys”.

Neoliberalism emphasises:

- the primacy of the free market;

- cutting public spending;
- austerity and wage freezes
- privatisation of state companies;
- encouraging foreign trade by slashing taxes on imports.

Economically, the military governments...

- Succeed initially in tackling **rampant inflation** using **wage freezes/ austerity measures, lower social spending**
- but these measures are very **unpopular and socially destructive: huge social problems, poverty:**
- **Chile: the most viciously neoliberal example;** state spending is slashed; massive wave of privatisation of state companies and industries.
- **Brazil: less fully “neoliberal”:** austerity is combined with quite **significant investment programmes, in big state-sponsored projects:** heavy industry, agriculture...

Economic miracles?:

Some “success”? both **Brazil and Chile** experience very **HIGH GROWTH RATES** – billed as “economic miracles” - e.g. at least 11% per year between 1968-73 in Brazil; lots of new industry and agricultural sectors

- **But:**
- **ALL THREE** widen **INCOME / WEALTH DISPARITY** very significantly – **Latin American countries** are still paying the very heavy price of this.
- The **Argentine** military prioritise **agriculture** by waging “war” on urban Argentina, creating tremendous urban poverty: **e.g. real wages fall by 40%, 1976-79**
- **In Chile**, the wealthiest 20% increase their share of national income from 51% to 60%; the next 60% suffer big income drop: from 44% share to 35% share; and the poorest 20% 4% of national income by end of dictatorship.
- **In Brazil:** similar patterns of income inequality emerge...
- **Meanwhile also, extreme concentration of LAND in the hands of the VERY FEW increases in Brazil under the military.** This helps spawn the **LANDLESS WORKERS’ MOVEMENT (MST)**, on which more later in this lecture.
- **All three military regimes** have some degree of economic success, followed by the bubble “bursting”. This isn’t only mismanagement – is partly about difficult international conditions: there are two sudden hikes in **oil prices** in the 1970s, for example, which create difficult economic conditions for many other economies.

TRANSITIONS BACK TO DEMOCRACY:

- It's these **economic crises** that help to then undermine the military in their own eyes, those of their people, and internationally.
- Meanwhile: **human rights violations** gradually become a major **international issue** – US had backed coups, but gradually moves away from supporting what have too visibly become vicious military regimes.
- **We also have internal power struggles within the military leadership:** in Brazil, for example, the “**moderate**” leader Costa e Silva ascends to presidency in 1974.
- **And, meanwhile, there is significant CIVIL SOCIETY PROTEST.** Lots of the avenues are CLOSED DOWN for this – political dissidents tortured, disappeared, exiled – but there are still spaces that exist.

Protest and resistance: The Church

- CATHOLIC CHURCH becomes umbrella under which various protesting causes can shelter...
- In Brazil: role of bishops influenced by **Liberation Theology**, like Dom Helder Câmara in Recife: mil don't dare attack him in person although they torture several of his clerics to death
- They let him have **one weekly 15-min broadcast:** this becomes **basis for Liberation Theology in Brazil**, many of which eventually help challenge the dictatorship
- In Chile: the Church plays a similar role, organising against the military under an organisation called the **Vicariate of Solidarity**.

Women's movements:

- Meanwhile all sorts of other social groups start to coalesce in opposition to military. One significant force are WOMEN's movements.
- In both **Argentina and Chile**, women turn their “private” domestic roles as mothers into a powerful public political platform, by protesting publicly about their **DISAPPEARED RELATIVES** – e.g. the “**Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo**” most famous example; act as the country's “moral conscience” [see image – the mothers and grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo]
- **But women also start to make other demands beyond the immediate issues of anti-dictatorship/ austerity:** e.g. reproductive rights; sex education; joint custody of children.
- In Argentina, women also protest about the **economic situation**, via an organisation called **Housewives of the Country:** denounces cost of living.

- Women are hit harder because in Latin America and elsewhere, poverty and austerity hit women harder than men overall.
- And you can see all kinds of interesting contemporary legacies of this activism, e.g. look at this **image of the commemorations of International Women's Day (8 March) in Santiago in 2020.**

Meanwhile, all sorts of other **grassroots, decentralised organisations** protest conditions under the dictatorships.

