

# Pinto, Antônio Costa; Martinho, Francisco Carlos Palomanes (Org.)

*O Passado que não passa: a sombra das ditaduras  
na Europa do Sul e na América Latina*

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Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2013. 336p.

*The past re-emerges even when there  
is an agreement to forget it.*

Alexandra B. de Brito and Mario Snajder

South American historiography has been concerned with the question of national security dictatorships since their creation in the middle of the 1960s, and the question continues to have important developments. The characterization of the regimes – fascist, bureaucratic-authoritarian, civil-military, dictatorial, totalitarian, etc. –, the differentiation from previous dictatorships, the role of the military in politics, the actors, the national and international context, the influence and participation of the United States, the role played by the Doctrine of National Security (*Doutrina de Segurança Nacional* – DSN), the exhaustion of a model of capitalist accumulation, the role of entrepreneurs in the coups, the study of resistance to the coups, guerrilla movements, leftwing organizations, and the memories of activists have been studied by historians and receive attention in books and collections. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the question of the Latin American dictatorships definitely entered in another field referring to the debate about the memory policies created – or not – by post-dictatorship governments. In 2014 the Brazilian 1964 coup completed 50 years, this so consecrated ‘round’ date for discussion and reflection on the authoritarian legacy, or of how much ‘survived’ of the residues in Brazilian society of the regime established after the coup.

The book organized by Francisco Carlos Palomanes Martinho and Antônio Costa Pinto, *O passado que não passa: a sombra das ditaduras na*

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*Europa do Sul e na América Latina* (The Past That Does not Pass: the shadow of dictatorships in Southern Europe and Latin America), is dedicated to this theme. Consisting of ten chapters which discuss fundamental themes about the authoritarian legacy in various European and South American countries, the book deals with the re-emergence and interpretation of the authoritarian past during the democratic transitions in Italy, Spain, Portugal, Greece, and Brazil. The cases are debated in a dual manner: the forms in which the political elites appropriated the event and deal with it, and the presence of the past within society.

The central axis around which this work is organized is the attitude towards the authoritarian past, notably the questions related to transition justice. Its chapters are based on a strong theorization of the democratic transition and its conditionalities and it seeks to debate the hypothesis that the quality of contemporary democracies are strongly influenced by the mode in which societies in transition deal with the authoritarian past. The punishment of authoritarian elites, the dissolution of corresponding institutions, and the holding of individuals and the state responsible for the violation of human rights, are possible aspects in the scenario of the justice of transition or the establishment of 'politics of the past.'

According to the introduction by Costa Pinto, the volume is organized about three central topics, namely: authoritarian legacies, transition justice, and policies of the past (p.19). In the text, one of the two organizers seeks to clarify and establish limits between the conceptual definitions, associating them with each other.

*Authoritarian legacy* is understood to be "all the behavioral patterns, rules, relations, social and political situations, norms, procedures, and institutions, whether introduced or clearly reinforced by the immediately preceding authoritarian regime, which survived regime change..." (p.20). The chapters particularly refer to two legacies: the permanence of political elites which support authoritarian regimes and the preservation of repressive institutions.

*Transition Justice* is understood to be "a series of measures taken during the democratization process, going beyond the mere criminalization of the authoritarian elite and its repressive agents and collaborators and equally implying a wide diversity of extra-judicial efforts to eradicate the legacy of the previous repressive power, such as official historic investigations of the repression of authoritarian regimes, purges, reparations, dissolution of institutions, truth commissions and other measures taken during a democratic transition process," (apud Cesarini, p.22), or "transition justice is a component of a

regime change process, whose different facets are a full part of this uncertain and exceptional process which takes place between the dissolution of authoritarianism and the institutionalization of democracy” (p.23). It means that the decisions taken within the sphere of *transition justice* are not necessarily punitive. They can give rise to the reconciliation or to combine both things. Furthermore, they emphasize how transitions occur and the quality of democracy being proposed and established.

