

After the Fact:
El Mercurio and the Re-Writing of the Pinochet Dictatorship

Julia Brown-Bernstein

Candidate for Senior Honors in History
Steven S. Volk, Thesis Advisor
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Introduction: History and Memory in Contemporary Chile

The exhibit of Chilean history in Santiago's *Museo Histórico Nacional* (National History Museum) abruptly ends with a pair of shattered eyeglasses inside an otherwise empty display case. The half-pair of eyeglasses, which belonged to Salvador Allende, Chile's socialist president from 1970-73, were broken on September 11, 1973 when Augusto Pinochet and Chile's armed forces violently overthrew Allende's *Unidad Popular* government. Today, the blackened lens and twisted frames make up the only piece of material culture to represent the last thirty-five years of Chilean national history.

Representing a national history of the period between the coup of 1973 and 1990 when Augusto Pinochet's seventeen-year dictatorship finally came to a close looms large in present day Chile. In fact, writing a national history of Allende's government and the brutal dictatorship that followed it has been such a fraught process that today, nearly twenty years after the country's transition back to civilian rule, Chile has yet to reach consensus over its recent and not-so recent past – and thus the empty space which follows Allende's glasses in the Museo Nacional. While Chile may never reach consensus about the meaning of Pinochet's dictatorship, over time one historical narrative will most likely displace the others and become hegemonic.

Over the past eighteen years, historians, scholars, journalists, and other social actors—all with different political projects and historical interpretations—have struggled to engrave *their* particular narrative of Pinochet's dictatorship as Chile's *official* national history. This thesis examines the narrative construction of one of the parties to that dispute, the Chilean Right, as it built and revised its story of the past after Pinochet left Chile's presidential palace. This project, moreover, explores the *reconstruction* of a

conservative historical narrative as it seeks to define Chile's past in the *present* and for the *future*.

Since the coup of 1973 that ousted the democratically-elected president, Salvador Allende, Chilean conservatives and supporters of Augusto Pinochet have constructed a narrative that has dominated public discourse by virtue of the military regime's control over most means of communication as well as the political and institutional state. This narrative portrays Pinochet's dictatorship as having saved the Chilean *nation (patria)* from Allende's totalitarian *Unidad Popular* government. However, beginning in the latter half of Pinochet's rule but gaining ground in the post-dictatorship period, this "salvation" narrative has been challenged by "counter memory" narratives, which seek to destabilize the Right's dominant account and expose the human rights violations committed under Pinochet's rule.

The past eighteen years of center-left government under the Concertación alliance have brought cascading historical disclosures that formally challenged the status of Pinochet and legally and seriously damaged the credibility of his regime. To be sure, as incriminating documentation has come to light and proponents of "counter-memory" narratives have, in turn, gained greater influence in the discourse of historical memory, the Right's ability to impose its own narrative of the dictatorial period has waned. Yet since 1990, Chilean conservatives and Pinochet supporters, along with the media voices which reflect their viewpoints, have waged battles with other sectors of society to obtain cultural and historiographic hegemony over this contested past — how the history of the 1970-1990 period will be written. To be clear, this is not solely about historical

“revisionism,” an essential component in the process of writing history, but also historical re-evaluation, which, according to Susan Crane, “affects not only what later generations think they know about the past, it also affects the historical actors themselves, when contemporary history is at stake.”¹

A close examination of the post-Pinochet period, defined here as 1990-2006, the years between the return to civilian government and Pinochet’s death, offers insights into the battles waged to write *the* history of this critical era in Chilean history. It represents a particularly rich, if fraught opportunity to analyze this historiographic process because the writers of most concern are not professional historians but “popular” sources in the media and public life; and the audience is not academics, but the Chilean population itself. The battle to *define* (not just “interpret”) Chilean history as it unfolds in the contemporary era is a memory battle, in which those who personally experienced this past fight to inscribe *their* history for a future they will not see.

