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Dictating the Past: Learning the Memory of the Pinochet Dictatorship in Present-Day Chile

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts  
in Latin American and Iberian Studies

by

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March 2024

The thesis of Amy Houser is approved.

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Dictating the Past: Learning the Memory of the Pinochet Dictatorship in Present-Day Chile

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For my family, who have cheered me on at every step of the way, I am forever grateful. Thank you for your support and always being there. Hearing your cheers and joy along the way continues to motivate me. A special thank you to my parents, without them this would not have been possible. A final and heartfelt thank you to Nathan, who was instrumental in almost every step of this project.

Dedicación: Me gustaría dedicar esta obra para mis abuelitos, Fernando y Ana Cobos, cuyas historias y memorias me inspiraron a aprender e investigar la historia de su querido país, Chile. Escuchar sobre sus historias y cuentos ha sido mi parte favorita durante mi aprendizaje de historia. Muchísimas gracias por darme su inteligencia, su cultura, y sus memorias. Los amo y extraño para siempre.

## *Abstract*

The dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet (1973-1990) has left a prominent and polarizing mark on the national memory of Chile. Thirty-three years after the return to democracy, the nation has diverging ideas on how to remember this period. In 2023, as I am writing this thesis, an entire generation has grown up in democratic Chile and personal memories of the military government and the violent coup d'état have begun to fade. In this context, the system of national education becomes a key resource for younger generations to develop and understanding of the history that shapes their present-day lives. After Pinochet was removed from power via plebiscite in 1990 and the first civilian-President inherited the administration, the nation underwent a series of changes. Many of these changes focused on the denouncing of human rights violations which took place during the dictatorship and forging a way forward. There was a notable rise in activism and public interest in this period. Chileans were demanding *both* truth and justice for the abuses committed by the state during the dictatorship.<sup>1</sup> In this atmosphere of activism and openness, a distinct memory movement is born in Chile, echoing similar conversations taking place across Latin America and in other “transitional” states. The memory movement in Chile specifically fights against the objective of oblivion surrounding the Pinochet years. Many of those fighting for the memory are those who will never be able to forget the traumatic cost of dictatorship; they are the family members and loved ones of those who were tortured, disappeared, or exiled during the dictatorship. These *familiares-activistas* were also incredibly influential in defeating Pinochet in the 1989 plebiscite.<sup>2</sup> After decades of governments from the left (center) political coalition, *La Concertación*, the Chilean right gained political

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<sup>1</sup> Stern, *Reckoning with Pinochet*.

<sup>2</sup> Stern, *Reckoning with Pinochet*.

ground for the first time since the dictatorship with the presidential election of Sebastián Piñera in 2010 and again in 2018. Under the Piñera administration, I argue, the politics of memory shifted. From the memory narratives established by activists and the governments of Concertación leaders, Piñera's ministers worked to promote a vague narrative of the dictatorship years. Such a narrative distances specific actors and removes some culpability of the military and right-wing politicians. Thirty some years after the return to democracy and after years of the state promoting ideals of *compromiso y convivencia*, present-day memory politics in Chile highlight the continuing and deepening polarization of the country.

This thesis will argue that the Chilean state uses the public education system to continually readjust the portrayal of the memory of the Pinochet dictatorship to match or combat political trends. During the alternating presidencies of Michelle Bachelet (2006-2010, 2014-2018) and Sebastián Piñera (2010-2014, 2018-2022), each administration used K-12 education to promote and promulgate a specific vision of the dictatorship that corresponded with their parties' political and memorial goals.

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## ***Introduction***

In this thesis, I explore the present state of national memory surrounding the Pinochet dictatorship (1973-1990) in Chile through examining institutions; namely, the national curriculum for middle and high school students and the Museo de la Memoria y de los Derechos Humanos (MMDH). In my analysis of the curriculum itself, along with notable scholarly literature on the subject, I have found that the distribution of memory in both national curriculum and through the MMDH represents the larger political polarization of the nation. I argue that the polarization is only growing in recent years, specifically referencing the estallido of 2019 and the ongoing Constitutional convention and approval process. Furthermore, I identify and discuss the significance of what is left out from the public narratives available to youth in Chile, situating the silences in the broader history of Chile and the process of memory formation which began in the days after coup d'état of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 1973 that established the dictatorship.

## **Research Problem and Relevance**

To understand the current state of Chile's collective memory and how that memory is passed down through educational institutions, I pose the following questions: How is the memory of the Pinochet dictatorship passed down to younger generations who cannot remember this period for themselves? How do public institutions, such as schools and museums, approach this period of history? What narratives are constructed of this time period? What is left out of the

narratives constructed in schools and in national museums? Is memory work still necessary and influential in Chile today, thirty-three years after the return to democracy?

My thesis takes an interdisciplinary approach to answer the research questions. I begin with a historical overview of the relevant time period, in order to make connections to the narratives constructed in the Museo de Memoria de Derechos Humanos and the national curriculum from 2015, 2018 and 2019. This historical context will also shed light on significant issues of memory formation which occurred throughout the dictatorship (1973-1990) and throughout the transitional state (1990 - 2006). The historical context will provide the basis of the recent national memory of dictatorship, relevant to the present-day cultivation of that memory that is passed down to future generations in the classroom and in the museum galleries. To address the latter research questions, I examine the national curriculum and overview the exhibitions and content of the MMDH. I propose that, even though thirty-two years have passed since the return to democracy, the memory of dictatorship continues to be a challenge that Chilean youth must come to terms with in the midst of recently increasing political polarization. The lasting impact of the military government influences the national memory and how the future generations view the past.

## Brief Review of the Literature

The memory of the Pinochet dictatorship has been well studied. Perhaps the most well-known literature in English on the topic is Steve J. Stern's trilogy *The Memory Box of Pinochet's Chile*. In this work, Stern retells key "memory moments" in the seventeen-year period of military rule in Chile, from the first days of the coup to 2006, just less than two decades after the return to democracy. The first book in the trilogy, *Remembering Pinochet's Chile: On the Eve of London 1998*, centers on the dictatorship years and demonstrates the ways in which the dictatorship

constructed its own image which, as Stern argues, forms the basis of an “official memory” of the period. While there is no doubt opposition to such processes, the junta begins the process of constructing a narrative of the past, in their present. Next, Stern introduces the formation of obstinate memory and the early forms of memory activism in *Battling for Hearts and Minds: Memory Struggles in Pinochet’s Chile, 1973-1988*. In the second book, Stern highlights the moments in which major counter memories were formed, with specific reference to resistance and activism that raised awareness of the repressive tactics of state violence employed by the military government. The third and final book, *Reckoning with Pinochet: The Memory Question in Democratic Chile 1989-2006*, demonstrates the issues of memory after the return to democracy in the years beginning with the plebiscite of 1988 and the 1990 inauguration of democratically-elected Patricio Aylwin and the following period. Here, Stern details the strategies and trepidations of *La Concertación*, the political coalition which formed to reinstate and strengthen democracy in the wake of almost two decades of dictatorship. Critically, Stern argues that the goals of *La Concertación* to preserve democracy and the very real fears of a return to military rule limited the formation of a cohesive national memory of the dictatorship. From this scholarship, the following pages will argue that the transitional governments, even a decade or more after the return of democracy, failed to adequately address the memory of life under dictatorship, specifically referring to instances of forced disappearance, exile, detention, torture, and other forms of state-sponsored repression, which has led to the promulgation of polarized memories and the failure to establish a unanimously accepted view of the recent past.

Outside of the discipline of history, Elizabeth Jelin has explored the topic of memory related to South American dictatorships and instances of state repression. In *State Repression*

*and the Labors of Memory* (2003) and her 2007 article “Public Memorialization in Perspective: Truth, Justice, and Memory of Past Repression in the Southern Cone of South America” Jelin works to understand the memorial practices both during and after dictatorships. Jelin’s work provides a theoretical framework for analyzing the ever-changing memories of the Pinochet dictatorship, among other cases such as Argentina, Brazil and Peru of which she has also explored thoroughly. Her work asks us to not only examine but question the critical ways in which a state, often a formerly undemocratic and repressive state, communicates memory to the population. In *Labors of Memory*, Jelin points out the important role that institutions can play in distributing and cementing memory. Specifically, she argues that, “school textbooks crystallize national histories,”<sup>3</sup> making schools a key location where youth will develop a connection to and understanding of shared national memories. The connection between Chilean youth and memory of dictatorship has also been explored by Daniela Jara. In her 2016 book, *Children and the Afterlife of State Violence: Memories of Dictatorship*, Jara discusses cultural works that attempt to reconcile a history of the dictatorship for a very young audience. Specifically, this audience is one that has only experienced democratic Chile. The generations which grew up after the transition back to democracy learn and incorporate the memory of dictatorship into their own concept of self and nation, often relying on family history and school-narratives. Jara specifically analyzes the constructions of dictatorship and transition in novels and films designed for children.

*Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* is the Haitian Anthropologist Michel Rolf Trouillot’s groundbreaking work which asks readers to examine the complexities of

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<sup>3</sup> Jelin, *Labors of Memory*., pg 27.

the ways in which History is written and rewritten. In this foundational text, Trouillot takes instances from the Haitian Revolution and demonstrates how they have been globally and locally *silenced*, or intentionally forgotten. Trouillot goes much further than the old adage “history is written by the victors” by asking his audience to think carefully and critically about the ways silences are intentionally created. By exploring these silences, we can approach a deeper understanding of historical memories. James Miles evaluates Michel Rolf Trouillot’s well-known concept of historical silencing and rendering counter-narratives “unthinkable” in a 2019 editorial, “Historical Silences and the Enduring Power of Counter Storytelling”.<sup>4</sup> Here, the authors Miles cites apply Trouillot’s framework to issues of anti-Blackness and anti-Indigenous coloniality. Importantly, the authors interrogate the ways in which educators employ counter narratives to fill silences from history curriculum from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, with the most recent example being from the Civil Rights Movement in the US South. Here, readers get a sense of the value of including silenced voices in history classroom setting, however, the article does not address the multitudes of counter narratives that students may have been exposed to in their home settings. Looking at cases from 20<sup>th</sup> century Latin American contexts highlights the differing historical consciousnesses of students and families based off familial history and selective forgetting/remembering. Trouillot’s framework, as discussed by Miles, helps to form a critical understanding of the ways in which history is constructed, taught and learned. In the Chilean context, we can explore the silences in the narratives that the state has put forth and work with these silences to understand key aspects of the societies that produced and replicated the prominent narratives.

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<sup>4</sup>James Miles, “Historical Silences and the Enduring Power of Counter Storytelling.” *Curriculum Inquiry* 49, no. 3 (May 27, 2019): 253–59. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03626784.2019.1633735>.

These narratives have been explored by researchers in Chile. Teresa Oteíza and her collaborators have evaluated the teaching of the Pinochet dictatorship and the coup d'état of 1973 in both textbooks and classrooms, usually linguistic analysis. As studies by Teresa Oteíza and collaborators highlight, Chilean history teachers and textbook authors utilize generalizations and abstraction when discussing the Pinochet years to promote a discussion of ethics and morality.<sup>5</sup> In turn, these strategies silence social actors and processes, thus reproducing “official national memories” which favor reconciliation and depolarization rather than causality, culpability, and action regarding the recent memory of dictatorship and human rights violations. Oteíza’s numerous studies show that educators perpetuate narratives of the dictatorship years as a natural consequence of Allende and the Unidad Popular’s misdeeds. Addressing the legacy of dictatorship in Chile is ever relevant. Studies by Oteíza and others highlight the importance of properly addressing all aspects of the dictatorship in school settings in order to safeguard democratic practices. The memory of dictatorship will become more and more influenced by institutions, such as schools, as family memory becomes overpowered by cultural memory. Analyzing the cultural memory that is taught in secondary schools provides clues for how future generations will come to terms with this period of Chilean history, and how that will influence understandings of the past.

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<sup>5</sup> For teacher’s strategies see, Teresa Oteíza, Rodrigo Henríquez, and Valentina Canelo, “Language Resources to Negotiate Historical Thinking in History Classroom Interactions,” in *Linguistics and Education* 47 (October 2018) and Teresa Oteíza, Rodrigo Henríquez, and Claudio Pinuer. “History Classroom Interactions and the Transmission of the Recent Memory of Human Rights Violations in Chile,” in *Journal of Educational Media, Memory, and Society* 7, no. 2 (September 1, 2015). For the case of textbooks see, Teresa Oteíza, and Derrin Pinto. “Agency, Responsibility and Silence in the Construction of Contemporary History in Chile and Spain” in *Discourse & Society* 19, no. 3 (May 2008) and Teresa Oteíza, and Mariana Achugar. “History Textbooks and the Construction of Dictatorship.” In *The Palgrave Handbook of Textbook Studies*, edited by Eckhardt Fuchs and Annkatrin Bock, 305–16. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2018).

Schools, however, are not the only institutions tasked with passing on the memory of dictatorship, museums throughout Chile address this topic. The Museo de la Memoria y de los Derechos Humanos in Santiago, is perhaps the most influential museum of its kind in Chile, if not Latin America. Since its inauguration in 2010, it has quickly risen to become one of the top fifteen most visited museums in all of South America. Furthermore, this institution is well-regarded by memory activists, scholars, and Chilean citizens. Accordingly, it has been the focus of many discussions and scholarly works. Susan Opatow and Valeria Vázquez are among the many to have written on the MMDH. In Opatow's 2015 article, "Historicizing Injustice: The Museum of Memory and Human Rights, Santiago, Chile," she examines the Museum's collections and exhibitions in connection to the 1991 Truth Commission, also known as the Rettig Report. She argues that the Museum very closely replicates the constructions of the past that were published in the Rettig Report, thus the MMDH's exhibitions can be seen as "lawful truth" that accurately reflect the military dictatorship.<sup>6</sup> Vázquez Guevara has furthered this conversation by highlighting the ways that the Museo reproduces polarization that the nation has faced for years. Not to discredit the importance and significance of this institution, Vázquez Guevara goes beyond the concept of Opatow's "lawful truth" and has demonstrated that the MMDH takes a political stance on the narrative it portrays to visitors while also playing close attention to the relevant historical context of the events depicted and the period in which the Museo itself was opened.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Susan Opatow, "Historicizing Injustice: The Museum of Memory and Human Rights, Santiago, Chile," *Journal of Social Issues* 71, no. 2 (2015): 229–43, <https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12107>.

<sup>7</sup> Susan Opatow, "Historicizing Injustice: The Museum of Memory and Human Rights, Santiago, Chile," *Journal of Social Issues* 71, no. 2 (2015): 229–43, <https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12107>.

## Outside of Chile...

The problem of disseminating political and historical memory across generations after experiences of state violence is not unique to Chile. In fact, many such conversations are currently taking place throughout Latin America and around the globe. In the case of neighboring Peru, Peruvians have been facing memory conflicts in the aftermath of the Internal Armed Conflict (CAI) from 1980-1998 and the postconflict period throughout the early 2000s.<sup>8</sup> During these years, Peruvians found themselves engulfed in a bloody and ideological conflict, between the Army and the Peruvian Communist Party Sendero Luminoso. Thousands lost their lives and loved ones, faced violence and repression, and many other challenges. Since the mid-1990s, activists in Peru have utilized memory as a political tool of resistance in their fight for justice. Scholars Tamia Portugal Tellier and Francesca Uccelli help us to understand the role of this memory work in memorialization projects, such as the Lugar de Memoria e Inclusión Social in Lima (LUM), and in classrooms around the country. Portugal Tellier retraces the complexities and challenges of forming a national museum of memory in Peru in her chapter, “Batallas por el reconocimiento: lugares de memoria en el Perú” in the collaborative volume *No hay mañana sin ayer: Batallas por la memoria y consolidación democrática en el Perú*. Portugal Tellier’s scholarship highlights the inclusions and silences in the formation of the museum in Lima, highlighting the important memory work that is being done throughout Peru, importantly in rural countryside areas that were most affected by the CAI. Here, her work situates the striking urban/rural and ethnic divides in Peru which not only influenced the country’s most violent years, but the transitional, reconciliatory and memorialization processes. In a collaboratively

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<sup>8</sup> Cecilia Méndez, “Paths of Terrorism in Peru Nineteenth to Twenty First Centuries,” in *The Cambridge History of Terrorism*, ed. Richard English, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2021), 420–52, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108556248>.



written article, Portugal Tellier and Uccelli examine another area of what Jelin would call memory crystallization: textbooks and curriculum. In Peru, the state produces not only curricular guidelines but also the textbooks which must comply with said guidelines. In their 2019 article, “Memorias, temores y silencios: el conflicto armado interno y su tratamiento en la escuela” the authors write that education has the potential to teach and promote peace, however, this pedagogical promise has been largely unfulfilled.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, they find that the youth’s main source to this historical memory is not the classroom or the textbooks, but their parents. Julia Paulson’s chapter, “From Truth to Textbooks: the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Educational Resources and the Challenges of Teaching about Recent Conflict” from the 2017 book, *(Re)Constructing Memory*, evaluates the pedagogical implications of the Truth Commissions and how they have been used in the development of state-issued educational materials. Like Uccelli and Portugal Tellier, Paulson analyzes how the state teaches the internal conflict to its youth. Paulson importantly highlights oppositions to the construction of memory in Peruvian textbooks and curriculum, specifically from the Armed Forces. Here, she evaluates the effectiveness of proposed and published materials and how the narratives constructed paint an incomplete and politicized memory of the violent conflicts.

