# Introduction

*Fear: A Cultural and Political Construct*

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Efforts to understand the foundations and internal processes of public life, culture, and discourse are gaining importance in several disciplines. They inform democratic theory in political science, discussions in comparative literature and other cultural-critical disciplines, new approaches in ethics and jurisprudence, debates in philosophy, and empirical studies in sociology, anthropology, history, and communications. This book toils in the same vineyard: it examines civil society and political life, but "through a glass darkly," by focusing on what we may call the culture of fear that developed in a number of South American nations in the 1970s.

The culture of fear has not yet been systematically analyzed for those nations, nor even for places like Guatemala and El Salvador, despite the fact that it is central to the most vital matters of our day, those of life and death. The importance of the issue and the gap in the literature have led the various contributors to this book to delve into the social, psychological, and ideological underpinnings of the terror-laden regimes that spread in South America in the seventies and eighties. This book seeks to be a genuinely interdisciplinary work, with contributions from specialists in sociology, political science, psychology, literary studies, education, communications, and human rights. We were not daunted by the sheer catholicity of the enterprise. We believed instead that the time was ripe for a coordinated intellectual approach to an important issue.

In the United States and in other advanced industrial democracies,

there is a marked reluctance to consider fear as something other than a personal emotion and, hence, a phenomenon within the exclusive purview of one discipline: psychology. This reluctance, however, is itself a product of deep-seated social habits and political traditions. The decentralization of power, the exercise of self-governance in local communities, the existence of myriad voluntary associations, the separation of state and religion, the plurality of sects and creeds within religions, the possibility of rapid social and geographical mobility, and, above all, the functioning of representative institutions are among the factors (masterfully analyzed by Tocqueville a century and a half ago) that have relegated fear to being either an intimate or a transcendent experience. Free societies do suffer the occasional occurrence of collective frights or panics, but they do not know fear as the permanent and muffled undertone of public life.

This, unfortunately, is not the experience in large areas of the world where, since the end of World War II, dictatorships of all stripes, ranging from the unstable but recurrent military regimes of the Third World to the more thorough and longer-lived totalitarianisms of the now defunct Eastern bloc, have dominated. For decades, the populations of many countries have been subject to generalized or centralized violence; they have experienced the erosion of public values, of legal and even primary social bonds. Uncertainty, self-doubt, insecurity have been the staples of public life. In such contexts, fear is a paramount feature of social action; it is characterized by the inability of social actors to predict the consequences of their behavior because public authority is arbitrarily and brutally exercised.

This book is a contribution to the sociological and political understanding of fear; it is based on the collective experiences of one particular area of the world—the Southern Cone of Latin America—in the 1970s, when the four countries of the area (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay) were ruled by military regimes of a special kind.

Between the 1960s and the 1980s, successive military regimes in these countries transformed the social fabric. By means of systematic state terror that penetrated more deeply into society than ever before—even in previous regimes dominated by the military—these governments strove to dissolve or isolate civil institutions capable of protecting or insulating citizens from state power. The creation and implementation of terror, in turn, caused unprecedented levels of personal insecurity among citizens. A description of the depth, intensity, and multiple expressions of this

personal insecurity, and of the innovative and courageous efforts made to overcome the effects of pervasive fear forms the core of this book.

The product of a long-term effort, this book was begun in 1980 under the sponsorship of the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) in New York. The central theme of what eventually became a collection of studies about political fear emerged from research conducted in Argentina in 1979, a period marked by widely disseminated reports of abductions, disappearances, torture, and random executions by the security forces in that country. The researchers, Argentine political scientist Guillermo O'Donnell and Brazilian psychologist Cecilia Galli, interviewed a broad range of primarily middle-class Argentines and found the results disturbing. Their assumption, based on past experience, was that most of their interviewees would be vocal in their opposition to the actions of the government or, at a minimum, would contest official versions of events. Instead, the individuals they questioned were generally uncritical and professed ignorance or lack of concern about reported government abuses.

Hypothesizing that Argentines had come to accept conditions that they ordinarily would have judged unacceptable because of pervasive fear rather than apathy, the researchers urged scholars to undertake studies that would shed light on the dynamics of what they believed to be a "culture of fear." Consequently, at regular intervals between 1982 and 1984, U.S. and Latin American scholars and human-rights activists met at the SSRC to present and discuss papers that described the dynamics of state terror, the nature of political fear, and efforts within civil society to counter the effects of terror and fear.

