Introduction

On a spring morning in November 1974 in Santiago de Chile, two bishops traveled to the "lion's den." As the leaders of the Pro-Peace Committee, one of the first Chilean organizations to offer relief to the victims of the military's abusive state practices, Fernando Ariztía and Helmut Frenz – the first a Chilean Catholic, the second a German Lutheran – headed to meet with the junta's leader, General Augusto Pinochet. Little more than a year prior, a military junta had orchestrated the violent overthrow of Salvador Allende, the country's first elected socialist leader. In the process of scheming his way to the head of the Chilean junta, Pinochet had devised a widespread terror apparatus that tortured, imprisoned, and killed thousands of suspected so-called *subversivos* and *terroristas*.

The bishops, carrying a thick file that detailed the extent of the state horrors, were determined to get answers. To their surprise, Pinochet greeted them alone in his office. They began by showing pictures of victims tortured by the National Intelligence Directorate (*Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional* (DINA)), diplomatically describing what was going on as "physical pressure." After a few references to the sanitized phrasing, the Chilean leader interjected: "Do you mean to say torture?" They acknowledged they did. Pinochet stood up to conclude the meeting, but not without first distilling his operating rationale. "The [Chilean] people have been attacked by the bacteria of communism, which I must eradicate ... They must be tortured, for that is the only way to make them sing. Torture is necessary to root out communism."[1]

[1] Helmut Frenz, *Mi vida chilena: Solidaridad con los oprimidos* (Santiago: LOM, 2006), 7–16.

It was a chilling admission. And one that stuck with Helmut Frenz, whose path to that November morning summit with "the Lion" was marked by a string of revelatory personal experiences that would shape his career-defining embrace of human rights. After arriving in Chile in 1965 as an immigrant to head a parish in a German community, Frenz ascended the ranks to lead the Lutheran Church. The 1973 coup prompted his conversion to the language and practice of human rights. In the coup's aftermath, Frenz tried to solve a massive refugee crisis and helped found the Pro-Peace Committee, which provided legal and social services to Pinochet's victims. He shepherded refugees to embassies, sheltered *subversivos* in his home, and publicly denounced the military's use of torture. The junta declared him *persona non grata* and forced him back to Germany.

Intended to silence a dissident, exile backfired in ways that Pinochet did not foresee. Soon after Frenz returned to his homeland in 1975, he testified as a witness before a United Nations body investigating rights abuses in Chile. He told the commission about his 1974 meeting where Pinochet had argued that torture not only took place in Chile but that it was a necessary evil.[2] Although he recognized that the Bible makes "no mention of human rights" and that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 1948 falls "completely beyond the horizon of the Bible," he concluded that "divine rights constitute human rights." Like many Christians at the time, Frenz came to believe, as he put it, "that defending human rights and a commitment to human dignity were … [integral to] preaching the Gospel."[3] Inspired and educated by his clashes on the front lines of South American state violence, Frenz committed the next ten years of his life to the promotion of international human rights as the head of the German branch of Amnesty International. He was not alone.

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The concern of hundreds of thousands of people across the Western world over rising state violence in Latin America triggered an unprecedented turn to a global politics of human rights in the 1970s. In an

[2] Annex no. 4, Testimony of Bishop Helmut Frenz, session held on January 12, 1976, in UN Doc. E/CN.4/1188, February 4, 1976, 8; interview with Helmut Frenz, *Project Cien Entrevista* (Museo de la Memoria, Santiago, unedited).

[3] Helmut Frenz's speech was reprinted as "Human Rights: A Christian Viewpoint," *Christianity and Crisis*, vol. 36, no. 11 (June 21, 1976), 149–51.

unusual convergence, activists, exiles, and diplomats in Latin America, the United States, and Europe found a new common cause in the practice of human rights. They used this new moral and political vocabulary to challenge prevailing notions of state sovereignty and social activism, blurring the borders of the nation-state to endow an individual with a set of rights protected by international law. No single region of the world played a more pivotal role in these sweeping changes than the Americas, which were both the target of human rights advocacy and the site of a series of monumental developments for regional and global human-rights politics.

This story explores how and why transnational and local actors began to use the lexicon of human rights in order to create a distinctly global version of human rights politics by the end of the decade. It connects the voices and experiences of a diverse array of people from both the Global North and Global South, including church and solidarity activists, political exiles, members of Amnesty International, Ford Foundation officers, international lawyers, and officials at the United Nations and the Organization of American States. In uncovering this intertwined history, it examines how such varied actors gave meaning to the human rights norms promulgated after the Second World War in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 1948.