Similarly, Michelle Bellino’s ethnographic work in Guatemala investigates the ways that the Guatemalan Civil War (1960-1996) is remembered and taught in classrooms throughout the stratified country. In her 2017 book, *Youth in Postwar Guatemala: Education and Civic Identity in Transition*, Bellino analyzes her ethnographic research at four different high schools in Guatemala. The schools reflect the ethnic and socioeconomic diversity of Guatemala, and

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<sup>9</sup> Tamia Portugal and Francesca Uccelli, “Memorias, temores y silencios: el conflicto armado interno y su tratamiento en la escuela,” *Instituto de Estudios Peruanos*, 2019, <https://repositorio.iep.org.pe/handle/IEP/1156>.

especially highlight the urban-rural divide. Here, Bellino focuses on social studies classrooms and discussions of the Guatemalan Civil War (interchangeably referred to as the *Conflicto Armado*). She finds that teachers and schools reproduce the official “two-devils” narrative which places indigenous peasants at the center of the conflict and normalizes the ethnic genocide committed by the state. In addition, Bellino finds that those who actively choose not to recreate this narrative either do so in a way that glorifies and vindicates *la lucha* or in a way that encourages youth to wait for the long-promised peace, and only then engage in civic actions, what Bellino calls, wait-citizenship. In this book, Bellino makes important contributions to the field of post-conflict and education studies by highlighting the diversity of opinions and the lack of accessibility that youth must engage with the historical memory of the *Conflicto Armado*. Bellino’s work is accompanied by the scholarship of Elizabeth Oglesby. In her 2007 journal article, “Educating Citizens in Postwar Guatemala: History, Memory, Genocide and the Culture of Peace” she details Truth Commission which formally ended the Guatemalan Armed Conflict in 1996, ultimately published in 1999, and it’s use (or disuse) to teach young people about the Civil War. First, Oglesby develops an understanding of the goals of the commission to not simply reproduce the “two devils” thesis nor to assume the argument that “*todos son culpables*” by using testimonios. She finds that there are no curricular resources to address the conflict, textbook information is scarce. Similarly, Bellino (2017) finds that many students are unaware of the Truth Commission’s existence. Through informed interviews, Oglesby finds that teachers or schools must decide how to address the topic, if at all. In a visit to a military academy in Guatemala City, we learn that the school confronts the theme of human rights, especially its origins, but does not discuss human rights in the Guatemalan context, ignoring the Peace Accords as a fruitful historical source. Framed as a Cold War struggle, which Oglesby argues

erases culpability and favors an international narrative with no specific actors and agents. From this article we can see how the lack of curricular specificity allows for the memory of the conflict to be addressed in diverse ways, or completely ignored. Here, it is clear that a formal and universal effort to address past conflicts would fight efforts of oblivion and would be aided by the use of primary sources, such as the Truth Commission's 1999 report.

Historical narratives presented in schools and cultural institutions demonstrate how a nation thinks about its own history revealing what should be glorified, glossed over, or silenced. There is significant literature which explores the memory of conflict in educational and institutional settings. From this work, I aim to situate my analysis of the portrayal of the Pinochet regime in Chilean institutions and how this influences the development of national and collective memories.

Much has been written about the memory of dictatorship in Chile, and how institutions like the Museo de Memoria y Derechos Humanos in Santiago hold space for the remembrance of the painful realities of the past. Many countries have experienced traumatic pasts with instances of state violence, of which there is also an influential existing literature that sheds light upon the ways in which states construct a consensus of memory after these period of conflict. What has been largely absent from these discussions, however, is the role that both K-12 schools and similarly oriented institutions have played in shaping and passing down this memory to future generations. The conservative and neoliberal military government made educational institutions a site of physical and systemic violence; from exiling, terminating, or disappearing suspected leftist students and faculty to privatizing elementary schools. My thesis draws attention to the current debates and ways in which the memory of dictatorship and state violence is addressed in

Chilean classrooms. Thirty-three years after Pinochet's removal, the Chilean nation continues to deconstruct and reconstruct the national memory of the dictatorial government. The population is still divided over its legacy and, as I will argue in my thesis, successive governmental attempts to placate tensions have tended to temper a contentious past. Teaching and learning, to a great extent, determines how a nation will view its history. As the recent memory of dictatorship in Chile fades, curricula will shape how Chile's past, including Pinochet's legacy, will be remembered.

## ***Chapter 1: Historical Context and Memory Framework***

In this chapter I will contextualize the lasting memory of dictatorship into the broader historical period of both the dictatorship years and the return to democracy. Furthermore, this historical conversation also correlates to work within the field of memory studies to understand how such histories and perceptions of histories affect present day understandings.

### **The Chilean Road to Dictatorship**

The memory of dictatorship begins on the infamous date of September 11<sup>th</sup> 1973. On this day, the Chilean Armed Forces staged a dramatic coup d'état and invaded the presidential palace, La Moneda. This event resulted in the suspicious death of President Salvador Allende as he took his own life after a final radio address to the nation. The violence of this day was not limited to government officials. Supporters, or supposed-supporters, of Allende were targeted, detained, and killed. The 1990 Truth Commission reports 3,500–4,500 cases of death and disappearance, 150,000–200,000 cases of torture and arrest, and 200,000–400,000 cases of exile between 1973 and 1990.<sup>10</sup> Many of the instances of violence occurred during and shortly after September 11<sup>th</sup>. The coup d'état swiftly and forcibly removed the nation's democratically elected Socialist leader and redirected the country off of the "Vía Chilena al socialismo" and reoriented the path towards a hyper neoliberal and authoritarian mode of governance. Notably, this forceful and violent redirection was supported logistically, financially, and ideologically by the United States CIA.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> "Truth Commission: Chile 90," United States Institute of Peace, accessed November 8, 2022, <https://www.usip.org/publications/1990/05/truth-commission-chile-90>.

<sup>11</sup> For an in-depth exploration of the US involvement in the coup d'état and Pinochet dictatorship see, Peter Kornbluh, *The Pinochet File: A Declassified Dossier on Atrocity and Accountability*, (New York: New Press, 2003).

Similarly, Pinochet's regime was connected to the larger *Operación Condor*, the agreement and understanding between multiple Southern Cone authoritarian governments to monitor, detain, and dispose of supposed dissidents across borders and territories.

General Pinochet took control of the nation and exerted this force onto the populace, using tactics of violence, fear, and a militant police force. The regime attacked the sphere of education from the start, and would continue to do so throughout the dictadura and beyond. In the early days of Pinochet's Chile, university faculty and students were among the most targeted groups, subject to unlawful detention, torture, exile, and disappearance. The effects were immediate and violent, in the words of an eyewitness to these events, Professor Enrique Kirberg:

A wave of repression swept over academic life. About 30% of the faculty were fired, most of whom had tenure. Over 10,000 students were expelled, some incarcerated and some assassinated. Those who were expelled could never again enter a Chilean university. Several departments were closed, among them political science, social sciences, journalism, and philosophy. Many books were burned according to military instruction.<sup>12</sup>

The junta specifically targeted those who could potentially be considered sympathetic towards Communism. As mentioned above, university students and faculty were victimized, but other groups such as union members, teachers, journalists, and indigenous faced violence, especially in the early days of the junta rule. In fact, indigenous Mapuche communities that had been connected to Allende's land reform policies were on the receiving end of suspicion, repression and danger.

Parallel to the air of state-sponsored violence, the regime implemented hyper neoliberal economic policies which reshaped Chilean society. Many of these reforms specifically attacked the public sector, and those sectors which would have favored the UP's socialist policies. Under Pinochet, the recent improvements to higher education were undone on a structural level. The

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<sup>12</sup> Kirberg, "Comparison of Educational Goals in Chile Before and After 1973", 17.

national government instituted neoliberal reforms in the arena of education, in some cases slashing the budget for primary, secondary, and higher education by upwards of 25%.<sup>13</sup> Under Pinochet's government, education ceased to be a right granted to citizens, in turn becoming a consumer good, subject to the ebbs and flows of the market. Both the system of higher education as well as primary and secondary schools suffered greatly in this period. Turning education into a for-profit enterprise resulted in the closure of numerous primary and secondary schools, and as ex-adviser to the Minister of Education, Gerardo Jofré, admitted in 1988, "subsidized education will be of inferior quality to a paid system."<sup>14</sup> This policy knowingly jeopardized the futures of numerous Chileans. In this neoliberal, deregulated, *laissez faire* system, the dictatorial government intentionally damaged the educational system and un-democratized what was for many years an elitist institution that only in recent decades had seen hopes of expansion and improvement. With the lowering quality of public education, many Chileans opted to send their children to private schools. In fact, the number of private schools, and universities, increased during the Pinochet years and even to this day<sup>15</sup>, a legacy of dictatorship's economic policies. The substantial difference in the quality of education has led to huge percentages of Chileans forced to indebt themselves to pay tuition for private schools and universities, as seen in other sectors of the Chilean economy. Due to similar so-called reforms in other sectors, Chileans have also become indebted in attempts to access health care and public transit, and in the past few years the overwhelming debt has sparked protests all over the nation.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Montero, *By Reason or By Force*, 30.

