THE PECULIAR REVOLUTION
RETHINKING THE PERUVIAN EXPERIMENT UNDER MILITARY RULE
EDITED BY CARLOS AGUIRRE & PAULO DRINOT
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University of Texas Press  Austin
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Acknowledgments

This volume began to take shape at a conference held at the Institute of the Americas at University College London in September 2013. The editors would like to acknowledge the support of several institutions, including LSE Ideas, the Society for Latin American Studies, the Peruvian embassy in London, and particularly the Institute of the Americas at UCL. In addition, we are grateful to several individuals who made the conference possible: Maxine Molyneux, former director of the Institute of the Americas; Oscar Martínez Gonzalez, events coordinator at Institute of the Americas; and Ambassador Julio Muñoz Deacon and his staff at the Peruvian embassy in London. Special thanks go to Gonzalo Romero Sommer for his assistance in the run up to and during the conference and to Elizabeth Dore, Rory Miller, Natalia Sobrevilla, and Fiona Wilson, among others, for their contributions from the floor at the conference. The editors are particularly grateful to Kerry Webb and the entire University of Texas Press team for taking on this project and for their sterling work, which has produced a very handsome book. We are deeply grateful to Peter F. Klarén and Cynthia McClintock for their careful reading of the manuscript and their sharp comments and suggestions. Our final and biggest thanks go to the contributors for participating in this project and making the process both pleasant and smooth.
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The Peculiar Revolution
Introduction

CARLOS AGUIRRE AND PAULO DRINOT

On the morning of October 3, 1968, the world woke to news about the horrible massacre that had occurred the night before at the Tlatelolco square in Mexico City, where an uncertain number of students (more than three hundred, according to some reports) had been killed by state forces. For Peruvians, the news from Tlatelolco was overshadowed by a much closer but probably no less dramatic event: that same morning they learned that President Fernando Belaúnde Terry, with less than one year left to complete his term (1963–1969), had been deposed by a military coup. Reactions varied, but a common feeling was one of déjà vu: yet another interruption of the constitutional order by military officers defending the status quo and ready to rule through harsh repression. Recent right-wing military interventions in Brazil (1964) and Argentina (1966) were in the minds of many observers in Peru and elsewhere as they tried to make sense of what was behind the latest coup d’état.

For most of the twentieth century, military and authoritarian governments closely allied with traditional social and economic elites had ruled Peru. Since the 1920s, radical projects of transformation, including those advanced by the Communist and American Popular Revolutionary Alliance (APRA) Parties, had attempted to open up avenues for social change, sometimes resorting to violence, but the forces defending the status quo had prevailed. By the 1950s, emerging political and social groups were pushing for modernization and the consolidation of representative democracy. Acción Popular, a center-right political party, won the election in 1963 and brought the architect Fernando Belaúnde Terry to the presidency. Belaúnde Terry had to confront not only fierce opposition from a coalition formed by the now more conservative APRA and the right-wing Unión Nacional Odriísta (UNO) but also the emergence
in various parts of the country of guerrilla movements, whose members were inspired by and trained in revolutionary Cuba. Accusations of corruption and a controversy surrounding the negotiation of oil contracts with foreign firms that fueled nationalistic sentiments weakened the legitimacy of Belaúnde’s administration. By 1968, Peruvian democracy was in peril, so though not many observers had anticipated another military intervention, when the October 3 coup took place, it did not come as a complete surprise either.

To the shock of many, if not most, however, the new junta led by General Juan Velasco Alvarado quickly dispelled the notion that it would establish another reactionary, right-wing, anti-Communist military project, like those that had ruled Peru in the past and were established in Brazil in 1964 and in the Southern Cone in the following decade. The message Velasco Alvarado broadcast to Peruvians was clear, though it took a while for them to digest it: he was leading a nationalist project aimed at radically transforming Peruvian society, eliminating social injustice, breaking the cycle of foreign domination, redistributing land and wealth, and placing the destiny of Peruvians into their own hands. Political parties, the military thought, had failed to represent the interests of the majority of Peruvians, so it was up to them to carry out the structural transformations needed to put the country on the path toward true sovereignty, independence, and social justice.

It did not take long for the military government to demonstrate that they really meant what they had announced: six days later, on October 9, 1968, they decreed the nationalization of the oil industry, until then controlled mostly by US firms. This was followed by a series of measures affecting virtually every aspect of Peruvian society, from education to labor rights, including, quite prominently, an ambitious land reform project launched on June 24, 1969. The state began to play a central role in economic affairs, the nationalization of foreign-owned companies multiplied, a new focus on promoting and protecting indigenous cultures and peoples was announced, a strong nationalistic rhetoric pervaded official discourse, and a vast apparatus of state propaganda (through print, radio and TV media, posters, songs, festivals, and so forth) accompanied the ambitious “Peruvian experiment,” as it came to be known.