For Chile’s Right, the period after 1990 has been a difficult time as more and more revelations have damaged Pinochet’s reputation. Consequently, Chile’s conservatives have used this time to attempt to shape even more forcefully their own interpretation of Chile’s national history, refashioning their master, “salvation” narrative and directly challenging the memory of the Chilean Left. As the reader will see, this has largely entailed redefining exactly *what* happened between the election of Salvador Allende in 1970 and Pinochet’s final departure from the presidential palace in 1990.

¹ Susan Crane, “Memory, Distortion, and History in the Museum,” *History and Theory* 36:4 (December 1997), 60.

History as a discipline recognizes that although we access the past through multiple sources—interviews and archives, among others – these sources don’t by themselves yield a *meaning* of the past. While multiple understandings of these archives surface, those interpretations, while hopefully remaining faithful to the sources, still constantly change because of circumstances in the present. Despite concerted efforts by some to “close” the past— to stabilize a single narrative —the production of history is a never-ending process, and historical *revision*—the historians’ task in the present – a standard practice. With this in mind, my project examines the way in which a Conservative narrative of the 1970-1990 period changed over the first fourteen years of restored civilian government even though it insisted on the “completed” nature of that history and resisted revisions to its own (previous) interpretations. In that way, this thesis illustrates not just the construction of a particular ideological view of the past in Chile, but the contested “production of history” as it takes place in the public sphere.²

Although a great deal has been written about Chilean historical memory, the bulk of this scholarship in Chile has emerged from a progressive, Left community that has largely examined the memories of those who experienced suffering and loss as a result of Pinochet’s dictatorship. While these works are highly important and can help us approach restorative future politics, there are few studies of an evolving conservative narrative that explain the 1973 coup and Pinochet’s dictatorship.

The Right in Chile is by no means monolithic or homogeneous; there is no *one* conservative narrative of this time period, even though most conservatives will agree on the basic notion that the Pinochet coup saved the country from disaster. Yet it remains to

² For more on the “production of history” see: David William Cohen, *The Combining of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 1.

be seen how those who supported Pinochet at the outset of his dictatorship have come to understand him now that he is no longer in power. Have the public disclosures of his human rights abuses which have lent legitimacy to the proliferation of counter memory narratives led the Right to view Pinochet's dictatorship differently? If the Right's historical vision has changed, how is this, then, reflected in the narrative it is constructing about the period of Pinochet's dictatorship and beyond?

While this project explores the production of a vernacular national history in Chile, it chooses for its focus the narrative construction of an exceedingly controversial and contested period in this history. First, because it examines the writing of a *recent* past, questions of memory, and the complicated nature of collective memory, become an indispensable part of its subject. When those who personally experienced the past which is being defined and revised are still alive, as is the case with Chile, the struggle to institutionalize a particular narrative becomes a highly contentious task. Still, since this thesis concerns only "popular" history, not the work of scholars, it will not consider the ways in which academic history can come into conflict with the weight of personal experience.³ Second, as stated above, this thesis examines the recording of Chilean *national* history. Writing a singular narrative of a *nation's* history, the synthesis of disparate views, is always a difficult task. Because this narrative seeks to influence how the nation views itself and simultaneously vies to become the *only* way to understand the past, further layers of complication and conflict are inevitable. Within this context, issues of historical exclusion, perversion, and erasure become commonplace. Third, this project

³ For an interesting discussion of this within the context of one contentious museum exhibit, see Edward Linenthal and Tom Engelhart, eds., *History Wars: The Enola Gay and Other Battles for the American Past* (New York: Metropolitan Books), 1996.

examines the history of a profoundly divisive and disruptive past, a past that is, it is fair to say, among the most disturbing in Chile's national history. As studies of the Holocaust have suggested, it is easier to talk about the suffering one has received as opposed to the suffering one has caused.⁴ As the wounds of Pinochet's dictatorship are deep and fresh, historical narratives of such atrocity and social conflict are all the more contentious, all the more so in that, as opposed to the Holocaust, Chilean society has not yet reached consensus as to whether those who inflicted the suffering are responsible for serious crimes or were doing "what needed to be done."