<sup>14</sup> Montero, *By Reason or By Force*, 28.

<sup>15</sup> Montero, *By Reason or By Force*, 68.

<sup>16</sup> José Ragas, "History Unclassified: Archiving the Chilean Revolution," *American Historical Review* 126 (March 2021):166-168.

## The Chilean Road to Restoring Democracy

After years of policy limitations, legislative violence and repression, anti-dictatorship activism grew in the late 1980s. This culminated in the 1988 plebiscite, which the junta projected would formalize their control given growing domestic and international criticism. This, however, was met with a fierce effort from activists and grassroots organizations along with political left and center to organize the “No” campaign. This campaign urged Chileans to vote NO on the measure which proposed that the regime would remain in power for another eight years. After a contentious political battle between the Sí and No factions, Chileans voted to end the dictatorship. Notably, the No measure only passed with 54.7% of the vote.<sup>17</sup> While this figure is over the majority threshold, the fact of the matter was that 43% continued to fervently support Pinochet and his regime.<sup>18</sup> These narrow margins will characterize the challenges faced by *La Concertación*, the political coalition formed with the main goal to restore democracy.

In 1990, President Patricio Aylwin was formally inaugurated as the first democratically elected president since 1970. His administration, and those to follow, faced the significant challenge of healing the polarized nation and protecting the recently restored democracy.

Given the impunity framework that is safeguarded by Pinochet’s 1980 Constitution, justice was delayed, and in the majority of cases it never arrived. This angered and disheartened activists, such as Mireya García, the Vice President of Agrupación de Familiares Detenidos-Desaparecidos. In reference to *La Concertación*, García has revealed, “every day we realize that we were mistaken when placing our hopes in this government... when it comes to justice, what is sought is to inhibit.”<sup>19</sup> The newly democratic government was not able to address the desperate

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<sup>17</sup> Stern, *Battling for Hearts and Minds*, 372-373.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> García, Mireya quoted in Stern, *Reckoning with Pinochet*, 331.



plea for justicia, instead promoting ideals of compromiso which would characterize the coalition as minimally effective. Despite the shortcomings, however, the mid-2000s did see significant accomplishments. As the center-left coalition steadily gained seats in the Senate and cases of universal jurisprudence began to address the justicia question abroad, Chile began a moderate increase in trying perpetrators of human rights violations.<sup>20</sup> Such legal actions, despite taking place fifteen years or more after the regime change, represented a cultural and political shift in Chile. In this period, many suspected that Chileans had finally closed the door to the dark memories of Pinochet.

## 21st Century Memory

The years 1970, 1973, 1988, and 1990 are significant moments for the formation of the national memory and legacy of the dictatorship and the transition back to democracy. The year 2006, as Steve J Stern has debated, can either represent the end of this period or the beginning of a new chapter in this story. In the Chilean summer of 2006, Pinochet unexpectedly died of a heart attack while under house arrest and facing serious legal troubles. After his death on December 10<sup>th</sup>, ironically coinciding with International Human Rights Day, the Chilean press published a posthumous letter where he addresses the entire Chilean nation expressing his love and respect for Chile, its history, how he regrets the necessity for the violent actions he led on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 1973.<sup>21</sup> In his final words to a still-divided Chile, Pinochet reaffirms the narrative his regime so carefully promoted, the violence was regrettable, but absolutely justified

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 333.

<sup>21</sup>The full text of this letter is available online from *El Mundo*, access here: <https://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2006/12/24/internacional/1166976334.html>.

to save Chile from Marxian terror. Thousands of Chileans mourned the death of this controversial figure. He received a formal military funeral with full honors. Also in 2006, La Concertación had the political majority in both houses of the Senate for the first time and their candidate Michelle Bachelet assumed the presidency. President Bachelet represented both a moral commitment to the memory of human right's violations and progress for the country. She made history not only as Chile's first woman president, but also as a survivor of the violence inflicted by Pinochet's regime. In her administrations, 2006-2010 and 2014-2018, perhaps some of the most influential memory work was accomplished. Her projects, however, were not immune to the challenges and limitations of previous governments of La Concertación. One of the most significant accomplishments in terms of memory was the 2010 inauguration of the Museo de la Memoria y de los Derechos Humanos in Santiago, Chile. This institution, as I will argue in the coming chapters, represents a national memory of the period, however, it is not immune to the politics and polarization which has become so significant for Chile.

Both the MMDH and the national curriculum are forms which intend to communicate and distribute the findings of the Truth Commissions. The results of the Rettig Report and the Valech Report are not plainly denied, however, they are consistently nuanced, expanded and reshaped to comply with political and social needs. After the return to democracy and Patricio Aylwin became president, the newly democratic government ordered the first Truth and Reconciliation Commission. When the final report was published President Aylwin said to the Chilean nation, "Nobody could, in good faith deny this truth. I am not saying that this is an "official" truth. The State does not have the right to 'impose' a single truth."<sup>22</sup> The goal and

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<sup>22</sup> Patricio Aylwin Azocar, "Justice 'to the Degree Possible': The Rettig Report Section VIII: Returning to Democracy: Transition and Continuity," in *Chile Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, vol. 1, 2014, 528, <https://heinonline.org/HOL/P?h=hein.cow/cerdrhy0001&i=553>.

lasting purpose of the Truth Commissions and iterations of such findings through public institutions has been to “[affirm] this truth [as] independent from the different opinions that people may hold” of the dictatorship.<sup>23</sup> As the experience and opinions that Chileans held about the dictatorship have become processed into memories, there have been instances in which the multitude of memories and opinions have become increasingly entangled with contemporary politics. Therefore, I argue that both the Museo and the national curriculum can be seen as representations of the Truth Commissions and a site to preserve and promote lasting memory, which both respond to and are a part of political motivations in presenting memory.

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<sup>23</sup> Aylwin, “Justice,” 528.

## *Chapter 2: Memory in the National Curriculum*

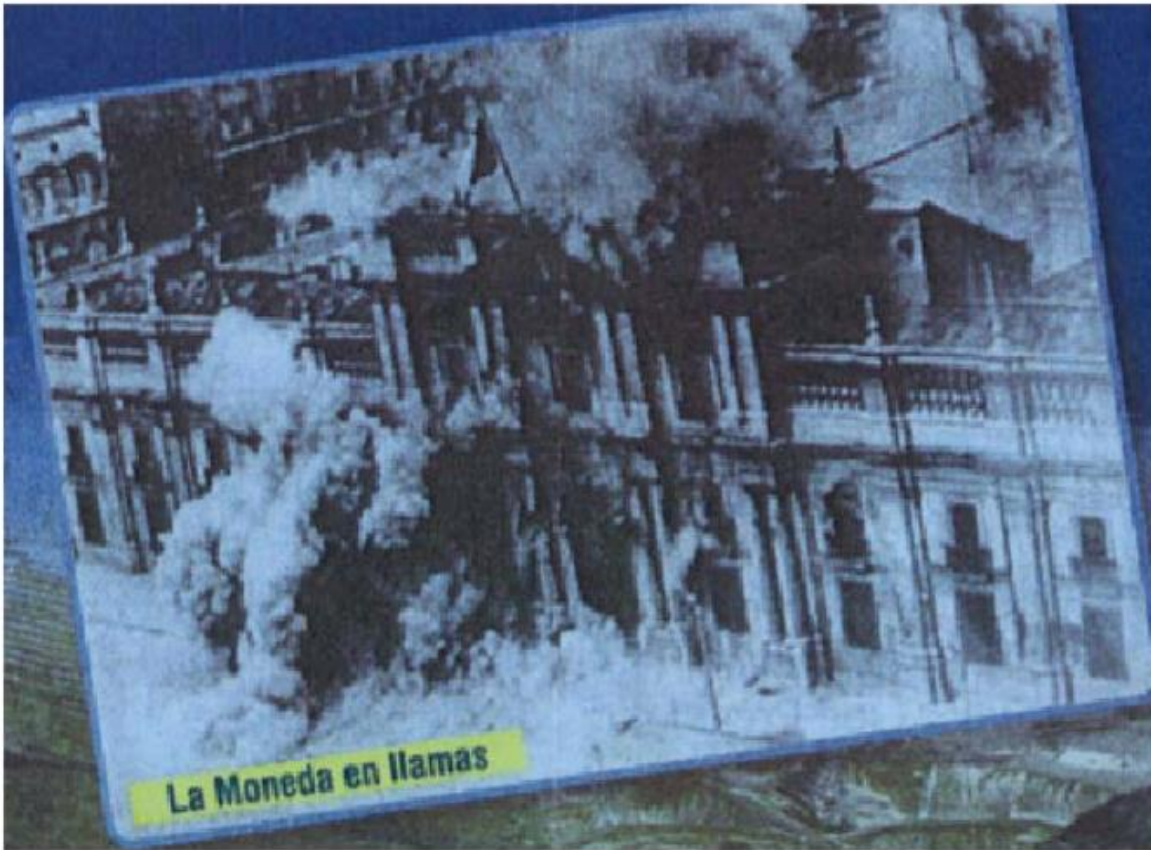


Image of La Moneda in flames from the textbook, MN Sexto Básico, 2009; (2012): 175. Image from Teresa Oteiza and Claudio Pinuer, “Des/legitimación de las memorias históricas”.