This meaning-making process started in earnest with the tightening of military rule and torture in Brazil in 1968, and it accelerated after the 1973 Chilean coup brought what many began to describe as massive state human rights abuses. It then deepened after the Argentine coup of 1976 in reaction to widespread incidents of state-sponsored "disappearances" – the detention and dispossession of victims without a trace.[4] These were pivotal events for clergy and Marxists in South America, many of whom were forced into exile; their personal testimonies of state repression animated the work of activists and diplomats in the North. This was especially the case in the United States, where fears of US intervention-ism in Latin America dovetailed with discomfort over US conduct in the Vietnam War and revelations of US support for repressive anti-Communist dictatorships like the ones in Greece and South Korea. And

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[4] A full analysis would also include Uruguay, but that work will be left to future histo-rians, and will necessarily build on Vania Markarian's *The Left in Transformation: Uruguayan Exiles and Latin American Human Rights Networks 1967–1984* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2005) and Debbie Sharnak, "'De Luz y Lucha' in Uruguay: Contesting the International History of Human Rights" (Ph.D. dissertation: University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2017).

in Europe, the fall of Allende amplified bonds of solidarity with sympathetic Western European social democratic governments, who in turn formed alliances with solidarity and human rights groups like Amnesty International to denounce state violence in South America.

In these ways, the 1970s was a turning point in the history of the twentieth century. Long overshadowed by the drama of the 1960s and the Cold War, the decade ushered in a number of structural transformations in the global order. The buzzword was one of "interdependence": people began to feel the accelerating globalization of the world, including the deterritorialization of capital markets, the restructuring of the postwar Bretton Woods economic order, and the expansion of multinational corporations throughout the globe.[5] Technological improvements, such as the rapid advance of jet travel and the thickening of a global telecommunications network throughout the 1960s, markedly increased contact between people from disparate parts of the world. Wealthier citizens of the Global North traveled to the Global South with regularity, not only for leisure and tourism but also as members of the Peace Corps, missionaries, technocrats, scholars, and exchange students.[6]

The intensification of cross-border exchanges was reflected in a proliferation of non-state actors dedicated to global issues. Human rights activism can be seen as part and parcel of the dramatic expansion of "new" social movements that worked above, below, and at times alongside governments to push for women's rights, the environment, humanitarian relief, and development. Of course, transnational activism also took insidious forms, as revealed by the allure of terrorism to religious extremists.[7]

[5] Daniel J. Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed: The Remaking of American Foreign Relations in the 1970s* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015). For a longer theoretical framework, see Saskia Sassen, *Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006). On multinationals, see Alfred D. Chandler and Bruce Mazlish, *Leviathans: Multinational Corporations and the New Global History* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005) and Richard J. Barnet and Ronald E. Müller, *Global Reach: The Power of the Multinational Corporations* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1974).

[6] On the age of jet travel, see Jennifer Van Vleck, *Empire of the Air: Aviation and the American Ascendancy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 239–80. On the peace corps, see Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffman, *All You Need Is Love: The Peace Corps and the Spirit of the 1960s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998). On the global telecommunications infrastructure, see David Held, Anthony McGrew, David Goldblatt, and Jonathan Perraton, *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics and Culture* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 342–6.

[7] See, e.g., Niall Ferguson, Charles S. Maier, Erez Manela, and Daniel Sargent, eds., *The Shock of the Global: The 1970s in Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University

By one metric, the number of non-governmental organizations sky-rocketed from less than 3,000 in 1972 to almost 13,000 in 1984. Scholars in the moment began to speak, with some hyperbole, of the birth of global civil society.[8] States joined transnational activists in systems of what today we call "global governance" to tackle issues of population control (the World Fertility Survey started in 1972), environmentalism (the United Nations Environmental Program was established in 1973), gender equality (the UN Decade for Women launched in 1975), and disease eradication like smallpox (certified in 1979).[9] Testifying to the newfound recognition of transnational advocates and the salience of human rights, Amnesty International won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1977.

Amnesty's Nobel acceptance speech singled out countries in Latin America where "emergency laws have been misused to legalize brutal repression – even when by objective standards there are no emergencies."[10] State violence in Brazil, Chile, and Argentina created what this book calls 'sovereign emergencies,' disruptions in international order caused by the misplaced faith dictators placed in sovereignty as an

Press, 2010); Akira Iriye, "The Making of a Transnational World," in *Global Interdependence: The World after 1945*, Akira Iriye, ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 679–847. On humanitarianism, see Peter Redfield, *Life in Crisis: The Ethical Journey of Doctors Without Borders* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013). On terrorism, see Brad Simpson, "Bringing the Non-State Back in: Human Rights and Terrorism since 1945," in Frank Costigliola and Michael J. Hogan, eds., *America and the World: The Historiography of American Foreign Relations Since 1941* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 260–83. As counterpoint, see Frederick Cooper, "Globalization," in *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 91–112.