This thesis examines the construction of a popular conservative historical memory specifically through an analysis of Chile's newspaper of record, *El Mercurio*. As the country's leading conservative outlet, one can safely say that *El Mercurio* is the voice—*vocero*—of the Right in Chile. First founded in 1827 but later established in 1900 in Santiago by the very affluent Edwards family, *El Mercurio* has garnered a degree of power and influence in Chilean society unrivaled by any other media source.⁵

Its location at the heart of conservative politics in Chile has also made *El Mercurio* into a site of memory (*lieux de mémoire*) in Chilean history.⁶ The archive of *El Mercurio* is a central site where the Right in Chile has located its memories and through

⁴ See Edward Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America's Holocaust Museum* (New York: Viking, 1995).

⁵ It must be noted that, as with the British press, for example, print media in Chile has long been associated with political orientations that shape their coverage of the news as well as the editorial pages. To be well informed, readers will consult a variety of newspapers, not just one. Presently, *El Mercurio* faces more competition than it ever did before, but not enough to destabilize its reputation as the newspaper of record.

⁶ Pierre Nora, *Rethinking France = Les Lieux De Mémoire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

which it will revise its narratives of the past. In short, *El Mercurio* is a vital source to study the Right's (re)production of the meaning of the 1973-1990 period in Chilean history.

While *El Mercurio* has been for nearly two hundred years the privileged media voice of the Right and a key player in the formation of Chilean conservative memory, one also studies *El Mercurio* because of the ways it has helped mold Chilean cultural and political identity. *El Mercurio* claims to be not just a shaper of public opinion, but the “representative” of Chilean society—the cultural agent that dictates the terms of what it means to be Chilean. That *El Mercurio* is not just the “voice” of the Right but also the self-proclaimed definer of *chilenidad* (Chilean nationality) necessitates an examination of the crafting of its post-dictatorship historical narrative.

Many studies have been published that examine *El Mercurio*'s ideology and its critical role in both the overthrow of Allende and during the course of Pinochet's regime.⁷ But there is little scholarship regarding *El Mercurio*'s historical memory narrative, particularly since the return to civilian rule, that is, the different ways *El Mercurio* has represented and inserted Chile's recent past of authoritarian rule into a larger narrative about Chile's history. For *El Mercurio*, a newspaper that has, despite its conservative biases, maintained its reputation as a defender of democracy and democratic ideals, constructing a narrative of Pinochet's dictatorship poses familiar and not-so familiar challenges.

⁷ *El Mercurio* was a propaganda machine during Allende's dictatorship and helped facilitate his overthrow. *El Mercurio* was also, for majority of Pinochet's dictatorship, the only media outlet permitted to continue publishing.

Since the country's independence, Chileans have come to emphasize their democratic tradition and continuity, particularly in relation to other Latin American countries. Major schools of Chilean historiography, at least since the mid-nineteenth century, have reinforced this narrative—what some would call a “whiggish” interpretation— and written history to reflect Chile's imagined unending progress even during times of democratic rupture.⁸ It is fair to say that Chile has indeed enjoyed a more prolonged history of constitutional government than all of its neighbors. And the absorption of this view at a popular level, the “myth” that Chilean political stability since the 1830s was synonymous with an uncontested and continual growth of democracy, was not seriously challenged until the coup of 1973 and the dictatorship that followed.⁹ But by all standard measures, as confirmed by solid evidence, Pinochet's seventeen-year rule was a repressive and authoritarian dictatorship. As such, his years in power represent a critical rupture of Chile's political traditions that must call forth, at the very least, a reexamination, if not a revision, of that prior narrative.

An analysis of the period between the coup of September 11, 1973 and the end of Pinochet's dictatorship in 1990, then, can turn Chile's longstanding historiography of democratic stability on its head. For those who supported this whiggish approach, and *El Mercurio* is certainly a representative of this within the popular sphere, the challenge in the post-dictatorship period is whether or how to revise its historical memory narrative in

⁸ Among Chilean historians most noted for their conservative (positivist) approaches, one can site the work of Diego Barros Arana, Miguel Luís Amunátegui, and Domingo Amunátegui in the nineteenth century or Mario Góngora in the twentieth.

