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Chile

Rodrigo Henríquez

The Battle for Memory: Dictatorship and Democracy in Perspective

Virtually all discussions around teaching and learning history in Chile are connected to the influence exerted on Chilean society by the military dictatorship that held power from 1973 to 1990. The dictatorship fundamentally changed Chile's policies of educational, economic, and political development, policies that had been in place and evolving since 1920; it privatised major public services, including the entire educational system from kindergarten to universities.¹ The regime systematically violated human rights, committing murder and torture, consigning some of its opponents to exile, and depriving the population of its civil and political liberties; its actions amounted to the overturning of a fragile but developing democratic culture by a violent military coup and subsequent repression. The history curriculum introduced by the dictatorship praised patriotic values and military exploits and blocked any objective approach to recent history, demonising the *Unidad Popular* (Popular Unity), the democratically elected coalition led by President Salvador Allende which was in power from 1970 until the coup d'état in 1973.

Almost 20 years later, the dictatorship met its end and gave way to the hesitant beginnings of democratic government; this course of events allowed space for a discussion around the design, development, and implementation of reforms to education, reforms which, however, were forced to remain within the framework of the law on education imposed by Pinochet on the very last day of his dictatorship's rule. In 1992, the reform efforts involved the attempt to incorporate a vision of renewal into the Chilean history and social studies

curriculum, emphasising the values of democracy and respect for human rights, and raised the issue of the need to add the recent history of Chile (1960–1990) to the curriculum. This matter generated intense debate among historians, teachers, educationalists and curriculum reformers, especially from 1990 to 1998, during which time the former dictator remained a threatening presence as commander-in-chief of the Chilean armed forces. These tensions were reflected in the debate on curricular content and in the lack of participation of teachers in the development of textbooks and courses.

Historical Background

The fragile democracy installed in 1990 maintained both the political structures imposed by the authoritarian constitution of 1980 and the neoliberal economic system of the ‘Chicago Boys’.² Policies from the dictatorship continued to influence military and political matters. The memory of recent history was stifled by the informal ‘stability’ agreements between the political leaders of the *Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia*, a coalition government formed in 1990 by the Christian Democrats, liberals and socialists, and Pinochet’s supporters on the political right. The first initiative aimed at approaching the remembrance of the regime’s crimes that was undertaken during the ‘transition to democracy’ after 1990 was the promotion of the National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation. Its *Informe Rettig* (Rettig Report, 1991) was an attempt to ‘clarify the truth’ about the serious violations of human rights which had taken place under the dictatorship. However, the Commission did not judicially investigate or prosecute the individuals and institutions guilty of crimes, and many events remained unexamined. This lack of judicial reckoning with the crimes of the past influenced the development of the curriculum for history and social studies in Chile’s schools. The meaning of concepts such as ‘dictatorship’, ‘human rights’, ‘citizenship’, and of historical phenomena such as the *Unidad Popular* was the focus of intense disputes among historians, partisan think tanks, and curriculum reformers. In some cases, the outcome of these debates was to minimise the most controversial aspects of recent history in the curriculum; the current rightist government headed by Sebastián Piñera, for instance, allowed the Chilean primary education curriculum (the Foundations Curriculum for Basic Education 2012) to use the concept of a ‘military regime’ as a synonym for ‘dictatorship’, which caused an intense public debate. These matters proved some of the most sensitive issues to arise during the ‘transition to democracy’.

Citizens' demands for policies of remembrance challenged the *Concertación's* accommodation of the political right, which identified strongly with the former dictator. Since the end of the dictatorship, human rights groups and social and political movements without parliamentary representation had consistently called upon the state to assume responsibility for the recovery of historical memory. Despite occasional attempts in this direction, including the creation of state agencies to promote human rights and compensation commissions for victims of the dictatorship and those imprisoned for political reasons during its rule, the *Concertación* governments (1990–2009) were wary of addressing the recent past because many of their political partners had held important positions of political and economic responsibility in the dictatorship.