In this chapter, I present the 2015, 2018 and 2019 public education curriculum which outline the 1973 coup d'état and the dictatorship period. I distinguish between the political and memory implications for each curricular base as part of larger trends in Chilean politics. Importantly, I make clear delineations between the efforts of the Left (Michelle Bachelet's administration) and the Right (Sebastián Piñera's administration) in how they present this history to Chilean youth. In this chapter, I discuss the repercussions of the narratives which are present in the curriculum. Here, I enter into an analysis of the constructions of memory and how this relates to previous memorialization practices in Chile. Specifically, Piñera's administration produced a curriculum

which is intentionally vague, leaving space for the proliferation of apologist-narratives that defend and normalize the army's intervention. Furthermore, Bachelet's administration clarifies what Piñera's obscures; establishing a layout which will not comply with dictatorship-era accounts of the necessity of the army's actions.

## 2018 6° Básico, 8<sup>th</sup> grade: Creating a Space for Polarized Views under Piñera

The 2018 Curriculum published for students in 8<sup>th</sup> grade (*sexto básico*) includes an outline for 20<sup>th</sup> century History and for Civic Education. For the history component, students are asked to:

Compare different views of the breakdown of democracy in Chile, the regime or military dictatorship, and the process of returning to democracy at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, considering different actors, experiences, and points of view and the current consensus with respect to the value of democracy.<sup>24</sup>

This is one of the central concepts present in the history curriculum and it is the only point which pertains to the military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet (1973-1990). Importantly, the curriculum is unclear, and the writing is purposefully not specific. For example, the point begins asking students to compare *different views* of the breakdown of democracy. Depending on the teacher, student or school, this could refer to the 1973 coup d'état or the 1970 election of socialist-President Salvador Allende. During the dictatorship period, the military takeover was painted as a necessary form of violence to save the country from communist chaos brought on by Allende and the Unidad Popular government. To this day, it is a common belief that the coup

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<sup>24</sup> *Ministerio de Educación*. <https://www.curriculumnacional.cl/portal/Documentos-Curriculares/Bases-curriculares/>. Santiago: 2018. Pg. 177.

rightfully stopped a dangerous movement and pacified the country, a worthy and just sacrifice for stability.<sup>25</sup> In fact, a recent survey conducted in Chile finds that 36% of Chileans feels that the military actions on September 11th, 1973 were justified.<sup>26</sup> As the curriculum outlines, there is a clear similarity to Pinochet's own viewpoints on the coup, as expressed in his final comments to the nation made in a posthumous letter.

How I wished the action of September 11th, 1973 had not been necessary! / How I would have wished that Marxist Leninist ideology had not placed itself in the way of our national life [vida patria]!/ How I would have liked that President Salvador Allende had not incubated in his political thought plans to transform our Homeland [Patria] into yet another piece on the board of Marxist dictatorships!<sup>27</sup>

By giving intellectual space to develop multiple understandings of the military *regime or dictatorship*, by “consider[ing] different actors, experiences, and points of view” and how they played a role in the breakdown of democracy implies that the role is debatable, not clear fact. Across historiography, even according to Pinochet himself, the military *dictatorship* is the definitive cause of the breakdown of Chilean democracy. While Pinochetistas would claim that the dictatorship was justifiably put in place, it is clear that the regime replaced a democratic administration. Here, we can see how the curriculum complies with the memorial practices which Pinochet and his junta advocated for. Allende's Marxists are put to blame, and the military had a just response. The unclear wording in the curriculum leaves this historical moment open for interpretation by textbook authors, teachers, and school districts, which may further polarization over the memory of the coup d'état and the dictatorship. For example, according to a

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<sup>25</sup> Oteíza, Teresa, and Derrin Pinto. “Agency, Responsibility and Silence in the Construction of Contemporary History in Chile and Spain.” *Discourse & Society* 19, no. 3 (May 2008): 333–58. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926508088964>.

<sup>26</sup> Ana María Sanhueza, “Un 36% de los chilenos cree que los militares tuvieron razón en dar el golpe de Estado que lideró Pinochet,” *El País Chile*, May 30, 2023, <https://elpais.com/chile/2023-05-30/un-36-de-los-chilenos-cree-que-los-militares-tuvieron-razon-en-dar-el-golpe-de-estado-que-lidero-pinochet.html>.

<sup>27</sup> Augusto Pinochet, “Texto Íntegro de La Carta Póstuma de Pinochet | El mundo.Es,” accessed May 31, 2023, <https://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2006/12/24/internacional/1166976334.html>.

participant in a study from Teresa Oteíza, teachers in Chile explain the situation preceding the coup d'état using the following rhetorical questions, "Was there chaos in the Popular Unity? Yes. Was the country profoundly polarized? Yes. Were a bunch of mistakes made? Yes. Were paramilitary groups being formed? Yes. Could we have gone straight to a Civil War? Yes."<sup>28</sup> These questions asked and answered by a history teacher mirror the narrative used by the junta to categorize their actions as just and righteous. Here, justifications are made for the coup d'état and stress is being removed from the violence and antidemocratic actions of the Pinochet junta. Many years after the return to democracy, the narratives established by the dictatorship are reproduced in classrooms and used to promote a memory of the dictatorship as salvation and warranted. Despite the democratic government's attempts to instill and imbue the young nation with democratic values, dictatorship-era anti-democratic narratives are still present.

The passage also illustrates a key debate, the nomenclature associated with the Pinochet years. Students are asked to compare different interpretations of the military regime *or* dictatorship. The distinction between these two terms reflects the 2011 decision to ban the word "*dictadura*" from school texts, instead, texts should use the neutral word "*regimen*."<sup>29</sup> A thorough interrogation of the national curriculum highlights the polarization which plagues Chile stemming from the 1973 coup d'état and the 17-yearlong long military dictatorship. The polarization not only comes from different political views and opposing experiences of military rule, it is compounded for young Chileans as they are presented with unclear and indecisive historical narratives dependent on school, location, and teaching choice.

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<sup>28</sup> Oteíza et al, "History Classroom Interactions," 59.

<sup>29</sup> *BBC Mundo. Chile: cambian textos escolares para que no hablen de "dictadura" sino de "regimen."* Jan. 5, 2012. [https://www.bbc.com/mundo/ultimas\\_noticias/2012/01/120104\\_ultnot\\_chile\\_textos\\_escolares\\_tsb](https://www.bbc.com/mundo/ultimas_noticias/2012/01/120104_ultnot_chile_textos_escolares_tsb)

## 2015 2° Medio, 10<sup>th</sup> grade: A Clear Memory from Bachelet

The national history and social sciences curriculum for 10<sup>th</sup> grade students (*segundo medio*) includes a focus on civic competencies and human rights as well as a historical understanding of Chile in the twentieth century.<sup>30</sup> Learning objectives are organized by theme, the following being the most relevant to this discussion: Chile in the context of the Cold War: structural transformations, political and social polarization, and the breakdown of democracy, Military Dictatorship, political transition and consensus around democracy in Chile today, Citizen Formation: human rights and the right of law as the foundation of our life and society.<sup>31</sup> Under these themes, the history becomes more clear. For example, the breakdown of society is unequivocally linked to the 1973 coup d'état and the ensuing junta.

With respect to the military dictatorship, the student will recognize the right-wing state rose to power and systematically violated human rights, and analyze the transformations that Chilean society underwent in the implementation of a new economic model and a new institutional policy.”<sup>32</sup>

Here, the blame and culpability is justly lifted from Allende's government, thus one can no longer argue that the military intervention was necessary. As Elizabeth Oglesby commented on for the case of Guatemala, human rights education is ineffective when not given specific context and reference to the living memory of the society. In Bachelet's curriculum, which we can no doubt imagine is influenced by her own experience with the junta's violence, discussions of human rights violations are clearly linked to the Pinochet regime. This curriculum unequivocally

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<sup>30</sup> *Ministerio de Educación*. <https://www.curriculumnacional.cl/portal/Documentos-Curriculares/Bases-curriculares/>. Santiago: 2015. Pg. 176-179.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 211-212.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 182.



links the violence to Pinochet's dictatorship and furthermore makes connections between human rights violations and the economic transformation of the country.