⁹ Tomás Moulian's influential book, *Chile Actual: Anatomía de un mito*, explores how the “myth” of Chilean democracy has unraveled since the end of Pinochet's dictatorship. Tomás Moulian, *Chile Actual: Anatomía De Un Mito* (Santiago, Chile : ARCIS Universidad, LOM Ediciones, 1997).

the face of what was an irrefutably *undemocratic* period of Chilean history. My thesis explores this challenge, examining the discursive ways in which *El Mercurio* seeks to reinsert Pinochet's dictatorship *into* a national narrative of democracy and progress. At the same time, as an extension of this work, my thesis raises questions about the responsibilities of the media as they seek to create a historical narrative. If a newspaper, which is a key ingredient of democratic society and ideals, can transform a period of authoritarian rule—of unjustifiable death and torture—into a period that *strengthened* democracy, then what is at stake for Chilean democracy in the present and future?

This thesis is organized into three chapters, an Introduction and Conclusion. In the first chapter, I explore some prevailing theories within the field of collective memory, and how these have been applied in the context of the Southern Cone and, ultimately, Chile. I also introduce the reader to the general contours of twentieth century Chilean history and trace the political context preceding Allende's election and, three years later, Pinochet's coup. I conclude chapter one by situating *El Mercurio* in its historical and journalistic context and explain why it has become an important site through which one can study how conservatives have viewed Chile's recent history.

In chapter two, I examine more closely the 1973 coup and Pinochet's dictatorship. Specifically I discuss the development of a new conservative politics and ideology as they unfolded after September 11, 1973 and evolved throughout Pinochet's seventeen-year rule. In this chapter I will also explore *El Mercurio's* role both in reporting Chile's "New Right" as well as in helping to bring it into creation.

Finally in chapter three, I offer an empirical analysis of *El Mercurio*'s editorial and news writing between 1990-2006 and suggest whether and how Chile's foremost conservative media outlet revised its historical narrative of the past. I explore five different time moments and locate the changing ways *El Mercurio* modified its vision of the 1970-1990 period through its mediation with present circumstances and historical revelations.

Chapter One: Collective Memory, *El Mercurio*, and Twentieth Century Chilean History

Each day, whenever *El Mercurio* hits Chile's ubiquitous kiosks, the battle to write a national history of the past thirty-five years is fought out once again. *El Mercurio*'s unfolding narrative of Pinochet's dictatorship does not fall within the confines of academic history as written by professional scholars. Rather it is history created in a popular mode—what some might call *vernacular* history—but it competes to define the meaning of Pinochet's seventeen-year rule every bit as much as academic histories and, arguably, its chances of success are many times greater. As with other groups struggling to engrave their historical narrative in the public domain, *El Mercurio*'s history, while it might incorporate documented evidence to verify “what happened” in the past, primarily appeals to the “historical consciousness” that is beyond text, deriving instead from collective experience and memory; its goal is not the generation of a “definitive” history, but rather to determine how what happened should be remembered.

In this chapter, I explore the ways in which the writing of the history of Pinochet's dictatorship within the public (popular) domain treads inexorably on the terrain of memory, and in particular, collective memory. To the extent that there is no established (consensual) national narrative of Pinochet's regime, nothing to follow the display of Allende's glasses in the *Museo Nacional Histórico*; to the extent that textbooks of Chilean history end with (or before) the coup of 1973; and to the extent that those who lived through this contested period are still present to debate its vastly different interpretations (Pinochet is variously described as a brutal *dictator* and a national *liberator*), the realm of collective memory becomes the battleground upon which a

popular struggle to define the past unfolds. When one reads *El Mercurio*, one reads an historical account that seeks to shape not just how the Chilean public understands but also *remembers* its collective past, and how that past pertains to the present and future.