The Revolutionary Government of the Armed Forces (RGAF) radically transformed Peruvian society. This is probably the only thing most scholars and analysts of the period would agree on. The RGAF was not without its limitations, contradictions, or setbacks, however, and it had
to confront multiple opponents, including so-called traditional political parties (APRA, Acción Popular, and others), sectors of the armed forces that did not agree with the path taken, and to a certain extent the United States and its attempts to prevent the Peruvian process from developing into another Cuba. The accusation of being a “Communist” regime, in fact, was not uncommon. The military government was also opposed by the ultraradical left, in particular Maoist groups with influence in peasant, labor, and student organizations, for whom Velasco Alvarado was leading a Fascist project. But there were also some Peruvian political, labor, intellectual, and economic circles that welcomed the military project and collaborated with it. The pro-Soviet Communist Party of Peru, the Christian Democrat Party, ex-members of the defunct Social Progressive movement, former guerrilleros, progressive sectors of the Catholic Church, union leaders, and ex-militants of APRA and other political parties in one way or another applauded the military’s agenda and participated in (or otherwise supported) its implementation.

Internally, the Velasco Alvarado regime also faced a number of challenges. The junta he presided over represented the three armed forces—army, air force, and navy—but they were not always in tune with one another. As was to be expected, officers disagreed about the nature, speed, and depth of the social reforms, which led to the formation of various interest groups within the administration and to successive changes in personnel that reflected internal power struggles. As George Philip explains in his chapter in this volume, nationalist generals loyal to Velasco were in the minority, which made the success of the entire project dependent on Velasco’s own personal leadership and his ability to keep all the other groups together. Conservative sectors of the armed forces opposed radical measures such as land reform but also the gradual incorporation of leftist and Communist intellectuals and cadres into the administration.

To build popular and institutional support, in 1971 the government created SINAMOS (an acronym for Sistema Nacional de Apoyo a la Movilización Social, or National System of Support for Social Mobilization), an entity that would become the political arm of the military revolution in the absence of a true political party. SINAMOS was in charge of publicizing the government’s agenda and measures, carrying out indoctrination campaigns, and mobilizing—using state financial and logistic resources—popular sectors in support of the changes being implemented. SINAMOS’s top-down and co-optation tactics led to clashes with autonomous grassroots and popular organizations as well
as with APRA and various leftist political parties. It also produced intense friction within the state apparatus. The nickname given to the core group of intellectuals that controlled SINAMOS—"la aplanadora," or the steamroller—is revealing of popular perceptions about its role in the political process.

In February 1973, Velasco’s health problems (an aneurism led to the amputation of his right leg) began to limit his ability to lead such an ambitious project of reforms and to navigate the complicated political situation. In July 1974, the government announced the expropriation of privately owned mass media and their transfer to “social organizations,” a measure allegedly aimed at “democratizing” or “socializing” access to information and guaranteeing freedom of expression for all. For the more conservative sectors of the government, this seemed like a move toward a more radical and authoritarian type of regime. They feared that a “Cubanization” of the process was under way. In February 1975, during a police strike, Lima witnessed a couple of days of massive street violence that reflected popular discontent with the government. The SINAMOS headquarters and other government and military buildings, as well as private shops, were the target of popular fury. The government was forced to use extreme measures to repress looting and sacking. Velasco’s fate was probably sealed in the wake of the February riots and the ensuing repression.

On August 29, 1975, Velasco Alvarado was removed and replaced by General Francisco Morales Bermúdez, the prime minister and minister of war, through an institutional or palace coup. Velasco’s health problems as well as growing “Communist infiltration” were mentioned as key reasons for this change. Although Morales Bermúdez announced that he would continue and even deepen the “structural reforms” initiated in October 1968, the truth is that the “second phase” of the Peruvian revolution quickly began to roll back, dismantle, or at least stall most of those reforms; adopted a clear anti-Communist agenda; and started a gradual process of transfer of power back to civilians. In May 1980, Fernando Belaúnde Terry, the president that had been ousted by the military in 1968, was elected for a second term.

Almost fifty years have passed since the beginning of the Peruvian experiment. During this interval, Peruvian society has gone through significant changes and has been the scenario of dramatic ordeals, including the “internal war” between the Maoist insurgent group known as Shining Path (Sendero Luminoso in Spanish) and the forces of the state that caused almost seventy thousand deaths and enormous human
Introduction

and material destruction. The meaning and legacy of the 1968–1975 experiment, not surprisingly, is still the subject of intense discussions: some blame the military for destroying democracy, hurting economic development, imposing inefficient state controls, and fostering authoritarian methods to address social issues; others recognize the limitations of the military nationalist project but agree that a serious effort was made to implement the social reforms that Peru needed to overcome oppressive forms of exploitation and the marginalization of large sectors of Peruvian society, thus contributing to its democratization. These debates, to be sure, were quite lively during the years of the military government and were successively taken up by scholars in the 1970s and 1980s. Although they never quite subsided, there was a lapse in new scholarly research for twenty years or so. In recent years, a new wave of interest in Peru’s military nationalism has begun to produce innovative approaches to our understanding of that period. This volume attempts to bring together some of the most original and creative scholarship on this fascinating period of Peruvian history, and it tries to do so by incorporating themes, regions, and analytical angles that had hitherto not been explored.

