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Portrayal of Pinochet: Historical Narratives in Chilean Schools

Introduction

On September 4th, 1970, Chile elected Salvador Allende as its first socialist president. The CIA had clandestinely prevented Allende's election twice before in 1958 and 1964, but their efforts had failed this time. Henry Kissinger, then Nixon's National Security Advisor, warned that Allende's election was not in the United States' interest because Allende had a close relationship with Communist dictator Fidel Castro. Already having organized military coups in Brazil, Ecuador, and Guatemala, the CIA resumed their work against Allende and began planning a military coup, contacting 21 powerful Chilean military personnel to encourage the idea of a coup d'état in Chile (Rosenfelder, 1996: 1). The leaders of each military branch formed a Junta and began their plans to overthrow Allende.

The CIA and the Junta proved successful in its forces against Allende on September 11th, 1973 when the Moneda Palace was surrounded by Chilean military and the President shot himself rather than surrender. General Augusto Pinochet Ugarte, promoted to Commander-in-Chief of the Chilean Army by President Allende himself months prior to the coup, assumed the role as the new President of Chile (Gjelten, 2006, 2). He sought to restore economic and political stability to Chile, but in doing so, General Pinochet left the country it a state of terror.

In order to restore economic stability after Allende's socialism, Pinochet utilized a neoliberal plan designed by University of Chicago graduates in economics under Milton

Friedman. The plan aimed to modernize Chile by removing state intervention in the economy, allowing market forces to drive the economy, and privatizing nearly all sectors including healthcare, water, and education (Oppenheim, 1999: 27-28). This neoliberal shift is sometimes called the “Chilean economic miracle” as it helped to lower inflation, modernize agriculture, and promoted the highest GDP growth in Latin America (Oppenheim, 1999: 121 & 130).

In addition to providing economic stability, it is also said that Pinochet and the military regime reestablished political stability. Before Pinochet took control in 1973, Chile had experienced the full gamut of governments, from liberal and conservative presidents and constitutions to military coup d'états, dictatorships, and most recently, socialism, all lastly a maximum of 10 years (“Chile Timeline”, 2012). Pinochet and the military regime remained in power from 1973-1990, marking the longest era of Chilean political stability. Furthermore, the Constitution of 1980 was unreformed until 2005 and still remains the Constitution today (Nolte, 2008: 16).

These economic and political gains attempt to assuage the tyrannical reality of the dictatorship; however, under the guise of restoring order to the country, General Pinochet and the military junta murdered, tortured, and exiled thousands of Chileans viewed as threats to democracy. The military regime was based on repression. Within weeks of gaining power, the junta had organized the ‘Caravan of Death’ to eliminate political threats, allowing the military to execute 75 Chileans and exile many more (Burbach, 2003: 48). Pinochet also instated the DINA, or the National Directorate of Intelligence, which enforced the state of terror, killing and disappearing well over 3,000 Chileans (Ensalaco, 2000: 55-58). The initial military force thought necessary to restore political order and economic stability developed into a major human rights issue, leaving thousands of Chileans still searching for justice.

Research Question & Hypothesis

A philosophy student at Stanford University once posited that the concept of history “suggests the possibility of better understanding ourselves in the present, by understanding the forces, choices, and circumstances that brought us to our current situation” (Little, 2012: 1); however, in order to understand history better, historians must present as many perspectives as possible in order to paint for others the entire picture. People often have different perspectives of historical events, whether social, economic, political, or cultural, and thus, historical record and reconstruction is often highly contested. Despite the differing perspectives, it is important that historians and teachers present a broad scope of perspectives in order to create a better awareness of what has happened in a country’s past.

In the case of the Chilean dictatorship, like most other historical events, there are conflicting perspectives. After a mere day in the country, one notices the weightiness the subject still holds in society. The man next to you on the bus might praise the economic triumphs of Pinochet while proudly clutching his briefcase; the outspoken woman selling you an empanada might turn her nose in disgust as a recording of General Pinochet appears on the television. These competing discourses of, generally speaking, pro- versus anti-Pinochet are apparent in Chilean society.

Though the polemic topic is apparent among Chileans, what is being taught in Chilean schools? What is the dominant historical narrative of the Pinochet administration that is taught in the Chilean education system? Based on preliminary research on the subject, I presumed that the subject would be taught heavily from an economic standpoint, omitting as much as possible the history of human rights violations; however, after general interviews with professors and students in Chile and examination of textbooks, I hypothesize that there are two competing

discourses about the dictatorship, the majority being anti-Pinochet and the minority being pro-Pinochet. Depending on the economic and social situation of a particular school, I believe the way the military regime is discussed will change dramatically, with room for conversation about human rights violations in lower-income, public schools and with a greater focus on economic history in upper-class, private schools.

Methodology

In order to answer my research question, I conducted interviews, both informal and formal, with Chilean professors and students during my stay in Valparaíso, Chile. In addition, I was able to survey the government-issued history textbooks used in 80% of Chilean high schools and middle schools. Before conducting interviews, I completed an IRB exempt application with my intent for research and my interview questions and was approved to move forward with my research. During my initial months in Chile, I spent enormous amounts of time reaching out to schools, professors, and students in hopes of setting up interviews and gaining access to textbooks. After 3 difficult months, I was able to conduct interviews with high school and university professors from both private and public schools. I also conducted university student surveys and reviewed the government-issued textbooks for each year in Chilean middle schools and high schools.