Finally, *politics of the past* is understood to be “a process in development, in which the elites and society review, negotiate, and at times quarrel in relation to past injustices, in terms of what is expected in relation to the meaning of the authoritarian past and previous injustices, in terms of what is expected to be achieved in the present and future quality of its democracies” (p.24). *Politics of the past* involve the form in which the past is raised in new democratic regimes. Moreover, the quality of democracy will depend on these attitudes, whether condemnatory or subtly critical. In the chapters of the book, it can be seen that in relation to *politics of the past*, rupture was less frequent than living with the remnants of authoritarianism, while the time elapsed between redemocratization and the establishment of a *politics of the past* also has to be considered to compare the different cases. The existence of multiple pasts confronted in recently-democratized societies leads to a diversity of forms of dealing with the authoritarian past ranging from reconciliation (an agreed or negotiated transition), with the establishment of reconciliation measures in relation to crimes committed by the state, even the creation of a purging justice (transition by rupture) with punitive measures.

During the various chapters the following questions are asked: do the cases studied try to “forget or revive the past?”, “hide or unveil the memory of authoritarianism and/or resistance?”, “face or avoid the authoritarian past?” and, finally, “is it possible to choose between confronting the past or forgetting it?” Costa Pinto observes that even after the consolidation of democracy “the old cleavages of transition do not disappear like a miracle: they can re-emerge in specific conjunctures” (p.29), and this is what leads us to understand the phrase that serves as an epigraph to the review: “The past re-emerges even when there is an agreement to forget it” (p.300), applied here to the Spanish reality.

The establishment of politics of the past depends on circumstances related to the strength of political parties; the agents who lead the transition; the singular traits of each dictatorship (related to the collective memory and the terror created within society); the duration of each dictatorship; the quality of the

previous democracy (political culture); self-criticism of actors (political and intellectual); a sudden or prolonged break with the authoritarian regime; the capacity of political actors, intellectuals, and media in including or removing the themes “politics of memory, transition justice, and the evaluation of the authoritarian legacy” from the agenda to be debated by society as a whole, amongst other factors mentioned.

In the introductory chapter, Costa Pinto compared the cases of Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece, the first three being the examples of long-lasting dictatorships, with personalized leaders and a high level of institutional innovation, while Greece was similar to a regime of exception. The conceptual definitions and the comparison attempted between the four transitions appearing in the chapter compensate the absence of depth in each case.

Marco Tarchi focuses on “The fascist past and democracy in Italy.” Involved was the fall of an authoritarian regime, the return of the pre-fascist ruling class, the differences between the north and south of the country, the ideological molds of each anti-fascist party (from the most moderate to the most radical) and, as a result, the different visions of transition justice, or the methods to “cleanse the fascists from the country” (p.51). Also referred to are details involving ‘reckoning’ –attacks on the symbols of the regime, the dissolution of regime institutions – and the purging policy in force in public administration. In the Italian case, also observed was the pressure exercised by the Allies to guarantee the judgment of those who had collaborated with the Germans. The public condemnation of the Mussolini regime and the acts of extreme violence found in the transitional process can also be explained by these pressures.

The chapter about transition justice in Portugal, written by Filipa Raimundo, deals with the criminalization of former members of the political police in the *Estado Novo*. It especially looks at the role of political parties seeking to elucidate how the party system was constructed when the question of transition justice entered the political agenda and how parties take positions in relation to punitive measures. Using synthetic frameworks the author verifies advances and setbacks in punitive measures, and simultaneously looks at the reflections in the legislation which regulated the process. She presents an analysis of daily and weekly press, electoral programs and the party press to evaluate the importance of the question.

Francisco Carlos Palomanes Martinho examines “Political elites of the *Estado Novo* and 25 April,” through a memorial built around the final president of the Council of Ministers of the *Estado Novo*, Marcello Caetano, in two

periods: 1980, the year of his death and 2006, the year of the centenary of his birth. The two periods are contextualized and help explain the “battle of memories” (apud Pollak, p.128). His text is supported by a wide-ranging bibliography about the politician and verifies the ambivalence of his trajectory, as well as questioning the possible ‘encapsulation’ of the memory of his government, which, according to Martinho, unjustly reduces the role of this character. The chapter neither rehabilitates Caetano nor the *Estado Novo*, but contributes to understanding the objectives of the regime and the “antics of memory” (p.155).