The contributions to this volume build on an extensive literature that goes back to the late 1960s and early 1970s. The Peruvian experiment attracted a great deal of attention among scholars, especially political scientists, who were trying to decipher the nature and goals of the military government and identify its social, political, ideological, and institutional foundations. Was it really a revolutionary process? What were the sources and limits of its nationalistic agenda? What was the role of the “masses” in the process? Analysts were generally cautious, if not openly critical. One of the first attempts to explain the military regime led by Velasco Alvarado was that of the Peruvian intellectual Hugo Neira, who would eventually become a collaborator of the military government. For Neira, the October 1968 coup was unjustified and incomprehensible, and he attributed it to the army’s anti-APRA sentiments (APRA was expected to win the 1969 election) and to its desire to stop the process of democratization and mobilization that, according to him, had already started in Peru. He denied that the military had any “revolutionary” goals but pointed out that in societies where the ruling elites proved to be incapable of addressing the challenges of social mobilization and leftist organization, the army plays a transitional role, which, he predicted, would be followed by “true and great social reforms.”

Another early and critical assessment of military nationalism was
that of the Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano. He dismissed attempts to label the Peruvian regime as “populist,” “Nasserist,” or “Bismarckist,” and proposed instead an analysis centered on the economic dimensions of the project: Who was benefiting from the reforms? Whose interests was the regime protecting? Locating the Peruvian experiment within shifting international scenarios, Quijano proposed that it was the result of changes in the nature of imperialist domination (“from the agro-extractive to the urban-industrial” sector) and of the erosion of “traditional agents of legitimation” such as the Catholic Church or universities. The military project, guided by notions of “limited nationalism” and “class reconciliation,” thus sought to strengthen the role of foreign capital in the more “modern” sectors of the economy and thereby pave the road for a new model of imperial domination, which he dubbed “neo-imperialism.” Among international observers, the British Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm shared some of these critical views about the Peruvian process: If revolutions, he wrote, were defined by the transformations they effect on a given society, the Peruvian experiment was clearly one of them; but if they were to be understood as processes of mass mobilization, then it was not. The masses, observed Hobsbawm, were completely “outside” the changes taking place in their country, and peasants were for the most part a passive element in this process. This was, for Hobsbawm, a “peculiar revolution.”

Although scholars began to pay attention to the Peruvian experiment as soon as it was launched, it would take a few years to produce dissertations and monographs, given the time needed to conduct research and complete publication cycles. One of the first contributions was the dissertation, completed in 1973, by the political scientist David Scott Palmer. The focus of his analysis was the extent and nature of political participation in the process. For Palmer, the Peruvian army had initiated a process of reforms in order to guarantee internal security, threatened by guerrillas and other revolutionary efforts, but it was also trying to change “the basic model of politics,” building a corporate model that contained a central contradiction: although it emphasized popular “participation,” it also needed to guarantee a centralized control of the process. Palmer concluded that Peru’s “revolution from above” should be conceived as a preventive effort, what he called “conservative reform.”

Two collections of essays, published in 1975 and 1976 respectively, summarized international scholarship on Peru's military regime at a time when it was already being dismantled. Abraham Lowenthal brought together a team of political scientists and economists to analyze the “Pe-
ruvian experiment.” The overall tone of the contributions can be summarized in the title of Lowenthal’s chapter: it was an “ambiguous revolution,” that is, anti-Communist in essence but applauded by Fidel Castro and other leftist leaders and parties, both in Peru and elsewhere; authoritarian but not fiercely repressive; allegedly anticapitalist and yet praised by many Peruvian and foreign investors. Like Palmer and Hobsbawm, Lowenthal highlighted the lack of popular support for the regime (he considered it “the toughest challenge” the military faced), despite efforts by SINAMOS, the office in charge of fostering popular mobilization behind military reforms. Failure to ensure “full participation” in the decision-making process was another important setback for the military regime. Overall, Lowenthal identifies an effort toward the redistribution of resources and a “segmentary incorporation” of the population into the process that allowed the military, in his interpretation, to control its pace and boundaries. Once again, the emphasis was on the “limited” or “controlled” nature of the changes being implemented, but Lowenthal also addressed (he was writing in 1974) the potential risks of “expanded participation.” The second volume, coordinated by David Chaplin and published in 1976, gathered original and reprinted contributions by Peruvian and foreign scholars. Many of them addressed the various social and political developments that would help explain the rise of military nationalism: guerrillas, peasant mobilization, squatters’ movements, and others. In his introduction, the editor, David Chaplin, reiterated the use of the “corporatist” label to characterize the military regime and its goal of guaranteeing popular mobilization behind it. Summarizing points made in several of the contributions, Chaplin insisted on the limitations and contradictions of a model that proclaimed to foster popular participation yet tended to concentrate power and decision making in the hands of the military.