[8] Data from the Union of International Associates, as cited in Akira Iriye, *Global Community: The Role of International Organizations in the Making of the Contemporary World* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001), 129. More generally, see Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).

[9] Erez Manela, "Smallpox Eradication and the Rise of Global Governance," in *The Shock of the Global*, 251–62; Steven J. Macekura, *Of Limits and Growth: The Rise of Global Sustainable Development in the Twentieth Century* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Christine Stansell, *The Feminist Promise: 1792 to the Present* (New York, NY: Modern Library, 2011), 353–94; Matthew Connelly, *Fatal Misconception: The Struggle to Control World Population* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); Jocelyn Olcott, "Cold War Conflicts and Cheap Cabaret: Performing Politics at the 1975 United Nations International Women's Year Conference in Mexico City," *Gender and History*, vol. 22, no. 3 (November 2010), 733–54.

[10] "Amnesty International – Nobel Lecture," www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1977/amnesty-lecture.html.

impenetrable shield, one that activists and diplomats began to pierce in the name of human rights in the 1970s. It reflects the growing sense of the limits of national borders and the urgent need to respond to acts of obscene state repression. The concept is at once analytical and ironic, for military regimes in Latin America viewed what they so repeatedly believed to be a Marxist cancer as their own type of sovereign emergency; to extirpate the disease, they made a mockery of the rule of law in order to torture and disappear their enemies with abandon. But in the globalizing world of the 1970s, activists and diplomats flipped the terms of the debate: in their view, the resort to sovereignty as an impervious barrier produced its own emergency, one that required urgent measures to break down.[11]

It was first in the 1970s that human rights activists and diplomats attempted to lift the veil of state sovereignty through on-the-ground investigative missions and public denunciations of internal state policies.[12] At the heart of changing notions of sovereignty was the quest to ensure that the individual rights codified in supranational documents like the UDHR trumped a nation's prerogative to delimit states of exception when

[11] On the construction of the "emergency imaginary," see Craig Calhoun, "A World of Emergencies: Fear, Intervention, and the Limits of Cosmopolitan Order," *Canadian Review of Sociology* vol. 41, no. 4 (2004), 373–95. He wisely notes how the term "emergency … simultaneously locates in particular settings what are in fact crises produced, at least partially, by global forces, and dislocates the standpoint of observation from that of the wealthy Global North to a view from nowhere" (376). Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015).

[12] In this era of interdependence, ideas about state sovereignty and the related concept of territoriality entered a state of flux. In sketching the contours of the shift, historian Charles Maier describes territoriality as "the properties, including power, provided by the control of bordered political space," which was the basic element of the nation-state from the 1860s until the late 1960s. By the 1970s, however, some activists and diplomats, influenced by the global structural changes of the decade, began to articulate a new territorial logic that challenged the equivalence of a nation's "identity space" with its "decision space." See Charles Maier, "Consigning the Twentieth Century to History," *The American Historical Review*, vol. 105, no. 3 (June 2000), 807–31, esp. 823–5; see also his *Once Within Borders: Territories of Power, Wealth, and Belonging since 1500* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016); Michael Geyer and Charles Bright, "World History in a Global Age," *The American Historical Review*, vol. 100, no. 4 (October 1995), 1034–60. This shift in understanding sovereignty was a sweeping move and one that ran against attempts by decolonizing states to strengthen national borders in the aftermath of centuries of colonial exploitation; as recently as 1965, the UN General Assembly, dominated by countries of the Global South, had ratified a declaration on the "inadmissibility of intervention" into a nation's sovereignty, see UN Document, A/Res/20/2131.

such rights could be abrogated.[13] "That's the fight that now is going on constantly," Frank Newman, a prominent US international lawyer and head of Amnesty International's first investigative mission to Chile in 1973, opined before a US Congressional hearing that same year. "Governments don't like it; but they can no longer say, 'It's none of your business.'"[14]

In the face of governments that defended repression by invoking doctrines of domestic jurisdiction and non-intervention – highly prized protections in Latin America – the reordering of sovereignty in the 1970s was nothing less than remarkable. The initial move toward a post-sovereign world of rights-respecting countries was tentative. But it seeded later explosions of talk about women's, socio-economic, indigenous, and LGBT rights, and the proliferation of truth and reconciliation commissions, and eventually trials of former military leaders, throughout the region and the world.

