

Book Reviews

Aguirre, Carlos and Drinot, Paolo (eds.) (2017) *The Peculiar Revolution: Rethinking the Peruvian Experiment under Military Rule*, University of Texas Press (Austin, TX), vii + 353 pp. \$90.00 hbk. \$29.95 pbk.

With the generalisation of electoral democracies in Latin America in recent decades and the spate of studies on their dynamics and limitations, the current generation of scholars of the region may be hard pressed to remember that, as recently as 1976, fully four-fifths of its twenty republics were under authoritarian rule in one form or another. In most, the military institution was in power in its self-perceived role as saviours of the nation, and used repression to purge elements deemed hostile. Most failed, some quite spectacularly, leaving a legacy of economic crisis and 'legal' impunity for elected successors to deal with.

It is refreshing, then, to have a group of mostly younger scholars and historians from Peru, the United States and the United Kingdom revisit the Peruvian case of institutionalised military rule (1968–1980). They highlight once again its efforts, especially until 1975, to carry out major policy reforms designed to transform the country through resource redistribution and central government expansion. Awkward choice of title aside ('Peculiar Revolution' appears to express the editors' ambivalence over just how to characterise this regime and its break with past policies), the reader is treated to a series of chapters offering updated perspectives on cultural politics, specific policies and institutions, and case studies of their local impacts.

For those of us who were fascinated by the reformist zeal of the self-titled Revolutionary Government of the Armed Forces (RGAF) in its early years, studied it closely in the field, and tried to explain what was different about it, this volume offers new information and interpretations that have benefited from time, archives, and academic approaches. There is a particularly useful summary overview to start the book. The editors/contributors encapsulate the writings of scholars during what they call the first and second generation of RGAF studies (while reformers were in power, and the years immediately following). Next follows one of the volume's most distinctive contributions, chapters offering windows onto the cultural politics of the regime. These include the RGAF's celebration of Peru's sesquicentennial Independence Day; its total appropriation of images of Tupac Amaru, leader of the last Inca rebellion in the 1780s; the 1977 funeral of President and General Juan Velasco Alvarado (1968–1975); and collected popular memories of the perceived legacy of the RGAF.

The volume then focuses on aspects of the military regime's policies and institutions: education and the disruptive role of a dissident teacher's union (SUTEP), agrarian reform and the tensions between rival peasant organisations, and analyses of the military institution on the emergence and the collapse of its reformist zeal. The reader is struck by the degree to which SUTEP continues to disrupt the best efforts by specialists to revamp and improve public education in Peru, which remains among the poorest in the region. It is also illuminating that the peasant confederations have largely disappeared, as have

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most of the collective initiatives of the agrarian reform in the context of post-RGAF re-privatisation and land titling policies.

The third set of chapters offers a range of analyses of how reforms played out at the local level. Given the emphasis of some earlier studies on the centralising effects of the military government's key initiatives, these case studies offer a significantly different focus. The regime's social mobilisation office (SINAMOS) looked very different in Piura, Cuzco and Tacna as a result of personnel, regional cultures and local power structures. A massive water project for the northern Santa River basin was initiated by the RGAF, pursued on quite different terms from the mid-1980s, and is only recently entering its third and final stage. The tourism project for Cuzco, designed in part to offset the negative local effects of the agrarian reform, proved to be a resounding success decades later, but generated controversy at the time as a magnet for hippies. Another success, but largely on the terms originally envisioned, is the effort to organise Native Communities in the Peruvian Amazon, with 1,200 established and recognised over the next 30 years.

Edited volumes with multiple contributions on a given topic need an integrating conclusion, and this one is no exception. A chapter connecting the old – laid out in the introduction – with the new in this volume would have enabled the reader to see more clearly the relationship between earlier and current scholarship. A bibliography is missing as well, forcing recourse to footnotes for choice references. Finally, this compilation, worthwhile as it is, is not the first to focus on key reforms and their effects at the local level. Such concerns aside, the book is a worthy addition to one's library on Peru and military regimes.

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