As the political situation in the Southern Cone opened somewhat, scholars in these countries, on their own initiative, began undertaking empirical and theoretical studies of the same topics. Growing regional interest in exploring the impact of authoritarian rule on civil societies led the SSRC to sponsor an international conference on "The Culture of Fear," which was held in Buenos Aires in June 1985. By this time, civilian government had been restored in three of the four Southern Cone countries. Only Chile still remained under authoritarian rule, but it too was to experience a transition to democracy by the end of 1989. In Buenos Aires, a number of the participants from the New York seminars joined colleagues from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay for a wide-ranging discussion on fear and society. The chapters in this book are the end product of this long process. They explore both past and present; they

reconstruct the dynamics of fear by looking at its individual victims and its broad political, social, and cultural legacies; they examine both the creation of fear through systems of state terror and the means by which people managed to overcome fear in their everyday lives.

The complexity and multiple dimensions of a theme like "the culture of fear" required abandoning conventional approaches in sociology and political science to the study of authoritarianism and military regimes. Because the situation that developed in the Southern Cone in the seventies was unprecedented; because the military dictatorships that befell Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay were quite different from the dictatorships in these and other Latin American nations in the past; because the depth and scope of repression (symbolized by torture and disappearances) were staggering, fear became a salient research theme and dictated a new turn in the development of the social sciences in Latin America.

Gruesome as the topic was, it nevertheless promised to yield important analytic dividends. In particular, the study of fear allowed researchers to bridge the gap between macrosocial structures and processes, on the one hand, and microsocial phenomena, like the interactions of everyday life, on the other. The problem of fear opened new vistas on politics and on the relations between state and society, and between power and its subjects. The aim of the collective research project—and of this book—has been to understand the experience of fear under these regimes in several dimensions: the structural and institutional framework of the experience, the forms for producing and overcoming fear in society, the social psychology of fear, the effects on the subjects and perpetrators.

Four major goals dominate our discussions about fear and society: first, defining and characterizing the culture-of-fear construct; second, examining the differences and similarities in the practices of repression in the different political entities where it can be said that a culture of fear was created; third, analyzing the differences and similarities in the stages and manifestations of fear and, perhaps most important, in the conditions under which fear is eroded and eliminated; and, finally, determining the legacies—political, social, economic, cultural, and psychological—of fear for the perpetrators as well as for the subjects once constitutional government has been restored.

In the first part of the book, a political scientist, Manuel Antonio Garretón, and a sociologist, Norbert Lechner, try to situate fear in relation to general political phenomena and, more particularly, in rela-

tion to the specific characteristics of the military dictatorships that pre-
vailed in the Southern Cone in the seventies and eighties. Fear is inti-
mately connected to what some scholars consider the political question
par excellence—namely, the question of order. But the question of order
prompts an array of alternative responses, depending on the culture
within which it is posed. Thus, Lechner argues that in Latin America di-
versity is perceived not as plurality but as disorder. The consequence
is overarching fear of the ubiquitous other ("chaos," "communism"),
which is regarded as an invader and under whose rubric diverse social
fears are subsumed. Authoritarianism "solves" the problem of order not
by the suppression but by the manipulation of fear. Yet this appropria-
tion of fear by authoritarian regimes, which eagerly seek the forceful
integration of society, paradoxically promotes social disintegration. All
social and political systems have to cope with fear, but authoritarian, as
opposed to democratic, regimes fail to process fear in creative ways.
From this perspective, democracy must be considered not only as the
domain of substantive and procedural rules but also as a domain where
the unpredictability of the other is not seen as a threat to the self, and
hence as a source of fear, but rather as a condition and an opportunity
for the self's own development.

In addition to covering general considerations about fear, politics,
and culture, Garretón's opening chapter proposes a scheme for analyz-
ing the nature and evolution of fear under the military dictatorships of
the Southern Cone. It provides distinctions between fears (for example,
those due to uncertainty and those due to certainty) and between the
subjects of fear (for example, political winners and losers). It then applies
these distinctions to the various phases that the military regimes under-
went: an initial and predominantly repressive phase; a transformational
phase; a critical phase; a terminal phase; and a phase of transition to
nonauthoritarianism. In each case the predominant patterns of fear and
of resistance to fear are examined. Garretón also discusses the legacy of
fear and the steps taken to overcome that legacy.

Based on the analytical schemes developed in Part I, the second part of
the book goes on to examine the specific means of instilling fear in each
military regime and its impact on the victims and makers of terror. This
part opens with Patricia Weiss Fagen's study of the apparatus of repres-
sion in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay. Drawing material from
each of the countries, she describes the military justifications for seizing
power and ruling above the law: that the nation was engaged in a war
against an ideological enemy that, like a cancer, would destroy society if

not extirpated. This theme persisted, as is dramatized by the fact that the most intense repression occurred when a significant armed opposition no longer remained. Fagen analyzes the ideology and the practice of internal war developed by the various military regimes. She discusses the transformation of state institutions and the exposure of civil society to state repression, with emphasis on military organization and security systems.