The 1970s also saw the shift on the left of the ideological spectrum from a politics of revolution to a politics of emergency.[15] Before the decade, many leftists dreamed of a large-scale restructuring of global capitalism, one that took the form of a Marxist revolution that would end US imperialism and its collusion with multinational corporations to reap profit.[16] In contrast to these visions of revolution roused at the point of a gun, or to high modernist failures to "see like a state," human rights in the 1970s were conceptually narrowed to a few civil and

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[13] Tom Farer, ed., *Beyond Sovereignty: Collectively Defending Democracy in the Americas* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Kathryn Sikkink, "Human Rights, Principled Issue-networks, and Sovereignty in Latin America," *International Organization*, vol. 47. no. 3 (Summer 1993), 413; Stephen D. Krasner, *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 4, 105–26; Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2015); Agamben, *Homo Sacer*.

[14] Newman testimony at the Hearings on the International Protection of Human Rights Before the Subcommittee on International Organizations and Movements of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, December 7, 1973, 310.

[15] Samantha Viz Quadrat, "A emêrgencia do tema dos direitos humanos na América Latina," in Carlos Fico, Marieta de Moraes Ferreira, Maria Paula Araujo, and Samantha Viz Quadrat, eds., *Ditadura e democracia na América Latina: balanço histórico e perspectivas* (Rio de Janeiro: Fundação Getúlio Vargas, 2008), 361–95.

[16] See, e.g., Jeremi Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); Jeffrey Gould, "Solidarity under Siege: The Latin American Left, 1968," *American Historical Review*, vol. 114, no. 2 (April 2009), 348–75.

political rights.[17] Contested by rival ideologies – above all others a
continuing ardor for Marxism – this emerging politics of emergency over
the course of the decade had the effect of muting concerns over economic
injustice, replacing calls for a more equitable global system with demands,
made one victim at a time, to respect an individual's right not to be
tortured; with only a few exceptions, social and economic rights were
not considered until after the decade concluded, and calls for a New
International Economic Order (NIEO) by the Global South fell on the
deaf ears of human rights advocates in the North.[18]

If the politics of emergency was minimalist in its conceptual framing, it
was maximalist in its global ambitions.[19] It was a sea change. It also
disguised itself by appealing to morality and non-partisanship. As such,
activists and diplomats improved and innovated techniques to draw the
world's attention to South American authoritarianism. These included
practices like the "objective" human rights report after an investigative
mission to a given country that began in the 1960s and was developed in
the 1970s, as well as the "Urgent Action" petition for prisoners whose
lives were believed to be in immediate jeopardy.

This was an unexpected turn of events in Latin America, where the
idea of social change in the name of "human rights" was not a wide-
spread notion before the 1970s. When an Amnesty International staffer
returned from a five-month survey mission of the region in early 1973,
she concluded that there was a "low consciousness of human rights in
Latin America." But she also saw an opening for a "re-evaluation of
the forms of struggle," since "the strategy of small armed groups had
failed." Amnesty would work with many Latin Americans, especially

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[17] On the paradoxical "double gesture" of human rights in a context of emergency, see
Bonnie Honig, *Emergency Politics: Paradox, Law, and Democracy* (Princeton, NJ:
Princeton University Press, 2009); on the waning belief in a future of revolutionary
violence, see Tanya Hamer, "Two, Three, Many Revolutions? Cuba and the Prospects
for Revolutionary Change in Latin America, 1967–1975," *Journal of Latin American
Studies*, vol. 45, no. 1 (February 2013), 61–89.

[18] Orlando Letelier was a notable exception; see his "The 'Chicago Boys' in Chile: Economic
Freedom's Awful Toll," *The Nation* (1976). Cf. Greg Grandin and Gilbert M. Joseph,
*A Century of Revolution: Insurgent and Counterinsurgent Violence during Latin Amer-
ica's Long Cold War* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); James C. Scott, *Seeing
Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New
Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998). As counterpoint to Scott, see Daniel Immer-
wahr, *Thinking Small: The United States and the Lure of Community Development*
(Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

[19] On "minor utopias," see Jay Winter, *Dreams of Peace and Freedom: Utopian Moments
in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 4–5.

exiles, in the 1970s to find solutions that centered on what she called "active non-violence."[20]

Still, the politics of emergency did not appeal to all in the same way. Different actors approached the idea of human rights in different ways – falling somewhere on a sliding scale between outright rejection and forthright embrace. Leftist activists were not only responding to the death of democratic socialism in the Chilean coup of 1973 but also to the brutal torture and murder of family and friends. The emergency of human rights in the Southern Cone during the 1970s elucidates why exiles, activists, and diplomats in Latin America established a fragile yet enduring rapprochement with groups like Amnesty International over the language and practice of human rights.