Official discourse on recent history was also marked by the *Concertación* governments' fear of confronting the army and its political supporters with responsibility for and the consequences of the dictatorship's imposition of neoliberal economic policies from 1975 onward. The *Concertación* continued the neoliberal policies imposed by the dictatorship, with both the centre-left government and the rightist opposition praising the economic changes introduced by the 'Chicago Boys'. Textbooks issued during the period from 1998 to 2009 supported the idea that the dictatorship built the foundations for economic growth, which then drove the development of the Chilean economy during the 1990s. The student demonstrations of 2011 indicated that the dictatorship's 'economic miracle' had increased inequality; the socially divisive effects of the privatisation of education, healthcare, and social security questioned the legitimacy of the economic model represented by the dictatorship. After 1990 the official view of the *Unidad Popular* was ambiguous because the party, now one of the main coalition partners, had been one of Allende's bitterest opponents. Government agencies used the historical interpretation of 'two devils' to refer to Allende and his opponents. In this view, which holds that the excessive radicalisation of political parties and movements both for and against Allende led to the 'breakdown of democracy' and the inevitability of the coup d'état, blame and responsibility for the events are assigned equally to the regime and its predecessors. Many textbooks produced during the period detail the positions of Allende supporters and defenders of the military coup. However, as noted in Teresa Oteíza's analysis, 'textbooks—especially in the sixth year of schooling—do not provide two clearly opposed positions or offer clear reasons for the events. Assessment of the coup [takes place] from an emotional perspective, rather than as an explanation of historical events.'³

The arrest of former dictator Augusto Pinochet in London in October 1998 generated a major debate on Chile's recent history because the former dictator had previously gone unpunished by the Chilean justice system. As a result of Pinochet's arrest the construction of history developed by the dictatorship came under renewed critical scrutiny and revealed a perspective that emphasised values such as order, economic liberalism, moral conservatism, and patriotism. The arrest sparked a debate surrounding the realistic possibility of conducting a proper analysis of the dictatorship while the dictator and his followers remained in political positions. It also gave rise to new debates in historiography on how to approach and understand Chile's recent history, which content should be analysed, and which methodologies were most appropriate. A series of articles on Pinochet's arrest written by the conservative historian Gonzalo Vial, who had served as a minister during the dictatorship, initiated one of the first debates on recent history to have significant media impact.

Vial's defence of the historical image of Pinochet generated a response, published in 1999 as the *Manifiesto de los Historiadores*,⁴ from historians, students, and a wide range of organisations and social movements. The document challenged the idea, forged since the beginning of Chile's Republic, that Chile had always had the most stable democracy in the region. This notion considered the advancement of the Chilean nation to have shown a continuity which was ruined by the political radicalism of the 1960s, whose outcome was the 1973 coup d'état. In this view, the dictatorship is portrayed as the restorer of the republican regime initiated by the 1833 constitution under the leader Diego Portales (1793–1837), defender of order, free trade, and political authoritarianism. This view became the official version of memory imposed by the dictatorship, and it was widely presented in school history classes at all levels.

The *Manifiesto* rejected this thesis, instead putting forward the view that the dictatorship was an expression of certain authoritarian continuities in Chilean history, not a tradition of heroism and military valour, but rather the continuity of an endemic social conflict, the expression of an authoritarian tradition resting on the Chilean state's exclusionary attitude towards the political participation of citizens and supported by military threat. The *Manifiesto* proposed a reading of the coup d'état from the perspective of certain challenging points in Chilean history: one of the most important was the rise of citizen participation from the 1940s onward, which was supported at that time by the state. Indeed, this view sees one of the most profound effects of the dictatorship on Chilean society as being the shift from the developmentalist

economic model that had been followed since the 1920s to the neoliberal model imposed in 1973.

The dictatorship justified this change by employing a view that delegitimised the developmentalist model, which it criticised for its high level of state-owned enterprises, inflation, and its 'welfare state' philosophy. This view also strengthened the idea that the dictatorship introduced a 'successful' economic model pioneered in Western democracies.

The mythology, coined by the right, of Pinochet's heroic deeds had been losing credibility after numerous declassified documents provided evidence of the manoeuvres by the US that damaged Chile's economy and assisted in the overthrowing of Allende. The US government's intervention, although it was a crucial factor in the crisis during the *Unidad Popular* and the coup d'état, is absent from the historical interpretation of the period that is dominant in Chile. The *Concertación* governments have continued to support this controversial justification for the economic paradigm shift, and functions such as social security, health, and education remain in the hands of private enterprise.

Conflicts over History Textbooks and Curricula: The Shadows of the Past in the Present

An essential area of ideological control for the dictatorship was the teaching of history. It transferred authority in educational matters to the *Comando de Institutos Militares* (Military Institutes Command), whose mission was to maintain ideological control of education and censor any hint of criticism or any denunciation of the new military authorities.⁵ This control was expressed in the 1981 curriculum reform, which placed great emphasis on military prowess and the individual values of those it styled as having sacrificed their lives for their country. The Ministry of Education controlled the market for textbooks and the few existing publishers were forced to adopt this version of history.

