

Review / Reseña

Larrabure, Manuel. *The Latin American Crisis and the New Authoritarian State*. London: Routledge, 2022. 216 pp.

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This year marks half a century since the coup d'état against the democratically elected government of Salvador Allende and the beginning of Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship, which inaugurated the neoliberal project in Latin America. Since then, the dream of state-led industrialization has been gradually dismantled to establish a market regime that is both "free" and institutionally guaranteed by the state. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, following a strong wave of social and popular mobilizations, a regional political project was born to end what former Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa called "the long and sad neoliberal night." In 2005, with a triumphant air, at a summit in Mar del Plata, the presidents of Venezuela, Argentina, and Brazil, with the support of several political and social organizations in the region, succeeded in stopping George W. Bush in his attempt to establish a "free trade area for the Americas." "Alca-Alca-rajo" ("The hell with the ALCA", the acronym of Área de Libre Comercio de las Américas) was the clamor that sealed the temporary triumph of the post-neoliberal "Pink Tide." However, this promising horizon soon languished when the region faced the end of a period of trade bonanza and neoliberal regimes returned to power in part of the region.

What factors can help us explain the birth, development, and end of the Pink Tide cycle? What has been the role of social movements in these processes of political and social change? Why did these dynamics lead to a crisis, and what paths is the continent taking to overcome it? In *The Latin American Crisis and the New Authoritarian State*, Manuel Larrabure explores these questions through an analytical framework inscribed in what he calls “new Latin American Marxism.” In outlining this framework, Larrabure draws from the tradition of Latin American critical thought and discusses the liberal institutionalist tradition, the more orthodox versions of Marxism, as well as postmodern and post-developmental proposals. In essence, it is a work of comparative political sociology that updates the debate on the relationship between political institutions, economic regimes, and social movements in Latin America.

Indeed, Larrabure makes a significant contribution to the ongoing debate on the nature of the Pink Tide and its relationship with neoliberalism, social movements, and democracy. His main argument unfolds in the analysis of the causes and consequences of the crisis. On one hand, the author argues that it is the result of the restrictions of the *neo-structuralism bargain*, which expresses the limitations of the pact between *post-capitalist struggles* and progressive governments. In the words of Larrabure, there was a “misalignment” or “disjuncture” between the Pink Tide governments and the social movements regarding their understanding and expectations of democracy, development, and progress. On the other hand, this rupture, in the context of the commodity boom crisis, opened the door to a type of new authoritarianism, which he calls *the new authoritarian state*. Although the book expresses a fundamental concern about this new political horizon, he also conceptualizes a second way of responding to the crisis, inspired above all by the Chilean case, of a *new democratic road to socialism*.

Thus, after a critical review of the literature on the Pink Tide, the author designs these four analytical tools (neo-structuralism bargain, post-capitalist struggles, the new authoritarian state, and the new democratic road to socialism) in order to study the cases that make up the empirical section of his work: the popular economy in Venezuela, the student movement in Chile, the worker-recuperated enterprises movement in Argentina, and the free transit movement in Brazil. Drawing on more than ten years of fieldwork, Larrabure combines interview and focus group analysis, discourse analysis, comparative politics, and statistical and sociopolitical analysis to interrogate these cases through three dimensions: *praxis, intersubjectivity, and relationality*. In so doing, he follows the legacy of seminal authors of Latin American social thought, such as René Zavaleta, Guillermo O’Donnell, and Paulo Freire.

Larrabure's work is organized in two parts. In the first three chapters, he develops an analytical proposal through a rigorous discussion of the literature on the left turn in Latin America. In Chapter 1, he reviews the historical background of the debate and the role of the ideas that emerged in the region in the wake of post-war populisms, state-led industrialization endeavors, and theories of modernization and dependency. This chapter illustrates how the experiences of popular mobilization and regional political power, such as the Sandinistas in Nicaragua and Allende's Chilean road to socialism, challenged these approaches. Moreover, with this historical intellectual map in the background, Larrabure examines the birth of the neo-Marxist tradition in the 1970s, and defends its analytical virtues vis-à-vis the liberal institutionalist/mainstream, social democratic, and orthodox Marxist schools. In his words, the strengths of the neo-Marxist tradition to which he adheres can be summarized as "a complex and nuanced understanding of the capitalist state and institutions of liberal democracy, an expansive understanding of the class relation, the centrality of praxis in the process of social transformation and the primacy of local/national conditions in the analysis of the region" (9).