For others, human rights did not supplant revolutionary politics but provided a versatile vocabulary that coexisted with a politics of revolution. "I had always been, in some sense, a human rights activist," Chilean exile and playwright Ariel Dorfman writes, "but it was only through my reconnection to gringo rebels that I began to inch towards the man I am today." Exile provided the opportunity to "bid a long goodbye to party politics but not to the politics of liberation."[21] Others, such as some liberation theologians, rejected human rights as an "ideological weapon" used by rich countries to perpetuate global inequality.[22] In these ways, the

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[20] Inger Fahlander, "Travel in Latin America," August 8, 1972–January 2, 1973, Folder 66: IEC, April 1973 (III) in Amnesty International's International Secretariat Archives, International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam.

[21] Ariel Dorfman, *Feeding on Dreams: Confessions of an Unrepentant Exile* (Melbourne University Press, 2011), 240.

[22] Juan Luis Segundo, "Derechos humanos, evangelización, e ideología," in Hugh Assmann, ed., *Carter y la lógica del imperialismo* (San José: EDUCA, 1978), 347. See, e.g, Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (London: Penguin, 2007), 146–151. Klein writes that human rights activists failed "by focusing purely on the crimes and not the reasons behind them," in effect "help[ing] the Chicago School ideology to escape from its first bloody laboratory virtually unscathed" (147). However, such indictments of human rights as the friendly face of global capitalism conflate the simultaneous rise of two distinct historical developments: human rights advocacy and neoliberalism. If it is true that both ideologies share notable similarities – purportedly universalistic, individualistic, and non-partisan – causal claims between the two erase human agency and elide the shared contributions and rival visions of transnational and local activists who first used the language of human rights in a sustained way. Latin American clergy and social activists also spoke of economic and social rights far more than their wealthy partners in the Global North. But since their efforts have yet to be properly contextualized in the burgeoning history of human rights, the Marxist critique still looms large. In other words, the protagonists of this story were far more than mere pawns on a chess game controlled by market fundamentalists. The other prevailing Marxist critique of human

language of human rights has always been embattled, jostled around on the battleground of transnational and local politics, and utilized for a variety of political agendas.

This contested nature of human rights can be seen in its evolving interrelationship with the concept of solidarity. Rampant state repression in South America spurred the creation of hundreds, if not thousands, of solidarity groups throughout the world. Activists self-identified "in solidarity" with the victims of state terror and bemoaned the loss of Allende. They cobbled together a solidarity movement that operated on both transnational and local levels: groups shared information, tactics, and resources across borders, but each was also heavily inflected by local politics and culture. The Chilean solidarity movement in Cuba, for example, differed in notable ways from solidarity in the German Democratic Republic, not to mention Sweden, Mexico, the United States, or Mexico.

Despite the local particularities, all made contributions to the growth of human rights politics, even though where solidarity started and human rights ended cannot be starkly delineated. Solidarity activists, on the whole, identified as more political than groups like Amnesty International. Solidarity activists were typically revolutionary anti-imperialists: they saw the world through a Marxist lens, blaming the rise of South American military dictatorships on the insidious advances of multinational enterprises backed by the United States. Roughly a year after the 1973 Chilean coup, radical left solidarity activists in Mexico City blamed the Chilean military dictatorship on the "bayonets and dollars of Yankee imperialism" that "will only be swept away by the resistance fight and offensive of the Chilean people with the help of ... international solidarity."[23]

Human rights organizations such as Amnesty International, however, shunned any overt mention of politics. They articulated claims of universal human rights as incontrovertible moral goods, ones that bestowed an

rights as enabling neoliberalism is Susan Marks, "Four Human Rights Myths," in David Kinley, Wojciech Sadurski, and Kevin Walton., eds., *Human Rights: Old Problems, New Possibilities* (Cheltenham, 2013), 226. For the argument that human rights were a "powerless companion" to the more powerful neoliberal currents, see Samuel Moyn, *Not Enough: Human Rights in an Unequal World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018).

[23] "Gran mitin de masas arena México – Con la resistencia chilena, por el socialismo!" Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales, Caja 1808 c, Exp. 6, September 6–18, 1974, Archivo General de la Nación (AGN), Mexico City.