El Mercurio's national history narrative is what one historian, Steven Stern, calls a *collective* or *emblematic* memory narrative. Collective or emblematic memory narratives look broadly at a period of history and establish a coherent story that interprets the events of the past in a way that can resonate with the prior expectations of the general public. These narratives are not necessarily constructed by professional historians, but rather by social actors who work in the public domain to ensure that their version of the past becomes *official* history. While many understand memory as the experience of one individual, Stern and others maintain that emblematic or collective memories are formed by underlying social frameworks acting to influence how a group or society as a whole remembers its past. Indeed there is a level of mutual interaction in which one's personal memories inform the collective memory and the underlying collective memory shapes the individual memory.

Since the end of Pinochet's brutal seventeen-year dictatorship, an increasing number of collective memory narratives have represented Pinochet's regime as a period of intense "rupture, persecution, and awakening."¹⁰ Stories (and histories) that had been repressed by the state or denied a public forum resurfaced after 1990 to challenge the dominant "salvation" history of the dictatorship. Yet the post-dictatorial period has not only seen narratives emerge from the (formerly silenced) Left. Conservatives also work

¹⁰ See Steven J. Stern *Remembering Pinochet's Chile: On the Eve of London, 1998* (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 2006). This is the first of Stern's trilogy of works on the topic.

to define the past, but their task and objectives are quite different. If the Left must give voice to its long buried stories, the Right must figure out how to shoe-horn a 17-year long dictatorship into a national narrative that has, for well more than a century, privileged the (imagined or real) liberal, democratic, constitutional traditions of Chile.

As stated above, *El Mercurio's* on-going construction of a post-Pinochet national history narrative was not written by professional historians and its audience was lay citizens not academics. This thesis, then, does not hold *El Mercurio* to “professional” standards of history production, nor does it question the paper’s engagement with historical revisionism, itself an essential component of historical work. What is of more concern and what this thesis seeks to examine is *El Mercurio's* efforts to authorize its national history of Pinochet’s dictatorship.

Taking into account the ways in which *El Mercurio's* historical narrative of the Pinochet’s dictatorship operates within the matrix of social memory, this chapter will briefly examine some of the burgeoning literature on collective memory. It will discuss how collective memory theory has been revised as it has been applied to Southern Cone, and more specifically, Chilean history in the latter part of the twentieth century. Because the memory story/ies of Chile presupposes a certain familiarity with the political and social background of the country, this chapter will also provide the reader with a brief overview of twentieth century Chilean history. Finally this chapter will introduce *El Mercurio* as key subject in the formation of conservative collective memory in Chile.

Prevailing Theories of Collective, Historical, and Social Memory

Much of the scholarship on historical memory comes from the work of French intellectuals who, starting in the aftermath of World War II, began to theorize the

relationship of history to memory by examining the “national memory” of France. It is important to note that this interest in historical memory occurred in the wake of France’s dismal military and rather unsteady political record in the 20th century. Recognizing that societies seek ways to commemorate and recover “what once was,” especially if, as in this case, “what once was” seemed more noble and glorious than the current era, these scholars tried to understand how and why the various means of remembering France’s national past—the physical places, images, and language—had changed over time. In other words, why did some collective memories of France endure the test of time while others faded into oblivion?

The passage of time diminishes memory, both personal (as we well know), and collective. Those memories we once had of a certain event—be it an event we experienced personally or collectively as a nation—are therefore continually evolving. As we (individually, collectively) become distant from the date of the event itself, some memories remain and are subject to revision while others are simply forgotten, suggesting that they no longer hold much relevance in the present. These issues raise a number of questions, not the least of which are the ways in which societies remember the past, the way in which the present continually transforms the past, and the propensity of power to promote or suppress memories.¹¹

In answering these questions, I am primarily drawing from the work of Maurice Halbwachs, Michel Foucault, and Pierre Nora.¹² Any theoretical discussion of collective memory begins with the work of Maurice Halbwachs, certainly the scholar who opened

¹¹ See, for example, John Urry, “How Societies Remember the Past,” *The Sociological Review* (1996), 46.