In Chapter 2, Larrabure takes a step forward and unravels the primary elements of the Pink Tide. On the one hand, he addresses the debate on the character and nature of the social and popular struggles that underpinned the Pink Tide. Again, in contrast to the main coordinates of the Latin American debate, the author defines them as *post-capitalist struggles*, giving an account at the same time of their oppositional and transcendent nature. Unlike the struggles of the past, he argues, these are characterized by radical democratic participation, transformative demands, and political ambiguity. At the same time, he examines the nature of the relationship between this set of struggles and the institutional face of the Pink Tide: the progressive governments. Using the concept of the *neo-structuralism bargain*, he explains that although these governments made numerous concessions in terms of social and economic rights, they set limits to the full democratization of the state. Finally, this chapter opens the discussion around a *new democratic road to socialism*, which is conceived as the alternative to the New Authoritarianism.

In the last section of the first part, Chapter 3 presents an analysis of Latin American political economy to clarify the relationships between economic crisis and political authoritarianism. Interestingly, in addition to examining the dynamics of this relationship in the rise and fall of the Pink Tide, Larrabure contrasts them with the economic fluctuations of the "lost decade" (1980s) and the neoliberal period. To do so,

he examines the evolution of macroeconomic indicators linked to the “profitability horizon” of Latin America and the Caribbean, on the one hand, and of Chile, Brazil, Argentina, and Venezuela, on the other. The main conclusion of this exercise is that the economic crisis of 2011-2019 is comparable but not as severe as that of the lost decade of the 1980s. Therefore, it is a crisis of a different scope and nature than those which in the past led to fascism after the great war or the bureaucratic authoritarianism of the 60s and 70s (theorized by O’Donnell). His prognosis, therefore, is that Latin America would endure a period of instability and political, economic, and social disorder in which authoritarian politics perpetuate the neoliberal management of the economy, seek alliances with popular sectors, and renounce the aspiration of a bureaucratic-authoritarian order. In other words, this new authoritarian state seeks not to pacify and de-mobilize, but rather embraces a degree of “controlled chaos” as a strategy for domination and accumulation.

In the second section of the book, the analytical considerations are enriched through case studies that support and test the theoretical arguments advanced in the first section. Chapter 4 reveals the complexities of the “Peronist Class Bargain” through a study of Argentina’s factory recuperation movement. The author argues that this movement, born out of the 2001 crisis, interweaves complex and contradictory relationships with Peronism in general and Kirchnerism in particular. Thus, he finds that the political and social variants of this movement express democratic experiments and demands that exceed the Peronist compromise. Chapter 5 explores a movement born a decade later, the so-called “June uprisings” of 2013, which were ignited by the demand for free transit in Brazil. He argues that this uprising re-oriented the direction of political change by confronting the Workers’ Party (PT) with its own limits while opening structures of opportunity to the right wing. Larrabure studies these changes in the light of three key events in the recent history of Brazil: the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff, the imprisonment of Luiz Inacio Lula Da Silva (Lula), and the coming to power of the far-right Jair Bolsonaro.

In the following two chapters, Larrabure examines two cases that, in his view, constitute counter-tendencies to regional trends in terms of their future horizon and the power of their past. Chapter 6 deals with what arguably was the most important antecedent of the vertiginous social and political process that eventually triggered a constituent process in Chile: the “penguin revolution” of 2006. Larrabure describes the innovations in the repertoires of mobilization and political organization and analyzes the movement’s tensions with the Chilean center-left. Finally, he examines the role of

the leftist coalition Frente Amplio and the call for a constituent assembly. Chapter 7 depicts the twists and turns of the Venezuelan road to socialism, which, according to the author, was the only Pink Tide project that went beyond the neo-structuralist bargain and, at the same time, the only one that has degenerated into a type of authoritarianism which, although expressing new modalities, somewhat approximates the “old” bureaucratic-authoritarian style of the 60s and 70s. Larrabure reveals some of the mediations of this dramatic turn through the rich and innovative expressions of the popular economy that became part of the Chavista imaginary and its vision of twenty-first century socialism.