- **In Brazil, one major one is the LANDLESS MOVEMENT** – this is because of the crisis in the countryside generated by the military regime, which favours big agribusiness and leaves small peasants landless. The **Movimento dos Sem Terra**, founded 1984 in the period of transition from dictatorship to democracy, is now Latin America's biggest **peasant protest group**.
- Meanwhile, the development agenda of the military in Brazil **means greater encroachment into INDIGENOUS territory too: by stimulating ROADS, MINING, and other development in Amazon, the military spells disaster for many indig communities.** Here's a picture of the **Transamazon Highway**, which is one of military's pet projects.
- **Thus, the indigenous also get organised:**
- **Political mobilisation brings Brazil's FIRST INDIGENOUS CONGRESSMAN, MARIO JURUNA, to office at end of dictatorship [picture]**
- Meanwhile, organising at URBAN level about terrible conditions of Rio favelas is undertaken by figures like **Benedita da Silva**, who will later become Brazil's first black woman senator. She organises first about local conditions under dictatorship, then is still around on political scene to push for rights for women and for afro-Brazilians in transition to democracy. **[Benedita da Silva]**
- **And the party she works for is another product of the military dictatorship: the PT, the Workers' Party, which grows out of the anti-dictatorship struggles and union campaigns in Sao Paulo.** The PT in these early years espouses this decentralised, grassroots, bottom-up style of organising. It works closely with other groups like liberation theology and the landless movement. In a sense, then, the eventual **election of Lula in 2002, Brazil's first real "worker" president [see photo – in his early unionising days still under dictatorship]** and the turn to at least the centre left in Br mainstream politics, we can say was in some sense a result of the dictatorship period. **Dilma Rousseff**, who succeeded him in office, is known for having resisted the military and been subjected

to torture in the 70s. (Jair Bolsonaro, Brazil's current hard-right-wing president, has publicly celebrated these acts by the dictatorship and is attempting to re-write the story of Brazil's military era in ways that have been surprising and disturbing to most observers.)

How do these transitions to democracy actually happen?

“Openings”:

- **Gradual military “openings”** from above fuel / allow broader **civil society protest...**
- E.g. hundreds of thousands **march in Rio and São Paulo for direct elections**
- E.g. in Chile, **Pinochet's own 1980 constitution promises an eventual PLEBISCITE on his rule.** This becomes focal point for major organising by the late 80s, among **unions, re-emerging political parties, and grassroots civil society movements.** When Pinochet does announce a plebiscite, these groups manage to convince the terrorised Chilean people to come out & vote **AGAINST** the dictator. The “yes” campaign dominates airwaves beforehand, but is Pinochet obliged to give just 15 mins airtime to “no” campaign; the story of this campaign was the topic of a recent Academy-Award-nominated film that you might like to watch, directed by Pablo Larraín, called simply **“No.”**
- **In Argentina: 1982 Falkland/ Malvinas conflict: military try to capture the islands from the British:** this is intended to be an easy victory and distract national attention from terrible economic situation; but war is disaster; this, coupled with increasing **PROTEST** from all sides, leads military **back towards elections. Election 1983: landslide victory of RAÚL ALFONSÍN: he had also had important trajectory in resisting dictatorship, had been active in human rights movement, had lots of support;** first democratically elected president since Perón in 1946.

So, very high hopes and possibilities were contained within the democratic transitions. But:

How much really changed?

- **Latin American economies were still plagued by debt and austerity. Neoliberalism continued in each case. So, a NEW POLITICAL ARRANGEMENT doesn't actually lead in any straightforward way to a new economic reality.** We can discuss in the seminars, via the Kurt Weyland article for this week, the nature of the connection between neoliberalism and democratic politics.

- **inequality increases; 1980s known as “Lost decade”** for Lat Am; terrible urban problems, violence, and entry of **drugs as another terrible social ill** (Ben will discuss next week).

- **Amnesties** for both military and dissidents help the transition process, but make it **difficult to bring military to trial** (this doesn't happen at all in Brazil; there is a very TRICKY process in **Argentina** whereby military figures are put on trial – we can discuss this in class if you choose the Pion-Berlin article on Argentina)

- and in Chile, the new civilian leadership strike a deal with Pinochet: allows him a **veto** on issues of national security, and he appoints **life senators** that block attempts at reform in the Chilean senate...

- On the other hand, out of these transitions from the dictatorships come a new progressive politics and new revived ways of “doing democracy”:

- **In Brazil**, for example, new social movements all exert pressure and are part of formulating the new **1988 Constitution**, which is very **progressive and democratic. It contains a very extensive list of citizenship rights: for women, Afro-Brazilians, the indigenous, people descended from former slave communities.** But as always in Brazil, the gap between these formal statements and what happens on the ground continues to be very large...