Once Velasco Alvarado was removed from power and the second phase of the process, under Morales Bermúdez, was in full swing, scholarly analyses began to revisit previous interpretations and to advance explanations about the demise of military nationalism. Two books published in 1978 are representative of these views. George Philip attempted to take stock of the “rise and fall” of military nationalism. He reviewed some of the military’s key reforms (such as the nationalization of the oil industry and the land reform); the composition of the military government (a pioneering effort in this regard); and the forces of opposition, both internal and external, that the military had to confront. Philip contrasted the “successes” of the military (the destruction of the landed oli-
garchy, for instance, or the creation of a powerful state economic sector) with the obstacles it had to confront, the central one being its very nature as a military government, which imposed various limits to the possibility of implementing the political changes it had set out to achieve, especially popular participation. In fact, according to Philip, “the problem of political participation is the Achilles heel of radical military regimes” such as the Peruvian one.11

The other book published in the aftermath of the Velasco Alvarado ousting was of a completely different nature: it was the transcription of a lengthy debate among Peruvian leftist intellectuals and political leaders such as Ricardo Letts, Carlos Malpica, Francisco Moncloa, and others.12 As the volume’s title suggests, all of them agreed to dub the Velasco Alvarado government a “bourgeois-reformist” regime, akin to, say, Mexico’s Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional; PRI) or Argentina’s Peronism. This characterization implied that it was an attempt (for the most part unsuccessful) to address the deep social problems of Peruvian society without destroying the existing (bourgeois) state and without creating a new structure of power, that is, “popular democracy.” For the left, as is clear in the interventions transcribed in this book, military nationalism presented a real and serious challenge, and while some sectors opted to offer their “critical support,” others never harbored illusions about the military representing the “real” aspirations of the masses of workers and peasants and chose instead to oppose (and compete with) the government’s attempt to control the popular movement.13

In the early 1980s, after the second phase of the military government had ended, scholars and analysts went back to revisit the Peruvian experiment. Three collective volumes published in 1983, two in English and one in Spanish, captured the tone of the debates fifteen years after the start of the military regime. Cynthia McClintock and Abraham Lowenthal’s volume, The Peruvian Experiment Reconsidered, offered a series of essays on the limitations and failures of the Velasco Alvarado-era reforms, especially in the realms of economic growth, redistribution, social justice, reduction of foreign dependence, and popular participation.14 Somehow departing from the overall tone of the volume, however, Lowenthal argued in his concluding chapter that the military government had actually succeeded in its true original goal: “If one defines the Peruvian experiment as the core program of nationalist affirmation, economic modernization, anti-oligarchical reform, and systematic state-building supported institutionally by the armed forces in 1968, the
agenda was implemented to an impressive degree.” For Lowenthal, Peru was able to catch up with other populist regimes in the region in closing the gap between “socio-economic realities and its political institutions and public policies.”

The other English-language publication, David Booth and Bernardo Sorj’s *Military Reformism and Social Classes*, advanced a critique of what its editors saw as a literature shaped by “the preconceptions, preoccupations and passing fashions—as well as the solid scholarly virtues—of mainstream North American political science” and more specifically by an overestimated “institutional” element to the 1968 coup and by the wrongheaded focus on corporatism and the culturalist theory of politics it reflected. Instead, these authors sought to engage more explicitly with the literature on the RGAF produced in Peru by “an initially small but now rather substantial circle of Peruvian social scientists formed under the influence of the new Marxist and radical dependency ideas of the 1960s and early 1970s.” Though in some ways disparate in approach, the contributions to this volume, on a range of issues including agrarian reform, public enterprises, and press reform, placed greater emphasis than other English-language publications on class struggle as a key factor shaping the process and outcome of the Velasco regime.

The third publication from this period was a three-volume compendium of essays on “Velasco’s Peru” written, for the most part, by former collaborators of the military government. Coordinated by Carlos Franco, it offered both the historical context necessary to understand the emergence of military nationalism (some essays went back to the early twentieth century) and a series of lengthy analyses/testimonies by key participants in the military government (Carlos Franco, Francisco Guerra García, Héctor Béjar, and others). One of the most valuable features of these volumes is precisely the fact that these contributors were writing in their dual role as protagonists and analysts. With the usual nuances and discrepancies, the overall conceptual framework behind these contributions is that the Peruvian experiment constituted an “interrupted revolution,” which obviously means that they did consider the military process a “revolutionary” one. In his introduction, Carlos Franco distanced himself from interpretations that dubbed the regime “corporatist” or “Fascist” and those that uncritically embraced the “participatory” nature of the process, but also from Lowenthal’s characterization of it as an “ambiguous” process. Franco and his collaborators aspired to offer an alternative interpretation, one that located the Peruvian experiment within the study of the “historical conditions that pre-
vented a popular, bottom-up revolution in Peru,” one that could have carried on the reforms that the military regime ended up implementing. In other words, there were specific conditions that made it possible for a process of reforms to be initiated. On the other hand, an explanation of the specific conditions that allowed the military to embrace that “mission” was also part of the preoccupation of these analysts. The supposed “inevitability” of the “military revolution” or its characterization as a “preventive” type of revolution were interpretations that, according to Franco, had been proved wrong. The emphasis, thus, was on those structural conditions that shaped the military’s mentality and consciousness and that moved them to act in the way they did. For Franco and the core group of collaborators in this multivolume publication, the ultimate meaning (and justification) of the 1968–1975 military national-ist regime had to be found, first, in the effective destruction of the oligarchic order and, second, in “the beginning of the construction of a national society and state.” The interruption of the process in 1975 left this project unfinished.