Finally, in Chapter 8, the author presents his conclusions by comparing the cases analyzed through three dimensions connected to Latin American Marxism: intersubjectivity, popular education, and state transformation. These dimensions are analyzed taking into account three factors: cross-sectorial alliances, democratic learning, and popular institution building. His conclusions reiterate his main argument:

Contrary to mainstream arguments in support of the pink tide, particularly the more moderate governments, the result of the neostructuralist bargain was the progressive erosion of democratic institutions, increased social conflict and economic polarization. The contradictions and limitations found at the core of the neo-structuralist bargain unfolded into two new political paths for the region. The first and more dominant path became the “anti-bureaucratic authoritarian”, best expressed in the wave of right-wing governments that began to take power in the region following the end of the commodities boom, notably the governments of Bolsonaro in Brazil, Macri in Argentina, and Piñera in Chile. [. . .] The second political path that unfolded was the creation of a new democratic road to socialism, best expressed in Venezuela’s Bolivarian Revolution up to 2014 and more recently the FA in Chile. (146)

After the completion of this manuscript, Latin America continued to experience some transformative processes that could be interpreted in light of Larrabure’s theses and others that raise new hypotheses. For instance, the recent emergence of a “Second Pink Tide” with progressive governments in countries such as Mexico, Colombia, Chile, Argentina, Bolivia, and Brazil, suggests questions about the liminal character of the crisis of the neo-structuralist bargain proposed by the author. Although the phenomenon of the new authoritarianism left in place strong dynamics of democratic regression, it is not clear that these could end up imposing themselves on the still relevant institutional projects of the center-left and the persistence of post-capitalist social struggles. At the same time, recent events have brought to the forefront the strength of Larrabure’s argument on the crisis and the new authoritarianism. Among them were Bolsonaro’s reluctance to accept his electoral defeat and the violent assault

on the Three Powers Square in Brasilia; the impeachment of Pedro Castillo after his attempt to shut down Congress in Peru and the subsequent repression of protests against the new government of Dina Boluarte; and the stripping of citizenship from poets, priests, and human rights activists in Nicaragua by Daniel Ortega. It is also true that Larrabure's thesis points to a general direction towards a historical horizon, and that this process does not necessarily follow a linear logic.

Moreover, emancipatory struggles in the region continue to express several civilizational horizons, and it remains to be seen whether all of them, with their references to multiple identities, autonomies, and ecologies, will eventually follow the direction of new socialism as Larrabure suggests. As he explains, many of these movements will continue to see their potency contained by the limits and institutional arrangements of States that continue to adhere to neoliberal social relations. The most emblematic case after the publication of the book was the setback suffered by the Chilean constituent assembly in the plebiscite on the new constitution. At the same time, the most recent progressive experiences of Mexico and Colombia seem to reflect the same type of neostructuralist bargain, in which the axes of the neoliberal accumulation model are only partially revised. The question, then, is whether the progressive reflexes (Brazil, Argentina, Bolivia) and their new faces (Colombia, Mexico, and Chile) succeed in re-editing a new democratic social pact or, as Larrabure posits, irremediably follow the destiny of "misalignment," thus feeding another cycle of the new authoritarianism or the democratic 'radicalism' of post-capitalist projects.

In sum, *The Latin American Crisis and the New Authoritarian State* makes an important original contribution to the debate on the Pink Tide in Latin America and, more generally, on the domination-emancipation dialectic in the region's democratic horizon. It is an analytically suggestive work, rich in nuance and supported by an extensive empirical work that provides compelling evidence for the theses proposed by the author. Hence, the book helps us to untangle some of the knots in the long debate on progressive politics in Latin America and opens new avenues of research for scholars interested in democracy, social movements, and progressive governments in the region. Half a century after the violent interruption of the Chilean road to socialism and the tragic death of Salvador Allende, this book shows us the new contours of the authoritarian road but also the potential for an emancipatory future for Latin America that is already contained in the experimentation and struggles of post-capitalist movements.