¹² This synthesis borrows heavily from Patrick H. Hutton, *History as an Art of Memory* (Burlington, Vt.: University of Vermont, 1993).

the field to contemporary study. Halbwachs (1877- 1945), a sociologist by training, did much of his work on memory before the Second World War and was heavily influenced by France's experiences during World War I. His findings, largely ignored while he was alive, reemerged in the late 1960s and the 1970s through the work of Michel Foucault, Phillippe Ariés, and Maurice Agulhon.¹³

Maurice Halbwachs's theory of collective memory first emerged in *Las Cadres Sociaux de la Mémoire* (1925) where he presents three main arguments.¹⁴ First, Halbwachs argues that collective memory is a social construction; rather than an arbitrary grouping of personal memories, it is the deliberate (if unconscious) union of comparable individual memories. According to Halbwachs, individual memories over time coalesce into one idealized image of the past that constitutes a collective memory.¹⁵ The jump from individual to collective memory entails a process of selection. Those individual memories that cease to resonate over time within a certain group diminish and are eventually forgotten. Inasmuch as it is individuals who remember the past and not groups, Halbwachs claims that "there are as many collective memories as there are groups and institutions in society."¹⁶

The coalescing of individual memories over time, however, relies on social groups to carry out the work of remembering, consciously or unconsciously. Herein lies Halbwachs' second point, one that has since helped contemporary historians understand the complex relation between history and memory. Halbwachs claims that the power of

¹³ Ibid.,73.

¹⁴ Nearly twenty-five years later (and five years after his death), Halbwachs' *Le Mémoire Collective* was published in English as *The Collective Memory*.

¹⁵ Ibid.,7.

¹⁶ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 22.

collective memory resides in its ability to establish roots within social frameworks: a collective memory endures when it resonates with social groups that stake a claim to it. If we accept that memories change over time, then the power of collective memories must depend on social groups (and their relative access to power) to provide continued support for the “collective” memory that reinforces their view of the past.¹⁷

Similarly, although approached from a different perspective, individual memories are also immediately shaped by a larger, more collective memory. As Halbwachs argues, the way one remembers the past reflects the social group to which he/she belongs. In *Las Cadres*, Halbwachs specifies some of these social groups as the family, the Church, and most significantly socioeconomic class.¹⁸ Two later memory scholars working in Latin America and Spain respectively, Elizabeth Jelin and Paloma Aguilar Fernández, have argued along similar lines. Jelin asserts that “individual memories are always socially framed,”¹⁹ while Aguilar suggests that “individuals are able to recall the past precisely because they belong to a social group. The interests and experiences of the group shape the memories of its members and the very fact that they belong to the group helps them to remember (by means of referral) and to recreate their own experiences collectively.”²⁰ Halbwachs elucidates the symbiotic relationship between collective and individual memories. He demonstrates that both kinds of memory subconsciously rely on social frameworks. Whereas individuals depend on social groups to inform their personal memories, collective memories rely on social frameworks to keep them alive. For

¹⁷ Ibid, 21.

¹⁸ Ibid..

¹⁹ Elizabeth Jelin, *State Repression and the Labors of Memory* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 11.

²⁰ Paloma Aguilar Fernández, *Memory and Amnesia: The Role of the Spanish Civil War in the Transition to Democracy* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2002), 11.

Halbwachs, social amnesia can occur when these social frameworks dissolve or break apart.

Halbwachs's third main argument is that memory is constantly revised because of circumstances in the present. Halbwachs assumes a presentist perspective on collective and individual memory, arguing that when we look back, we do not conjure up the same past that we had originally perceived. Instead, our personal and collective reminiscences go through a filter that refashions our memories based on the present. In other words, memory is a reconstruction of the past from the vantage point of the present. In writing about Halbwachs, Patrick Hutton succinctly observes "remembering, therefore, might be characterized as a process of imaginative reconstruction, in which we integrate specific images formulated in the present into particular contexts identified with the past."²¹

But how does Halbwachs explain the difference between history and memory? If memory is a social reconstruction of the past based on the present, what is the role of history and historians? In *La Mémoire Collective*, Halbwachs argues that history and memory are separate enterprises and retrieve two different pasts. Where memory is whimsical and mystical in its ability to bring the past back to life with emotions intact, history is more sterile and can only resurrect a past that has been stripped of its emotional resonances. Halbwachs maintains, however, that it is the historians' job to "keep memory honest"²²—history must fill in the gaps of the past that memory leaves behind. It can be said then that Halbwachs saw the amalgamation of "objective" history and "subjective" memory as the fundamental ingredients in the production of History.