In contrast to the 1970s and early 1980s, since the mid-1980s the scholarly output on the RGAF has been limited. This relative lack of interest was likely a product of the important changes that Peru experienced in the 1980s and 1990s. The emergence of the Shining Path insurgency in 1980, the development of the internal armed conflict through the rest of that decade and the early 1990s, and the election of Alberto Fujimori and the authoritarian neoliberal “revolution” that he implemented after 1990 shifted scholarly attention to new questions. But the fall in scholarly output also corresponded with a passing of the baton between academic disciplines. The political scientists and sociologists who had led the way in the study of the RGAF, and who in several cases had been drawn to the study of the regime by its apparently sui generis character, shifted their attention to other topics. In the 1990s, anthropologists picked up some of the slack; this is particularly true of anthropologists who were working in rural areas and whose ethnographic studies could not ignore the effect of the Velasco-era agrarian reform on the peasant communities they were studying. In other words, scholars have continued to explore the Velasco regime but do so increasingly indirectly. Historians, however, with a few notable exceptions, had paid relatively little attention to the RGAF until now. One important exception is in the field of diplomatic history, with the work of Richard Walter and Hal Brands adding new perspectives, based on extensive and exemplary research in diplomatic archives in Peru and the United States
and, in the case of Walter, on the international relations of the Velasco regime, particularly with the United States. Another is the work of Anna Cant, a contributor to this volume, on the visual culture of the RGAF and its mobilization strategies.

Two general studies of the Velasco regime merit particular attention. Dirk Kruijt’s *Revolution by Decree: Peru, 1968–1975* (1994) draws on extensive interviews with key actors in the armed forces. Though it does not provide a major reinterpretation of the Velasco regime, Kruijt’s study does contribute to our understanding of the RGAF and its main protagonists through its judicious use of interview material. In particular, the book offers unique insight into the backgrounds and personal motivations of the regime’s key actors, including Velasco himself. In Kruijt’s fine study, the Velasco regime acquires a much more human dimension and its policies appear to be expressions of a more complex range of factors than in previous studies. Unlike Kruijt, Juan Martín Sánchez does not draw on much original material in his 2002 *La revolución peruana*. Instead, this book, based on the author’s doctoral dissertation, is an attempt to provide a new interpretation of the Velasco regime in dialogue with political science theory and in particular with theoretical perspectives on revolutions. Drawing on a careful analysis of several key documents produced by the regime and an assessment of other interpretative frameworks such as populism or corporatism, Sánchez provides a helpful overview of the secondary literature and an intriguing argument about the utility of viewing the regime through the analytical lens of “revolution.”

If earlier studies of the Velasco regime had examined the range of reforms it implemented, it is arguably the 1969 agrarian reform that has received the bulk of attention in the last few decades. These studies have continued an earlier interest in exploring the effect of the agrarian reform, a trend that had been set out clearly with the publication in 1976 of José Matos Mar’s edited volume *Hacienda, comunidad y campesinado en el Perú* and reassessed in Matos Mar and José Mejía’s *Reforma agraria: Logros y contradicciones, 1969–1979*, published in 1984, and continued and developed in the work of authors such as José María Caballero, Cynthia McClintock, Elena Alvarez, and others. In part due to shifts in research paradigms but also no doubt because of the growing awareness of the differentiated effects of the agrarian reform across the country, the studies became more focused on the regional and the local and reliant on grounded or ethnographic research. Linda Seligmann’s study of Huanucoquite in Cuzco, Carmen Diana Deere’s on Cajamarca, and Karin
Apel’s on Piura are good examples of this trend.\textsuperscript{26} Perhaps inevitably, more recent studies of the 1969 agrarian reform, such as Seligmann’s, have sought to explore the ways in which the reform shaped the rise of the Shining Path in the south-central Andean highlands. In this sense, such studies overlap with historical scholarship on the Shining Path that homes in on the ways in which the initiatives of the RGAF, most particularly the agrarian reform and SINAMOS, contributed to creating conditions for the Shining Path to emerge where and when it did.\textsuperscript{27}