## 2019 3° and 4° Medio, 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade: From Confusion to Silence under Piñera

The 2019 curriculum for 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade does not expressly mention the coup d'état nor the Pinochet dictatorship in the section devoted to History and Social Sciences. The curriculum goals focus on historical thinking processes and twenty-first century competencies, such as digital citizenship, human rights, sustainability, and project-based learning/problem solving. There is, however, a large section of curriculum devoted to civic education. The civic education curriculum contains guidance on education about human rights, democratic participation, and political ethics. This is no doubt influenced by the focus on human rights violations after the 1990 plebiscite and the return to democracy under President Patricio Aylwin.<sup>33</sup> The curriculum outlines that students must, "explain the common processes of Latin American states in recent political history, including the relationship between civic power and the armed forces, transitions, the defense and promotion of human rights and the strengthening of democracies."<sup>34</sup> Here, we see references to Chile's military government, and other similar regimes throughout Latin America, yet, the relationship, for example, between the army and human rights is not clear. From this curriculum one might draw connections between the Pinochet's junta and the *defense* of human rights. This is perhaps also in response to the multiple reports which showed Chilean youth had poor understanding of and little interest in democratic

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<sup>33</sup> Stern, Steve J. *Reckoning with Pinochet: The Memory Question in Democratic Chile, 1989-2006*. Latin America Otherwise. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010

<sup>34</sup> *Ministerio de Educación*. <https://www.curriculumnacional.cl/portal/Documentos-Curriculares/Bases-curriculares/>. Santiago: 2019. Pg. 148.

processes after the dictatorship.<sup>35</sup> According to Bellei and Morawietz, Chilean youth had the lowest scores in surveys gauging the importance of democracy and civic participation. Notably, these responses were found after the return to democracy. This indicates that the Chilean education system had not capitalized on the recent past as a tool to understand the importance of democracy. In ignoring and not calling attention to this history, the consequences of an anti-democratic state have been silenced in the curriculum.

## Discussion

The 2018 curriculum is clearly different from the 2015 curriculum which was published under Michelle Bachelet. The national history and social sciences curriculum for 10<sup>th</sup> grade (*segundo medio*) students includes a focus on civic competencies and human rights as well as a historical understanding of Chile in the twentieth century.<sup>36</sup> Here, the breakdown of democracy is unequivocally linked to the 1973 coup d'état and the actions of the military. This detail follows the point which asks students to develop an understanding of the beginning of the 1970s and the economic and social turmoil which took place during Allende's years as president. Here, the blame and culpability is lifted from Allende's government, thus one can no longer argue that the military intervention was a necessity. The 2018 curriculum, on the other, does not specify exactly what led to the breakdown of democracy, or even when exactly that occurred.

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<sup>35</sup> Bellei, Cristián, and Liliana Morawietz. "Strong Content, Weak Tools: Twenty-First-Century Competencies in the Chilean Educational Reform." In *Teaching and Learning for the Twenty-First Century: Educational Goals, Policies, and Curricula from Six Nations*, 93–125. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Education Press, 2016.

<sup>36</sup> *Ministerio de Educación*. <https://www.curriculumnacional.cl/portal/Documentos-Curriculares/Bases-curriculares/>. Santiago: 2015. Pg. 176-179.

## *Chapter 3: Learning in the Museo de la Memoria y de los Derechos*

### *Humanos*



El Museo de la Memoria y de los Derechos Humanos in Santiago, Chile. Image from <https://mmdh.cl/museo/historia>.

### Formation and Goals of the Museum

The Museum of Memory and Human Rights (Museo de la Memoria y de los Derechos Humanos, MMDH) was inaugurated on January 11<sup>th</sup>, 2010 in Santiago, Chile. The Museo was established under the presidency of Michelle Bachelet (2006-2010, 2014-2018). Bachelet herself had been detained and tortured at the infamous Villa Grimaldi along with her mother and father, the latter of which died in custody. Bachelet's personal and emotional connection to the political

violence of the past imbued her with moral authority regarding the traumatic memory.<sup>37</sup> This fact, however, did not make her goals with the MMDH above criticism and debate. Her predecessor, Ricardo Lagos (2000-2006), was in talks with several activist groups to form a *Casa de memoria* that would serve as an archive for the multitude of resources that anti-dictatorship activists had saved and created over the decades.<sup>38</sup> The Bachelet administration, however, announced their project to build the MMDH with no connection or prior knowledge of the Casa de memoria talks. The debate does not end with the initial drama of its development. The MMDH has been criticized from multiple perspectives in Chile. Vázquez Guevara explains how the exhibitions on the famous arpilleristas<sup>39</sup> and the native Mapuche communities are located apart from the main corridor of the museum that represents the “official” truth constructed in the Rettig Report.<sup>40</sup> The physical separation of these perspectives from the main narrative represents the divide between the larger social memory and memories which do not apply to what the Museo has deemed the standard population.

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<sup>37</sup> Daniela Jara, *Children and the Afterlife of State Violence: Memories of Dictatorship*, Memory Politics and Transitional Justice. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

<sup>38</sup> For more on these debates see, Katherine Hite and Cath Collins, “Memorial Fragments, Monumental Silences and Reawakenings in 21st-Century Chile,” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 38, no. 2 (December 1, 2009): 379–400, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0305829809347537> and Susan Opatow, “Historicizing Injustice: The Museum of Memory and Human Rights, Santiago, Chile,” *Journal of Social Issues* 71, no. 2 (2015): 229–43, <https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12107>.

<sup>39</sup> These women created traditional folk crafts, arpilleras, which reflected the experience of life under dictatorship and served as a form of resistance to an international audience. There have been many exhibits of arpilleras, for example the exhibit from the Museum of Latin American Art in Long Beach, California: *Arte, Mujer, y Memoria*, and many publications which discuss them. See, Elizabeth Doolan, “Textiles of Change: How Arpilleras can Expand Traditional Definitions of Records.” *Interactions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies*, 2016, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/80j818zz>, Eliana Moya-Raggio, “Arpilleras: Chilean Culture of Resistance.” *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 10 No. 2, 1982, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3177867>, and Susan Traini, “Unforgotten to the unforgettable: How Arpilleras contributed to Chilean history informing everyday occupations and social change.” *IOS Press*, 2013,

<http://web.b.ebscohost.com.proxy.library.ucsb.edu:2048/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=1&sid=51d7edf7-f974-4fb7-8f51-ee82898f959e%40sessionmgr102> for sources in English.

<sup>40</sup> Vázquez Guevara, “Crafting Lawful Truth,” 279-280.

An additional key criticism is the historical timeline of the museum. The museum's narrative begins physically on the first floor, chronologically it begins on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 1973 with the coup d'état led by General Pinochet. Though pre-coup exhibitions are present, they are not housed in the main floor of the museum, and thus not presented within the course of events in a logical, or justifiable, manner.<sup>41</sup> Critics on the right, such as Ángel Soto of the Catholic Opus Dei Prelature, take issue with the start of the timeline, claiming it silences the reasons which drove the military to act and forcibly remove democratically-elected President Salvador Allende from office.<sup>42</sup> From this perspective, visitors to the museum would not understand the valid motivations from the army to act violently, yet justly, and establish control. In such a telling of history, the military's actions are not only explained, but excused by the environment of chaos that was fostered under Allende's "disastrous" term. Allende's attempts to embark on the Chilean path to socialism resulted in shortages, strikes, and a general discontent. This concern for an explanation of the coup connects to the narrative constructed by the military junta. It's important to acknowledge that this perception has been highly debated Stern (2006) and Kornbluh (2003) show that this period was subject to economic sabotage from US and other foreign investors in Chile in an effort to topple the government as well as conservative groups in Chile exaggerating the scope of turmoil. Furthermore, after the junta took power, they claimed that Chile was under attack and must fight off "cells of Marxist cancer" justifying the violent tactics that the military government employed to cement their power. The museum's relegation of this period to a separate floor, I argue, is an attempt to project an apolitical memory, one that

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<sup>41</sup> Valeria Vázquez Guevara, "Crafting the Lawful Truth: Chile's 1990 Truth Commission, International Human Rights and the Museum of Memory," *London Review of International Law* 7, no. 2 (July 1, 2019): 275. <https://doi.org/10.1093/lril/lrz008>.