The case of Spain is covered by Carsten Humlebaek’s chapter as a case of a negotiated transition, in which the strong polarization of society in the dictatorial period resulted in the need for the reconciliation at the time of the fall of Francoism. According to Humlebaek: “The combination of the need to reconcile the nation with the fear of conflict was translated into an obsessive search for consensus as an indispensable principle for political change after Franco, but also made the principal actors abstain from any type of abrupt change which could be interpreted as revolutionary” (p.161). Humlebaek contextualizes the reappearance of the question at the turn of the twenty-first century, especially in the public sphere, and describes the organizations which emerged in relation to the question.

Dimitri Sotiropoulos deals with the Greek case and compares it with the transitions in Spain and Portugal. The chapter looks at the colonels’ regime, its defeat and the very severe application of transition justice which promoted the purging of institutions, including the Armed Forces. Equally he reveals, based on public opinion research, that Greek society does not have a precise memory of the rejection of the dictatorial regime. In his view, the Greek model of transition justice had a “rapid and measured” nature (p.212), which helps to explain the deletion or the attenuation of the memory about the regime.

The chapter dedicated to Brazil, written by Daniel Aarão Reis Filho, debates the amnesty law, approved in 1979, in relation to the “silences” which the legislation helped to produce (p.217), namely of the tortured and the tortured, the revolutionary proposals of the left and the support of society for the dictatorship. After this he considers the possibility of the revision of the Amnesty Law and observes that the arrival of old leftwing activists in power propelled “a questioning of the silences agreed in 1979” (p.224). Finally, Reis Filho asks if it is positive or not for Brazilian society to discuss these silences. In his view, debating the past is the “best form of thinking about the present and preparing for the future” (p.225).

Alexandra Barahona de Brito also looks at the Brazilian case, considering it one of the longest transitions in Latin America, where supposedly “the duration and rate of transition occurred more due to the action of the military than the pressure of civil society” (p.236). In her description of how the military guided the process and belittled the pressure of society at the end of the 1970s, Brito contributes one more silence, of the so many referred to by Reis Filho. The chapter, to the contrary of the others, expresses opinions without the due evidence, as well as proceeding with the description of processes with the use of not very clarifying adjectives, such as the one which describes the politics of Lula and Fernando Henrique Cardoso in relation to the past as “schizophrenic” (p.244 and p.246). Nevertheless, the chapter shows the advances in the direction of a politics of memory. Finally, the explanations about the motives which made the rhythm of the “transition justice” so slow in Brazil, given on page 253, appear once again the fruit of opinion and not the study of historical sources and the political culture of the country.

Chapter 9, by Leonardo Morlino, proposes a comparative analysis of the “Authoritarian legacies of the politics of the past and the quality of democracy in Southern Europe.” He returns to concepts and theories formulated and presented throughout the volume and suggest a relationship between “regime innovation, duration, and the type of transition” (p.271). His text presents data from public opinion in Southern European countries about the attitudes of society in relation to the authoritarian past and reflects on the quality of democracy in each country.

Finally, in the last chapter Alexandra Baharona de Brito and Mario Sznajder reflect on the “Politics of the past in Latin America and Southern Europe in comparative perspective.” This completes a volume which intended at every step to compare cases and extract common and singular experiences to explain the democratic transitions at the end of the twentieth century. Greece, Portugal, and Spain, as well as Argentina, Uruguay, and Chile, are examined in the chapter. The central approach is respect for transition and the establishment of mechanisms for auctioning the past. Equally it reflects on the legacies of the dictatorship in each country and how this legacy interferes in the implementation of transition justice.

Given a “past that does not pass” and the authoritarian remnants which remain latent in all the societies studied, the reading of the book makes us think a lot about the politics of the past established by democratic states about the role of the historian in this process. Since the politics of memory established by the state have been modified over time because they respond to the

concerns of the present and are molded by the concrete socio-historical context, the book leads to reflection on the profession and responsibility of the historian in light of these politics of memory established by the state and related to the traumatic processes experienced by societies. The problematic dimensions of the past are the raw material of the historian. For this, once democracy is consolidated, each new generation of historians will focus on the question of authoritarianism and the dictatorship and seek to add to the collection of information about the period. Based on this collection of information, historians have to reflect on the politics of memory and establish with the greatest precision possible the difference between the past which emanates from the rememorative interests of states probable forgetting, omission, and antics of memory which can be counterpoised to information raised by the historian based on sources and scientific research.

Review received on 31 March 2014. Approved on 19 May 2014.