Published in 2009, Enrique Mayer’s \textit{Ugly Stories of the Peruvian Agrarian Reform} is the most important recent contribution to the study of the Velasco period. Building on his own direct experience of the agrarian reform, Mayer’s work marks a departure in the literature on the RGAF. It draws on numerous interviews with a whole range of actors directly involved in, or impacted by, the agrarian reform, from those who designed it to those who implemented it, as well as a socially diverse group of characters, including landowners, peasants, intellectuals, academics, and agricultural experts. Unlike other studies of the agrarian reform published in the last couple of decades, Mayer’s work attempts a more comprehensive analysis, taking in a number of different experiences from the northern coast, to the central highlands, and to the altiplano in the south. In contrast to some of the earlier work on the agrarian reform, Mayer is interested in recovering the experience and meaning of the agrarian reform for those whose lives were changed by it. Among other things, this approach enables Mayer to show the extent to which the outcome of the agrarian reform differed from the objectives set by its designers and implementers. In the hands of those who benefited from it, the reform took on a life of its own.\textsuperscript{28} As in previously mentioned studies, Mayer, too, is concerned with the relation between the agrarian reform and the rise of the Shining Path, though his conclusions are rather cautious.

The chapters in this volume draw on, yet at the same time depart from, the scholarship summarized above. As we have seen, much of it, particularly the contributions made in the 1970s and 1980s, focused on political and economic processes, on issues such as state-military relations and popular mobilization, on determining the character or nature of the RGAF (corporatist, nationalist, populist, revolutionary, and so on), and on assessing the success or failure of particular reforms. By contrast, the chapters in this volume pay greater attention to social and cultural processes, and in particular to the cultural politics of the regime. In so doing, the volume brings into view aspects of the regime
virtually unexplored in earlier studies, such as the regime’s uses of the past or the collective memory of Velasco and the RGAF. It also sheds new light on previously studied issues such as the regime’s education reform, its policies toward the indigenous peasantry, and the military’s self-fashioning and culture. Finally, the volume also shifts the focus from the national to the subnational in order to examine in greater detail the ways in which the RGAF’s reforms and initiatives were experienced and inflected at the local and regional level in different parts of Peru. In so doing, the volume offers a richer and more complex interpretation of the Velasco regime.

In the first section, the contributions explore aspects of the cultural politics developed by the RGAF and those that it engendered but did not necessarily control. In the first chapter, Carlos Aguirre examines the RGAF’s patronage of the sesquicentennial celebrations of Peruvian independence in 1971, and in particular of a project to publish over one hundred volumes of original sources on Peru’s independence process. He shows that the apparently contradictory alliance between the military and the conservative historians named to head the special commission charged with overseeing the publication of that collection served the broader purpose of the RGAF to cast its project as one of completing a nationalist emancipatory process and of freeing Peru from external economic dependence and political domination. The sesquicentennial commemoration was seen as an opportunity to legitimize the RGAF by emphasizing the “incompleteness” of the “first” independence process and the need to fully realize the promises of national liberation.

In the next chapter, Charles Walker focuses on the role played by the eighteenth-century rebel leader Túpac Amaru II in the RGAF’s cultural politics, and in particular in the context of the sesquicentennial celebrations studied by Aguirre. Walker shows that the regime’s championing of Túpac Amaru II was an attempt to create a national symbol that could serve to unify the Peruvian nation around a common project of national liberation that placed Peruvians at the very center of that process. In this reading, it was Túpac Amaru II, rather than the foreign “liberators” like the Argentine José Francisco de San Martín or the Venezuelan Simón Bolívar, who had initiated Peru’s independence process, one that the Velasco regime was trying to complete.

In his chapter, Adrián Lerner offers a narrative history of Velasco’s funeral. Velasco died in 1977, two years after General Morales Bermúdez had deposed him in a palace coup. However, as Lerner argues, his death and in particular his funeral illustrate many of the characteris-
tics of the regime that he led. Through a detailed reconstruction of the funeral informed by a theoretical engagement with the literature on rituals, Lerner suggests that the massive outpouring of popular sentiment and mobilization during the funeral represented a challenge to the course that the military regime had taken since the ousting of Velasco in 1975. But the sympathy for Velasco manifested in the funeral was not to have a lasting impact, which further reveals the limits of the politics of mobilization that the RGAF promoted.

Paulo Drinot examines the contested collective memories of the RGAF. Drawing on several hundred comments attached to videos about the Velasco period uploaded on YouTube, Drinot examines views expressive of collective memories of the agrarian reform, Velasco’s death, Velasco’s policies with regard to economic dependency and US power in Latin America, Peru’s relations with Chile, and the links between the Velasco “revolution” and the Shining Path insurgency. The Velasco regime and the memories mobilized by and reconstructed through it, Drinot concludes, offer Peruvians a means through which to negotiate, if not necessarily resolve, a number of issues that shape the ways Peruvians feel and think about themselves and their place in the world.

In the second section, the focus turns to the examination of particular policies of the RGAF and its key institutions. Patricia Oliart revisits the education reform implemented by the RGAF. Oliart pays particular attention to the diverse transnational influences that shaped the reform, including Paulo Freire’s seminal ideas; to its agents, many of whom, like Augusto Salazar Bondy, were important cultural figures in Peru; and to the radical initiatives that characterized it, which resonated with the regime’s critical assessment of the character of Peruvian society and its attempts to transform it. At the same time, Oliart examines the obstacles that the reform encountered. Opposition came from conservative sectors but, more importantly, from teachers aligned with the left-wing teachers’ union, Sindicato Único de Trabajadores en la Educación del Perú (SUTEP; Unified Syndicate of Workers in Education of Peru), which viewed the reform as an expression of a bourgeois authoritarian regime.