The chapters in Part II deal with the human cost of repression and fear-mongering. The authors explore the cultural, psychological, and even the gender dimensions of fear in situations of political repression. Sofía Salimovich, Elizabeth Lira, and Eugenia Weinstein bring to their chapter the experiences of the Fundación de Ayuda Social de las Iglesias Cristianas, an organization that has been working with exiles and with victims of torture in Chile. Their chapter describes fear in the face of arrests, torture, and exile. They discuss fear in an atomized, privatized society in which it was dangerous to be identified with the left, past or present. Their focus, however, is on the individual victims whose experience with repression caused lasting psychological damage. These victims often lost their ability to cope with or gauge reality, or to recover their sense of self. According to the authors, changes in Chilean society as a whole inhibited interpersonal relations, greatly augmented feelings of personal insecurity, and changed social values.

In Chapter 5, Juan Rial explores three themes: the vulnerability of Uruguayan society to the imposition of authoritarian power, the centrality of prisons in Uruguayan repression, and the factors that both engendered and counteracted the culture of fear. Political prisoners in Uruguay were generally not killed but held for years in total institutions whose primary purpose was to destroy their personality and individuality. Although the spiral of fear began with and was most strongly enforced in the prisons, the ultimate objective, as Rial elaborates, was to spread insecurity and apprehension throughout the population. The success of the Uruguayan regime in this regard was significant: it created a society that was silent, atomized, and, at times, without hope. Acknowledging this general sense of insecurity, Rial goes on to show why islands of resistance ultimately developed within the privatized society.

Jean Franco attempts to furnish the conceptual underpinnings of fear and repression, and to place the Southern Cone experiences within the wider sphere of what she characterizes as an ethical vacuum in postmodern society. She first develops the argument that current methods of social control by means of extermination have grown out of scientific ex-

perimentation. She goes on to examine the actions of victims and per-
petrators of violence as manifestations of gender differentiation. Moving
from testimony related to incarceration and torture in Argentina, Chile,
and Uruguay, she examines the resistance of the mothers' movement.
Franco states that the mothers' struggle, based on an ethics of survival,
transformed gender-associated weakness into strength.

The third part of this book is the most extensive, for it deals with
what, for the participants in the project, were perhaps the most engaging
and fascinating questions: Who was immune to intimidation? What
processes led some to conquer fear? What explains recorded instances of
courage in the public and private spheres? What types of resistance
developed?

A long tradition within sociology suggests that resistance to estab-
lished orders of domination—including those that seem the most terror-
istic—is not a sporadic or exceptional occurrence but an everyday prac-
tice. Oftentimes, even the most spectacular successes of control are
diverted and diffused by those who make use of the imposed system.
Subdued populations are resourceful, even though their efforts may not
always bring about the abolition of bondage.

Students of culture have often stressed the capacity of the arts to
convert a dominant order through metaphor, transposing it to another
realm of meaning. Art remains "other" within a system that it assimilates
and that assimilates it. The chapter by Franco in Part II and two chapters
in Part III, by Joan Dassin and by Beatriz Sarlo, highlight the importance
of literature as an index of changes that take place in people living in fear.
Thus, literature is both a topic and a resource in the study of the culture
of fear. Among the issues that require examination, the following stand
out: changes in genres, the relationship between official and oppositional
texts and between official and unofficial discourse, changes in the social
positions of the authors, the relationship between author and public, the
impact of censorship and the importance of self-censorship, the com-
parison of literature under conditions of internal and external exile, the
consequences of terror for literature (from the shipwreck of literary
generations to the universalization of regional literature through the
diaspora), and, finally, the implications of a high-risk situation for the
intensity of commitment to cultural activities.

Other studies included in Part III remind us that similar processes also
occur in the everyday "arts of living" and in other institutions. These
practices amount to the invention of a poetics of resistance among
women, students, workers, human-rights activists. Ironically, in the long

run, the experience of repression may produce an increased understand-
ing of, and appreciation for, an ideal of public life in a democratic
society. Even at its most depressing stage, a culture of fear is not without
paradox. Repressive, closed societies afford an opportunity to express
and signal true intensities of commitment to certain values precisely
because in them the manifestations of criticism, from the mild to the
severe, carry some price tag or penalty. The sense of excitement and of
participation generated under such conditions contrasts with the bore-
dom often characteristic of political life in institutionalized democracies
and, of course, with the hopelessness and despondency among those
who have adapted to authoritarian regimes.