<sup>42</sup> Opatow, "Historizing Injustice," 238.

avoids the polarized politics which have characterized Chile for so many decades, despite the aforementioned criticism.

The careful presentation of the timeline, beginning on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 1973, echoes and contradicts other forms of state memory, notably the curriculum for middle and high school students. The Museum, though not directly intended for children, relates more closely the latter depiction, especially given its political genesis, and in turn it has been criticized for not showcasing the army's point of view for intervening in electoral politics. All these narratives and particularly the switch back and forth between interpretations, I argue, furthers the dramatic polarization of the nation. Although the MMDH does not cover pre-1973 Chile, both narratives do not allow for an interpretation which characterizes the military takeover as warranted or necessary.

***Epilogue: Constituting Memory — How Legislation Facilitates Memory and Oblivion***



Demonstrators in the 2019 estallido with the Wenufoye (Mapuche flag) and Chilean flag. From CiperChile.

In 2019 Chile made international headlines after demonstrations took over Santiago in response to a seemingly minor increase in subway fares. The protests that began in October of 2019 set off a course of events that highlights the lingering polarization of the nation leftover from Pinochet’s dictatorship and the shortcomings of the transitional government. This conversation compliments my analysis of the Chilean national curriculum for middle and high school students, by highlighting the ongoing and changing memory of the military government. I first examine the 2019 estallido brought on by the deep scars of neoliberalism. The estallido



resulted in a plebiscite where 80% of Chileans voted to abandon Pinochet's 1980 Constitution and write a new governing document. The elected constitutional representatives made history as an extremely diverse group, headed by Dr. Elisa Loncón, a Mapuche leader and Professor of Linguistics at the University of Santiago. The committee released a proposed constitution in the Chilean winter of 2022. The Constitution was incredibly progressive, including provisions for the teaching of indigenous languages, gender parity and rights for non-gender conforming individuals, territorial autonomy for indigenous groups, labor and pension reform, among others. This proposal was rejected via plebiscite with 62% voting against its ratification. In a dramatic shift, a new committee was elected with a notable (extreme) right-leaning makeup. On December 17, 2023, the conservative constitutional proposal that resulted from this second process was also rejected by voters.

Amid these recent events, I contextualize these results and the larger process within the implications for youth-oriented memory work. I will also discuss the implications that the estallido and drafting process has for the developing memory of the Chilean youth and how this ongoing process illustrates the polarization that the country has been facing for the past six decades.

## The Miraculous Legacy of Debt

This section will expand on the historical context of dictatorship, instead of focusing on the dictatorship's use of repression and violence, it will elucidate the economic transformations which Chile underwent, transforming the country into a hyper-neoliberal economy. In speaking of legacies of dictatorship and lasting memories, the economic system in which the newly-



democratic generations inherited represent one of the most long lasting and palpable scars of the regime.

Pinochet's dictatorship is infamously remembered for its systematic violation of human rights, including, as the 1990 Truth Commission reports, 3,500–4,500 cases of death and disappearance, 150,000–200,000 cases of torture and arrest, and 200,000–400,000 cases of exile between 1973 and 1990.<sup>43</sup> The regime also implemented economic transformations which violently dismantled the social welfare system and the Socialist reforms put in place by Salvador Allende's administration. In fact, under Pinochet, the amount of people living in poverty had risen to 45% in the 1980s.<sup>44</sup> This was no doubt related to the neoliberal policies backed by the so-called "Chicago Boys" who transformed the economic system. The government privatized the water and power industries and increased the prices that families were accustomed to paying, leaving many unable to access essential utilities.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, under Pinochet many formerly publicly owned institutions were similarly privatized. For example, the education system was one of the most affected institutions, with the neoliberal policies slashing the budget for primary, secondary, and higher education by upwards of 25%.<sup>46</sup> Transportation and health sectors were also privatized, setting the stage for the fall of 2019, many decades later. Under these transformations, Chileans fell into debt, often crushing debt, to make ends meet. While the dictatorship formally ended in 1990 with the Aylwin administration, this neoliberal structure remained.

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<sup>43</sup> "Truth Commission: Chile 90," United States Institute of Peace, accessed November 8, 2022, <https://www.usip.org/publications/1990/05/truth-commission-chile-90>.

<sup>44</sup> Alejandro Foxley, "Successes and Failures in Poverty Eradication: Chile", in The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 2004, pg. 6

<sup>45</sup> Susan Traini, "Unforgotten to the unforgettable: How Arpilleras contributed to Chilean history informing everyday occupations and social change", in IOS Press 2013, pg. 95.

<sup>46</sup> Valentina Montero, *By Reason or by Force: The Chilean Neoliberal Model and Its Implications for Education and Culture*, Doormats 3 (Los Angeles: Errant Bodies Press, 2013), 30.

## 2019 Estallido and 2020 Plebiscite

Here, I will outline the 2019 estallido and the subsequent plebiscite, drawing important connections from the 1988 and the 2020 national votes.

In the Chilean spring of 2019, protests erupted around Santiago de Chile. The protesters were demonstrating against a 30 peso increase in metro fares, in USD, this would amount to about 40 cents. The new fare would make the metro in Chile the most expensive public transportation system in Latin America.<sup>47</sup> At first glance, the increased fare would appear to be a minor issue, despite the already high-prices. However, the metro fares have already posed an issue for Chileans, particularly those living in Santiago and heavily relying on public transportation. In fact, “transportation may represent 20 percent of the monthly salary in some families”<sup>48</sup> and an approximate 4 percent increase to this percentage can cause significant distress for those who have no other options. In the initial days after the increase, many Santiago residents refused to pay the new fare and jumped the turnstiles to access the metro. The government addressed this issue by assigning more carabineros to the stations and criminalizing this practice. Eventually, the stations were closed and the demonstrations moved away from the underground and onto the streets of Santiago, shortly thereafter President Piñera declared martial law.

In the days of Piñera’s martial law, many Chileans experienced a sense of déjà vu. The return of state actors taking a violent role to “defend” the nation brought back the memory of the

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<sup>47</sup> José Ragas, “History Unclassified: Archiving the Chilean Revolution,” *American Historical Review* 126 (March 2021):166.

<sup>48</sup> Ragas, “History Unclassified,” 167.

Pinochet dictatorship. Tear gas and water cannons were used to disperse and disrupt protestors which left many injured. The violence of the state's response resulted in deaths of twenty individuals, nearly two thousand were injured by gunshots, and more than four hundred experienced ocular injuries.<sup>49</sup> Here, the abuses of human rights committed by the state harkens back to the violence of the 1973 coup d'état and the ensuing seventeen years. Chileans have experienced military presence, curfews, increased circulation of carabineros, and more before. The violence that the state used in response to address protests against an inherently neoliberal policy highlights the lingering issues of Pinochet's memory.

Notably, a large percentage of the demonstrators were young adults. This generation of Chileans did not experience firsthand the violence and dangers of the Pinochet years, and therefore have no personal memories of those years, however, they clearly have had to cope with both the cultural and economic legacies of dictatorship, as the metro fare increase so dramatically illustrates. As Daniela Jara has argued, it is common for the second generation after a conflict to be the generation that more actively searches for memory reckoning.<sup>50</sup>

In the wake of the reopened wound of state violence, Chileans demanded a referendum to address the legislation which allowed the state to respond with such measures. In October of 2020, one year after the estallido, 78% of Chileans voted to draft a new constitution.<sup>51</sup> This constitution to be written would replace Pinochet's 1980 Constitution that cemented the power of the military junta and imposed measures that safeguarded the state in cases of human rights abuses. In 1988, 46% of Chileans favored the continuation of Pinochet's rule, while in 2020,

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 179.

<sup>50</sup> Daniela Jara, *Children and the Afterlife of State Violence: Memories of Dictatorship*, Memory Politics and Transitional Justice. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 12.

<sup>51</sup> Katy Watson, "Jubilant as Chile Votes to Rewrite Constitution," BBC News, October 26, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-54687090>.

nearly 80% of Chileans voted to abandon Pinochet's 1980 Constitution. We can consider this to be important actions for memory. In the scope of thirty-two years, perhaps, Chileans have gained enough temporal space to take steps erase lingering forms of dictatorial powers while acknowledging the memory of the dictatorship as a cultural wound that continues to influence the country. The 2020 referendum may suggest that we are nearing the end of this chapter. In this case, the memory would exist in the past, and events like the estallido and the state's response would not continue to take place in Chile.