Jaymie Patricia Heilman similarly considers how land reform impacted a key organized sector of the population: the peasantry. The reform, Heilman shows, produced an intense ideological debate within the Peruvian Peasant Confederation (Confederación Campesina del Perú; CCP) leading to its split into three competing organizations. The establishment of an alternative national peasant confederation by the regime,
the National Agrarian Confederation (Confederación Nacional Agraria; CNA), further deepened the division of the organized peasant movement in Peru. As Heilman shows, the impact of the agrarian reform was not limited to the shifts in land tenure explored in numerous studies but also had a profound and long-lasting effect on peasant organization and politics.

Lourdes Hurtado examines what was undoubtedly the central protagonist of the RGAF: the military, and the army in particular. In seeking to understand how Velasco became so central to the project of the armed forces, Hurtado pays special attention to the military culture that developed in Peru in the twentieth century, shaped by gendered (and to a lesser extent racialized) notions about the role of the military in protecting the Peruvian population. Notions of a masculinized army and a feminized nation formed the background against which Velasco emerged as a father or brother figure whose mission was to act as the agent of Peru’s emancipation. Because of this close association between Velasco and the fate of the revolution, Hurtado argues, his illness also came to symbolize the weakness and eventual defeat of the process he spearheaded.

In a study that also focuses on the military, George Philip further explores the decline of Velasco’s administration. Philip sets out to explain the speed with which the Velasco government collapsed. He acknowledges the role played by economic factors in that collapse (rising debt and an economic slump) and the costs associated with the arms buildup that followed the 1973 Chilean coup. But equally important, Philip suggests, was the type of regime that Velasco established, characterized by personalism but precariously dependent on a coalition of forces. For this reason, Philip concludes, once Velasco’s health started to weaken, his hold on power also weakened inevitably and irreparably.

In the third and final section, our contributors explore the local and regional dimensions of the RGAF and its policies. Anna Cant draws on extensive research in provincial archives and interviews she conducted to examine the work of SINAMOS in the context of the implementation of the agrarian reform in three different regions of Peru: Piura, Cuzco, and Tacna. In contrast to the still dominant notion that the reforms of the RGAF were top-down and uniformly applied across the nation, Cant shows that at the local level there was significant engagement between the promoters of the military revolution and those it targeted. Drawing on a keen understanding of local history and problems, SINAMOS developed different communication strategies and narratives to address
the particular circumstances of each region. This resulted in significant variation in how the revolution was represented and understood across different regions of the country. At the same time, Cant points to the problems that SINAMOS encountered in each region, which were partly the result of opposition from various local and regional actors and partly the consequence of issues internal to SINAMOS. As Cant shows, the reforms implemented by the RGAF were inflected in different ways in different parts of Peru, an issue that is further explored in the next four chapters.

Mark Carey’s study of the giant Chavimochic irrigation project on Peru’s northern coast offers new perspectives on the short- and long-term effects of key reforms of the RGAF, in particular the agrarian reform and the 1969 General Water Law. Though Chavimochic was initiated during Alan García’s administration (1985–1990) and is still being completed, Carey shows that several developments during the Velasco regime proved critical to its subsequent history. In particular, Carey shows how the impact of the agrarian reform on landownership (the elimination of haciendas), the establishment of the General Water Law and technocratic management of water resources, the mobilization of support for the measure from recently established cooperatives, and the politics of drought management all contributed to creating the conditions that would enable the initiation of the project in the 1980s.

Focused on the town of Chimbote, Nathan Clarke’s chapter illustrates the tensions produced by the RGAF’s attempt to co-opt the Peruvian labor movement. As the most important fishing port in the world by the 1970s and the heart of Peru’s massive fishing industry and emerging steel industry, Chimbote witnessed acute conflict between different labor groups and the emergence of a clasista movement, whose leadership sought to align itself with the military regime. In a context of ecological crisis, as fishing stocks fell sharply as a consequence of an El Niño event, and in the midst of the nationalization of the fishing industry, the attempt by the RGAF to curtail labor autonomy in Chimbote resulted in opposition and repression, culminating in the violent Chimbbotazo (labor union strike) of May 1973. Clarke suggests that this event marked a point of inflection in the history of the RGAF from which it never fully recovered.