Therefore, an indispensable part of the study of fear is examining the
processes whereby the sense of inevitability is conquered—that is, exam-
ining dynamic factors in culture, social structure, and personality that
put iron in the soul. This is the gist of Javier Martínez's contribution. His
study of the protest movement in Chile is a prototype of the kind of
sociological research that we hope to encourage with the publication of
this book. Readers will notice that Martínez's empirical research has a
tight fit with the theoretical framework developed by Juan Corradi in the
closing chapter.

In studying resistance to fear, two related tasks must be tackled: on
the one hand, the examination of macrosociological processes, notably
the study of failures, fissures, and contradictions in the sources of fear
(especially state action), and, on the other, the study of resistance emerg-
ing from below, from minor challenges to full-fledged protest move-
ments, with special attention to the mechanisms that insulate actors
from fear and to their recipes for coping. Both case studies and compara-
tive analyses seem indispensable for shuttling back and forth between
the two levels, as shown by the sequence of chapters in Part III. What
they reveal is that a basic human drive pushes us to find those moments
when the tables are turned and justice is restored. Toward the end of the
book, some of the chapters explicitly honor this impulse and, as in the
case of Emilio Mignone's chapter on justice and compensation in Argen-
tina, turn it into a topic. But beyond such sentiments, our goal is to
determine those conditions under which genuine democratic power,
which involves the ability to act in concert without fear, is renewed.

Hugo Fruhling's work explains how two Chilean human-rights orga-
nizations managed to provide partial alternatives to the Pinochet re-
gime's policies of social control. These organizations, operating under
Church auspices, created relatively protected institutional spaces within

which adversaries of the government could work. Fruhling underscores the importance of these organizations' ability to break the monopoly of state-run communications, to provide legal and material assistance, and, most important, to support grass-roots efforts of resistance. Although these activities helped to undermine the legitimacy of the regime and facilitated the reconstruction of organized political activity in Chile, Fruhling concludes that the structure and mandate of human-rights organizations limit their capacity to bring about redemocratization.

Focusing on the Brazilian metalworkers of São Bernardo and Diadema, Maria Helena Moreira Alves describes how one sector of Brazilian society largely overcame atomization and fear through the process of building a democratic labor movement. Like all trade-union members subject to the repression of the Brazilian national security state during the 1960s and 1970s, the metalworkers were denied previously won benefits and prohibited from organizing and striking. Alves emphasizes the importance of two factors in the union's unequal battle against both government and corporations to regain these rights: the moral and material impact of widespread grass-roots support for the strikers and, more important, the commitment to participatory democracy and solidarity within the union.

Exploring the gradual loss of fear and the development of organized opposition in Uruguay, Carina Perelli analyzes the political trajectory of secondary school students. In contrast to the Brazilian trade unionists described by Alves, who were targets of repression under authoritarian rule, the secondary school students in Perelli's work were the objects of governmental resocialization and reeducation policies. She examines the situation in generational terms and in relation to the government's effort to transform the previously dominant ideology. Identifying three generations of actors: the "autistic adults," the *marrano* youth," and the countercultural adolescents, Perelli describes the means they found to preserve or create forms of opposition. According to Perelli, the determination of the authorities to eliminate the old ideological order, combined with their own inability to create a new order, facilitated the students' ability to develop countermessages of their own. What began as a clandestine and symbolic opposition ultimately took the form of organized political militance.

As so many of our chapters indicate, the leaders of these repressive, terroristic states attempted to impose on citizens a certain type of social life. Did these fear-mongering regimes ultimately succeed or fail? In several cases, they succeeded only in destroying the existing social and

moral fabric without generating viable alternatives. As their own diffi-
culties and failures drove them out of power, more "civil" societies
emerged. The success of democracy depends very much on outside
political and economic conditions. But internal factors are equally signif-
icant. Democratic societies will be the product of ongoing social con-
flicts. We must find out how, in the countries of the Southern Cone,
defensive reactions from the authoritarian period can be transformed
into social action within the framework of democratic institutions and
how such struggles can create a new public sphere.

Our book closes with a look ahead and beyond, seeking clues in
theories and historical events outside Latin America. It reflects on the
inevitability and the recurring cycles of fear in society, its ideological
roots, and the forms of social organization that are built under and
against fear. After rejecting absolutist modes of exit from fear, Corradi
surveys the dangerous political terrain that communities that have just
emerged from fear-mongering regimes must tread. On the one hand, a
symbolic cut between past and present must be made as a form of ritual
renewal. On the other hand, pressures build up to prevent such a collec-
tive catharsis from becoming itself a new source of insecurity. The
tension between punishment and reconciliation—the thorny issue of
political justice under successor regimes—leads us to explore new no-
tions, such as that of transitional justice, and to recast, in the light of such
notions, the concept of democracy. A democratic system able to conquer
and contain fear must rest on a network of social relations that generates
moral convictions sufficiently strong to weather the deep economic and
institutional crises that lie ahead.