The 1990 inauguration of the *Concertación* government liberalised the textbook market. Pinochet's law on education, passed in March 1990, had established a mandatory curriculum stipulating content and objectives, along with optional 'contextualisation' programmes. In practice, publishers aligned with the official programmes. Under the current law (from 1998), the Ministry of Education invites tenders for the textbooks which are then provided free by the state to municipal (state) schools. Privately funded schools and schools with mixed public and private funding, which together comprise the majority

of Chilean schools, select textbooks based on market criteria, while publishers promote textbooks with intensive advertising campaigns. Although history textbooks have gradually begun to incorporate critical views on recent history, many continue to present an ostensibly neutral representation of the past. As Oteiza has shown, the books still contain value judgements and interpretations that tend to avoid addressing traumatic issues of national history.⁶

Issues such as human rights violations and the exclusion of ethnic groups were explicitly addressed during the development of overarching objectives for the proposed 1992 Chilean curriculum, which also incorporated topics such as gender equality and human rights. Pressure from the political right and the Catholic Church led the government to postpone the debate. Furthermore, curriculum reformers found themselves forced to 'negotiate' with historically conservative groups over certain sensitive issues including the occupation of the Araucanía region (Mapuche) by the Chilean state in the nineteenth century, euphemistically called the *Pacificación de la Araucanía* (Pacification of Araucanía) in many textbooks. Although the historical record shows that the Chilean state military have occupied the Mapuche area from 1861 to the present day, expelled the Mapuche people from their lands and subjected them to systematic oppression, neither the history curriculum nor textbooks address these matters. In many cases, the treatment of the Mapuche and other ethnic groups are referenced as belonging to the past (pre-Columbian and colonial system), rendering them invisible in the context of current, ongoing problems.

Discussions on these and other curricular matters were held between 1992 and 1998 among a closed group, without the participation of teachers or other social stakeholders. This manner of proceeding increased criticism and hindered the implementation of curriculum changes.⁷ The lack of progress in pending human rights cases⁸ led the government to form a round-table forum in 2000 entitled *Mesa de Diálogo*, in which the military and victims of the dictatorship were brought together. This forum saw the presentation of conflicting views on the causes of the coup d'état, similar to those expressed in the curriculum for the sixth year of schooling whose analysis is cited above.

Although the round-table forum generated a debate primarily among historians, it was clear at the time that the treatment of recent history is a complex issue with wider public implications. It also emerged that the development of the history and social studies curriculum has been decisively influenced by pressure from the political and economic right as well as the Catholic Church in matters of citizenship and gender rights. Since the adoption of the current history and social studies curriculum, some adjustments have been carried out by closed working groups consisting primarily of historians, with little involve-

ment on the part of teachers. Despite having a history curriculum more or less to their liking, the incumbent rightist coalition decided in November 2010 to cut teaching time for history and social studies by one hour a week, reducing the time available for these subjects to four hours, and to reallocate the time thus made available to languages and mathematics. A massive, and unexpected, social mobilisation of historians, history teachers, and students forced the Ministry of Education to reverse the change. These events illustrate that debate on the content, teaching, and learning of history remains dynamic even in a society running the risk of getting stuck in presentism and only analysing the past from a present viewpoint.

Debate on the interpretation of the causes of the coup d'état following the publication in 2000 of the official textbook for the sixth year of schooling

The excerpts below, from two letters sent to the editor of the conservative national newspaper *El Mercurio*, illustrate the two opposing camps in this debate. The first letter presents the perspective of supporters of the dictatorship, while the second represents the supporters of a more inclusive democracy, and considers a more balanced, consensus view.

Juan Ricardo Couyoumdjian, professor at the Institute of History, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile. Letter to *El Mercurio*, 21 May 2000

Overall, I am referring not only to the textbooks; you should allow some time to pass (it used to be a generation) before writing the history of a period. [This is] not because of the methodological difficulty of doing so, but because of the advantage of looking at it in perspective and dispassionately. It is understandable that young people want to know about the recent past they did not live through, all the more so due to its strong influence on the present. The difficulty is in providing a dispassionate view of periods of conflict that is supported by the facts and that reflects a social consensus on them...

Instead, today we see political groups and individuals interested in keeping alive the tensions of the past, a kind of 'hate industry' in Chile, which moves in the opposite direction to [the] national reconciliation promoted by the Church. Clearly, in this context it becomes much more difficult to reach a consensus view on the last thirty years of Chilean history.