Mark Rice shifts our attention to Cuzco and to an aspect of the RGAF that remains understudied: its tourism policy. Through a detailed examination of Plan COPESCO, the regime’s tourism development strategy,
Rice explores the tensions that the implementation of this policy generated in Cuzco, where regional support for tourism promotion, including the building of modern hotel infrastructure in Cuzco and Machu Picchu, faced opposition from the National Institute of Culture, a struggle that pitted regional developmental objectives against Lima-based cultural institutions. The promise of tourism-led regional development also soured when hopes for high-end tourism were confronted with the reality of the growing presence of “hippie” tourists in Cuzco and its environs. Rice concludes by underscoring the limits of the RGAF’s tourism policy, which, he argues, failed in its stated objective of providing employment to Cuzco’s indigenous population.

Finally, Stefano Varese offers a personal reflection on the impact of the reforms that targeted Amazonian indigenous peoples, reforms that he was involved in and helped design. Varese shows that the small group of anthropologists and other social scientists charged with developing the RGAF’s policies toward the Amazonian populations were working in a largely adverse context in which knowledge about the target groups was limited. Much of the initial work involved collating historical and ethnographic sources to map populations. Varese discusses the “revolutionary inventiveness” that went into creating categories such as the “Comunidad Nativa” while at the same time attempting to challenge understandings of Amazonia informed by conceptual frameworks derived from the cases of communities and populations from the Andean highlands. Varese concludes that these initiatives were successful not only in titling indigenous land in the Amazon but also in contributing to the development of ethnopolitical civil institutions that continue to play an important role in preserving the sovereignty of Native communities.

The originality and diversity of the studies included in this volume allow an opportunity to rethink military nationalism in Peru: its policies and institutions, its successes and failures, and its lasting legacies. Building on, but also departing from, the emphases on state institutions, economic processes, and political dynamics, these studies represent some of the most innovative scholarship being produced on this crucial period in Peruvian and Latin American history. New topics, actors, and regions are given attention in these essays, including, quite notably, the cultural dimensions of the revolutionary project and its legacies, the impact of structural reforms at the local level, the dynamics produced by the interaction between state policies and ordinary citizens
and labor and peasant organizations, and the careful consideration given to hitherto underexplored areas of the country such as Piura, Chimbote, or Amazonia.

Moving beyond debates about the “characterization” of the military regime (corporatist, Fascist, Nasserist, and the like) and the emphasis on its top-down and authoritarian nature, this volume represents a fresh and diverse intervention in the comparative study of both military power and projects of social transformation in Latin America. The debates around the degree to which the Peruvian military revolution actually succeeded in implementing its policies are illuminated with new evidence and arguments. In the same vein, various chapters in this volume highlight the skepticism and sometimes open hostility with which different social agents reacted to those reforms. What is beyond question, however, is that—as several chapters in this volume highlight—the package of reforms put forward by Velasco Alvarado and his collaborators was quite ambitious: they did attempt to radically transform all realms of Peruvian society, including land-tenure patterns, forms of political participation, the role of the state in the management of natural resources and the economy, and the relationship with foreign capital.

At the same time, it is also true that many of the reforms promoted by the military did not fulfill all their promises and failed to deliver the alleged benefits to the population. Multiple factors contributed to this: excessive bureaucratization, lack of understanding and knowledge about the social realities on the ground, opposition by various social actors, and the contradictions inherent in the very definition of the government’s goals. Although several reforms were clearly “leftist” (by the usual definition of what the “left” should promote) and, at least in theory, sought to promote the participation of the population, not all of them shared the same character. As some of the chapters show, there were cases in which the participatory and even the “nationalist” nature of the reforms were, at the very least, questionable. The gap between the ambition and the reality of the reforms is very clearly in evidence in the vivid if conflicted memories of the RGAF that resonate in Peruvian political affairs today.

We are confident that this set of contributions will renew scholarly interest in the Peruvian experiment. This was, we ought to remember, quite an extraordinary and unique initiative: in a context dominated by Latin American right-wing dictatorial regimes and the fight against Communism, the Peruvian armed forces actually embarked on a process aimed at achieving national liberation and promoting social justice
that drew on a sobering and unusually candid assessment of the deep historical and structural causes of social inequality and underdevelopment in the country and promoted popular mobilization as the means to achieve social and economic emancipation. That by itself should generate a great deal of interest among scholars and students. The originality of the topics and approaches represented in this volume will shed new light and spark new debates on this fascinating episode of contemporary Latin American history.

Notes

1. We are not including in this review of the literature the numerous articles, pamphlets, and books produced by the military government itself or its collaborators. For an early attempt to defend it, see Carlos Delgado, El proceso revolucionario peruano: Testimonio de lucha (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno, 1972). Unless otherwise noted, all translations in this introduction are our own.


3. Ibid., 61.


11. Ibid., 167.


13. For a similar assessment, see “Peru: Bourgeois Revolution and Class Struggle,” special issue, Latin American Perspectives 4, no. 3 (1977).

15. Ibid., 419.


17. Carlos Franco, ed., *El Perú de Velasco: De la cancelación del Estado oligárquico a la fundación del Estado Nacional*, 3 vols. (Lima: Centro de Estudios para el Desarrollo y la Participación, 1983). Although the date that appears on the copyright page is 1983, the books were printed in 1986. The research was conducted between 1980 and 1984.