## Draft and Rejection

After the success of the referendum in 2020, the processes to form a convention and committees to draft a new constitution began. Importantly, the Constitutional Committee was headed by Dra. Elisa Loncón. Loncón, a Mapuche leader, feminist, and professor of Linguistics, represented the dramatic shift and coming together of Chile. As both a professor and a Constitutional committee member, her work has centered indigenous voices, specifically in the long history of Mapuche exclusion, repression and colonial pain at the hands of the Chilean state. Within this context, Loncón has championed a pluralistic unity across Chile, outlining a path forward that recognizes multiple perspectives and stresses inclusion. From a 2019 article, Loncón and her collaborators proposed alternative ways to center indigenous women voices in academic research:

As a result of this process we continue the work to design research that acknowledges our different positionalities, designing protocols that respect and recognize our privileges and marginalizations, to respect indigenous women voices and ways in which we can continue to design research from different epistemological standpoints...[Loncón's work

also acknowledges the] significance of doing the work together when working through the historical debt that academia has to indigenous groups.<sup>52</sup>

Loncón favors an approach of interculturality to mend both colonial and dictatorial wounds which Chile faces.<sup>53</sup> In her academic work, this translates to the study and promotion of indigenous Mapuche language. Politically, this results in advocating for the teaching of indigenous language and culture for all Chileans and an understanding of shared responsibilities to all of Chile's inhabitants. Outside of Loncón's academic work, her voice as the President of the Constitutional Committee was no doubt influential specifically in expansion of rights indigenous people and autonomous lands, platforms for the teaching of indigenous languages, increased environmental protections, and expanded rights for minoritized groups.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, the 2022 draft also expanded economic rights, such as the right to housing, work, and pensions, and measures to combat corruption.<sup>55</sup> Here, the constitution represents progressive initiatives in Chile which would no doubt continue the dismantling of Pinochet's neoliberal regime, which the *estallido* proved is still tangible in Chile. This proposed constitution, I argue, not only paves the way for progressive reforms, but symbolic steps to distance the nation from Pinochet's regime.

The proposed constitution, however, was rejected with approximately 60% of Chileans voting against its ratification.

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<sup>52</sup> Andrea Lira, Ana Luisa Muñoz-García, and Elisa Loncon, "Doing the Work, Considering the Entanglements of the Research Team While Undoing Settler Colonialism," *Gender and Education* 31, no. 4 (May 19, 2019): 475–89, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2019.1583319>.

<sup>53</sup> Elisa Loncón, "Popular Power and Constitutional Change: Reflections from Chile", (Roundtable Talk, UCSB Dept. of Spanish and Portuguese, Apr 20, 2023).

<sup>54</sup> República de Chile, Constitución Propuesta, 2022, <https://gauchospace.ucsb.edu/courses/mod/resource/view.php?id=3903288>.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

## What does this mean for memory?

Ultimately, Chile since 2019 highlights the ongoing struggles of a deeply polarized nation. We can categorize the events of 2019 in relation to a brutal memory of state violence but also as an action towards demanding a reckoning that the state has not been able or willing to provide. As Jelin notes, public response and action is often the result of a lack of direction taken by state actors.<sup>56</sup> The recent case of Chile, however, highlights the extent to which the public remains polarized on such matters. In 2023, thirty-six percent of Chileans supported the military's actions on September 11th, 1973, believing the coup d'état was justified.<sup>57</sup> A percentage which has risen by over twenty percent in the past twenty years.<sup>58</sup> Here, the rejection of the proposed Constitution correlates to larger political trends in Chile, pointing to a revitalized effort to support the legacy of Pinochet and the military intervention, especially in the context of a growing Right-wing. The country has recently elected multiple ultra-conservative politicians to the new constitutional convention, many of which supported the junta's government. These politicians would further the precedent set by Piñera, reclaiming a politicized memory of the Pinochet years as a just and righteous time which was required to save the nation. The recent wave of protests around the country created an atmosphere of change and represented significant forces for creating a national memory which tackled the dictatorship head on. Now, on the other hand, the memory seems to be cast in an unclear light for young Chileans.

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<sup>56</sup> Elizabeth Jelin, *State Repression and the Labors of Memory*, Contradictions ; Volume 18 (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

<sup>57</sup> Ana María Sanhueza, "Un 36% de los chilenos cree que los militares tuvieron razón en dar el golpe de Estado que lideró Pinochet," *El País Chile*, May 30, 2023, <https://elpais.com/chile/2023-05-30/un-36-de-los-chilenos-cree-que-los-militares-tuvieron-razon-en-dar-el-golpe-de-estado-que-lidero-pinochet.html>.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

## Getting Back to Work

Though the 2022 draft was rejected, the process of change does not stop. New committee members have taken on the task to continue marching toward the common goal of writing a governing text. While the most recent draft available in 2023 does not include the extensive and groundbreaking inclusion and expansion of indigenous rights, gender parity and other protections for minoritized groups. However, some of the environmental protections remain, though this is continually evolving throughout the drafting process.<sup>59</sup>

While far right groups have gained more ground in Chile in this past election, the recent success of the referendum campaign shows the potential for resistance and memory work. In the October 2019 and the ensuing months, organization against neoliberalism and alliances between indigenous peoples and urban working-class Chileans proved potent and resulted in meaningful changes, notably the initiation of this Constitutional process. It is clear that the path forward is a path that acknowledges the underlying causes of the uprisings of 2019 and the polarization which has persisted for fifty years.

While the state of memory and the political parties continue to evolve in Chile, it is a success solely for the fact that the nation is moving away from the document intended to cement the military junta's power. The first two articles of the first draft of the new constitution are dedicated to outlining the protections which the Constitution must grant:

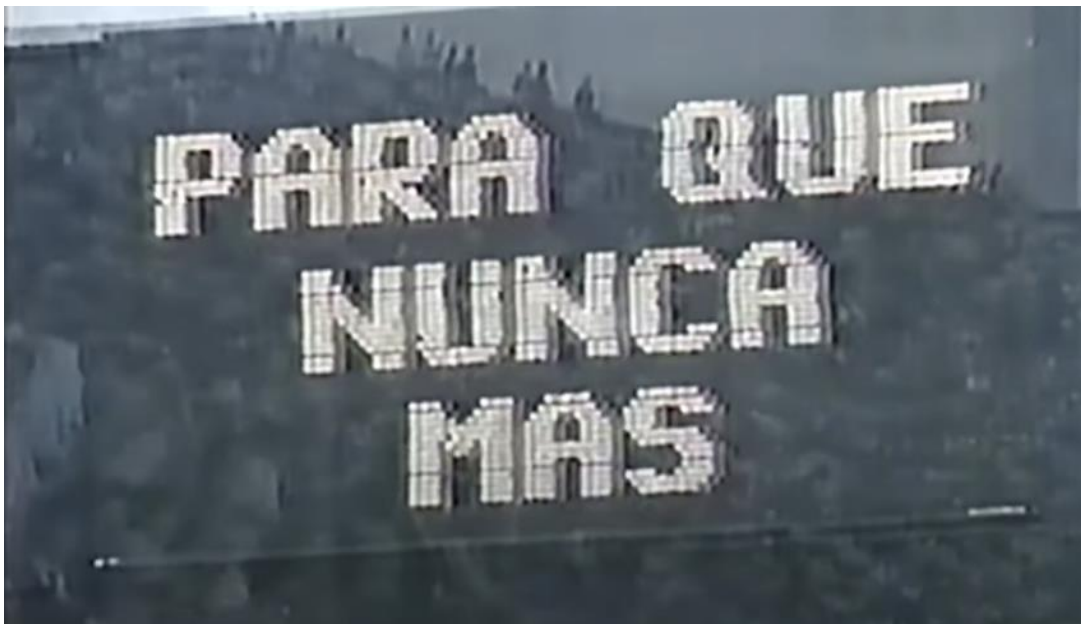
The state will serve the people and the society, its ultimate purpose is to promote common good, so it must create the social conditions that permit all and each member of the national community to achieve the highest possible realization of spiritual and material goals, with respect to the rights and guarantees that this establishes.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> República de Chile, Constitución Propuesta, 2023, [https://www.pauta.cl/pauta/site/docs/20230531/20230531111800/texto\\_aprobado\\_en\\_particular\\_por\\_pleno\\_de\\_ce\\_vf\\_30\\_05\\_23.pdf](https://www.pauta.cl/pauta/site/docs/20230531/20230531111800/texto_aprobado_en_particular_por_pleno_de_ce_vf_30_05_23.pdf).

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 4.

Though this language is relatively general, it does not mention the role of the state to defend Chile from internal forces that may threaten the government, as Pinochet's outlined. We can read into the concept of "social conditions" mentioned and contextualize this as a way to distance the new governing document from the hyper neoliberal and dictatorial state which has previously harmed so many Chileans. All in all, the shift away from Pinochet's Constitution and the continued effort to make a nationally-accepted alternative highlights the complexities of living in a society that both explores and suppresses the memory of dictatorship. Within these challenges, I believe, it is clear that the Chilean youth are committed to addressing the memory of the dictatorship and willing to do the work to ensure "para que nunca más."



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