In the case of high school and university professors, I used formal interviews. These were conducted within the particular universities or high schools. I prepared a list of 6 questions to gather sociological data about the interviewees. The majority of professors pertained to the upper and middle classes, they had completed all basic schooling, college, and had a master's degree in their field, and they were most often Catholic. The questions were as follows:

- Date of birth:
- Gender:

- What city are you from?
- Which social class do you identify with: lower/middle/upper?
- How many years of school have you completed?
- Are you religious? If yes, which?

Next I prepared 12 basic interview questions to get an idea of how the military dictatorship is taught and discussed in Chilean history courses. They were as follows:

- Is your school public or private?
- How do you speak about the Pinochet administration in your history classes?
- Do the textbooks discuss the theme of the human rights violations?
- Do the textbooks teach that Pinochet was an economic hero?
- Do the textbooks say that Pinochet stopped Communism in Chile?
- Are the United States mentioned in the coup d'état of 1973?
- As a history professor, do you teach only what is in the textbooks or do you also bring other resources and opposing views?
- Is the topic of the military regimen and General Pinochet polemic among students?
- Does your school allow you to talk openly about the military regime instead of teaching only what is written in the textbooks?
- Do you know anyone that was disappeared during the military regime?
- Do you think that many Chileans still support Pinochet?
- Does the education system, in general, defend the military regime?

Student interviews were conducted much more informally. I conducted interviews in coffee shops and on camping trips with my closer Chilean friends. In order to reach more students to have a better sample, I asked these friends to send out a survey form of the interview to other friends. The sociological data questions remained the same; however, the research questions were slightly different of those asked to professors in order to gather data on students' experiences in Chilean history courses. They were as follows:

- Which high school did you attend? Which University? Why did you attend this school?
- Do Chilean history and/or politics interest you?
- How is/was the Pinochet administration spoken about in your history classes?
- Is/was the topic of human rights violations taught in your classes?
- Is Pinochet spoken about as an economic hero?
- Do the textbooks say that Pinochet stopped Communism in Chile?
- Are the United States mentioned in the coup d'état of 1973?
- Do your history professors teach only what is in the textbooks or do they also bring other resources and opposing views?

- Do you believe that what is taught in schools affects your opinion of the military regime?
- Is there a difference in what you learned in school and what your parents believe about the military regime?
- Briefly, what is your personal opinion of the military regime and General Pinochet?

In regards to participant observation, more informal research was conducted. I had the opportunity to interact with many Chileans of all ages and learn different perspectives they have based on economic factors, cultural factors, and personal experiences. I participated in discussions with my host family and professors to learn more about what life was like during this era and why perspectives are so conflicting about the topic. I was able to visit the wealthier regions and talk with military families about their experiences, which gave a face to those that benefitted economically from the dictatorship. I was also able to visit the Museum of Memory and Human Rights in the capital city of Santiago, which brought to reality the human rights violations and the enduring pain Chileans still experience today.

Finally, I also have copies of middle school and high school history textbook sections that deal with the Pinochet administration. These textbooks are used in over 80% of Chilean schools, both public and private. These textbook sections will allow me to see what the master narrative is being constructed by the Ministry of Education in Chile. I will also be able to compare them with professor interviews. If professors have said they are not able to bring in other resources when teaching the topic, I will have an idea of what they are allowed to teach.

In order to begin analysis of the data, I will first transcribe and translate the interviews and surveys. Next, I am going to apply interpretive analysis to each of these sources, including textbooks, by coding the data in terms of key themes. This means I will establish a list of codes or themes to assist with sorting and drawing conclusions from the data. My list will include basic themes such as:

- De = Democracy
- Di = Dictatorship
- E = Economic
- CB = Chicago Boys
- NEO = neoliberalism
- CON = 1980s constitution
- HR = Human Rights
- T = Torture
- V = State violence/repression
- US = United States/CIA
- M = military
- GS = military coup
- SA = Allende
- AP = Pinochet

I will sort interviews, textbook sections, and secondary literary sources according to these themes. More will be added as new common themes are discovered.

Research Agenda

My thesis will contain 5 sections. First, I will give a brief introduction to the dictatorship, the economic situation during this era, and the Chilean school system. I then will present existing literature on the topic and articulate what I hope to contribute with my research. After outlining my methodology, I will analyze my data using 3 content sections: 1) Private vs. Public school teaching, 2) university history courses, and 3) state-issued textbooks. These content sections will discuss the interviews and textbooks according to common themes discovered during analysis. Additional sections may be added to discuss class dynamics in the schools or other social factors such as student protests. Finally, in the conclusion, I will define the basic portrayal of General Pinochet and the dictatorship era in Chilean schools and discuss its consequences and potential for change.

In order to write my thesis on time, I have established a loose calendar of deadlines:

10/09/15 – Transcribing, begin data sorting
 10/23/15 – Intro pt. 1 & basic sorting done
 11/6/15 – Intro finished
 11/20/15 – Existing literature/research section

12/11/15 – Methodology section
01/29/15 – Content section 1
02/12/15 – Content section 2
02/26/15 – Content section 3
03/11/15 – Conclusions

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