Letter to *El Mercurio* from a group of historians on the depiction in textbooks of recent Chilean history. *El Mercurio*, 18 May 2000

[Regarding the above-mentioned criticism of the depiction of the dictatorship in the sixth-year textbook] We believe that what drives these people is not the defence of the historical truth, but the defence of the 'interpretation' of the years of military rule (the government which they supported) that was given by the supporters of the former dictatorship about the period. They claim that the representation of this period in the

memory of Chileans is simply a matter of saving the image of the country, an image that has been badly damaged in the present. People know that the word of historians is very important in a political struggle, especially if their professional view is expressed in textbooks. The Right is very clear, which explains its angry reaction. For our part, we think the sixth-year textbook, which admittedly contains certain minor errors of detail (for example, the statement that the majority secured by President Frei in his election in 1964 was the highest in the history of Chile until that point), is a balanced version of what happened in contemporary Chile, suitable for delivery in the sixth year of schooling. This is even more evident when it is compared to the textbooks issued during the military government, which contained a much skewed view of the recent history of Chile. In this regard, we support the authors of the textbook, which was selected by the Ministry of Education through public tender and prepared by Editorial Don Bosco S.A. (Salesiana), and we reject the challenge by representatives of the political right who seek to impose their vision of Chile's immediate past.

Conclusion: Better History Teaching for Better Citizenship

Echoes of the dictatorship continue to resonate in contemporary Chile because the official version of memory imposed by the dictatorship, namely the idea that the coup redeemed the national soul, still has supporters ready to defend it. Following Jörn Rüsen's typology of forms of historical consciousness,⁹ Chile is an exemplar of the type of consciousness that maintains specific ideals revolving around authoritarianism, moral conservatism, and the economic principles of free trade. From 1990 onward, Chile has been tentatively opening up new space for a historical consciousness that promotes social values and attitudes based on the recognition of the historical trauma that occurred as well as the values of social inclusion and citizen participation.

Notes

1. The dictatorship changed the Chilean constitution to assign primary responsibility for education to parents; it also provided subsidies to private schools that charged for tuition and competed with state schools. The state school system is now considered inferior, with only a minority of Chilean students attending primary and secondary state schools.
2. The 'Chicago Boys' were Chilean economists educated at the University of Chicago as part of a US government programme that commenced in the 1950s. Many of these students went on to help the dictatorship develop and implement its neoliberal economic policies.

3. T. Oteiza, 'Cómo es presentada la historia contemporánea en los libros de textos chilenos para la escuela media [How contemporary history is presented in Chilean secondary-school textbooks]', *Discurso & Sociedad* 3 (2009) 1, 150–174, here 169.
4. S. Grez and G. Salazar, eds. *Manifiesto de los Historiadores*. Santiago: LOM Ediciones. 1999. It had been released to an academic audience earlier, but with little media attention.
5. L. Reyes, 'Olvidar para construir nación? Elaboración de los planes y programas de estudio de Historia y Ciencias Sociales en el período post-autoritario [Forgetting as a path to nation-building? History and social science curricula development in the post-authoritarian period]', *Cyber Humanitatis* 23 (2002), accessed 15 September 2013, https://web.uchile.cl/vignette/cyberhumanitatis/CDA/texto_simple2/0,1255,SCID%253D3541%2526ISID%253D258,00.html.
6. T. Oteiza, 'Cómo es presentada la historia', 169.
7. J. Pinto, 'La reforma curricular en el área de Historia y Ciencias Sociales: propuestas y debates [Curricular reform in history and social science: debates and proposals]', *Revista Chilena de Humanidades* 18–19 (1998–9), 231–242.
8. As of 2012, the official number of people 'disappeared' or killed between 1973 and 1990 was 3,216, and the number of survivors of political imprisonment and/or torture was 38,254. Figures from the Interior Ministry Human Rights Programme state that between 2000 and May 2011, 773 former members of the security forces had been charged with or convicted of human rights violations. 245 had had final sentences confirmed, but only 66 were in prison. The others benefited from non-custodial sentences or sentences that were later reduced or commuted. Amnesty International, *Chile Report*, 2012, accessed 22 June 2013, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/chile/report-2012>.
9. J. Rüsen, 'Historical Consciousness: Narrative, Structure, Moral Function, and Ontogenetic Development'. In *Theorizing Historical Consciousness*, ed. P. Seixas (Toronto: University Toronto Press, 2006), 63–85, here 73.

Further Reading

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