²¹ Hutton, *History as an Art of Memory*, 78.

²² *Ibid.*, 77.

Although a revitalized appreciation for Maurice Halbwachs' work came years after his death, several other French theorists have also contemplated memory within similar contours. French philosopher Michel Foucault has garnered praise for his contributions to the politics of memory. Although Foucault's work focused more on the rhetoric of commemoration than on memory, his argument that historical discourse constantly evolves based on the present can easily be applied to the process of collective memory. As the way in which we discuss the past is reconfigured because of the present, so too is the way we represent the past, both in word and deed or commemoration, in our memories. Foucault maintained that what may appear to be the past retrieved by commemorative rhetoric is actually a representation of how society once "talked" about the past. In this way, Foucault's theory of historical discourse is akin to Maurice Halbwachs's argument of social frameworks and collective memory. For Foucault, the reconfiguration of historical discourse relies on powerful social groups to promulgate the myriad discursive representations of the past.²³

Maurice Halbwachs and Michel Foucault centered their work on the internal mechanics of memory. Both argued that memories are representations of a past that we reconstruct based on the present. What Halbwachs and Foucault (and many others) first suggested has since been applied, among others, by Pierre Nora (1931-), a French historian and perhaps the most preeminent contemporary scholar in the field. In Nora's most significant project, *Les Lieux de Mémoire* (1984-92),²⁴ he and fifty other French historians set out to understand why the French Revolution had ceased to represent the

²³ Ibid.,106-123.

²⁴ *Rethinking France = Les Lieux De Mémoire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

pinnacle of French political identity. This subject led Nora and his colleagues to question more broadly where and why other French sites of memory had evolved to take on new, more powerful meanings, thus eclipsing the Revolution. For Nora, imagining France's future required discovering where and how France had previously been represented in the nation's collective mentality. This meant passing through the "commemorative monuments, shrines, national histories, civic manuals and history textbooks, public archives and museums,"²⁵ and concluding that the omnipresence of memory sites is a product of the obliteration of living memory.

Nora opens *Les Lieux de Mémoire* with the essay "Between Memory and History," in which he lays out the conceptual framework that guided his project. He argues that "there are *lieux de mémoire*, sites of memory, because there are no longer *milieux de mémoire*, real environments of memory."²⁶ According to Nora, history has diminished and destroyed living memories because of a need to organize them into representations of the nation. Sites of memory, like monuments, museums, and textbooks, exist because history has colonized our whimsical, precious reminiscences of what is no longer. If it were not for the "conquest and eradication of memory by history," there would not be the need to continually commemorate the past—the constant need to retrieve the irretrievable.²⁷ Nora also argued, and this is critical for understanding the function of memory both within the Southern Cone and more specifically within the Chilean context, that the need to commemorate or catalog the past emerges during moments of historical disruption or dislocation. As individuals, but more visibly, as

²⁵ Hutton, *History as an Art of Memory*, 178.

²⁶ Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," Marc Roudebush, trans., *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989): 7-25.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

social groups, we “return to the past” during periods of rupture, when history changes course.

Like Halbwachs, Nora assumes what some might see as a particularly cynical view of history. He argues that history is always the reconstruction of what once was, while memory is our eternal link to the past, present, and future. But Nora’s critique of history goes further. As he claims, “history’s goal and ambition is not to exalt but to annihilate what has in reality taken place.”²⁸ Yet given his provocative stance towards history, Nora nevertheless acknowledges that the creation of *lieux de mémoire* makes historians out of everyone. Every group within society feels a need to recreate its identity by the reconstruction of its own history. So while it is history that destroys memory, it is historiography—or the representation of the past (what one might designate as History, with a capital “H”)—that in turn gives birth to sites of memory. The latter argument applies to *El Mercurio* as many would say that the paper is both *representative* and *generative* vis-à-vis memory. It is *representative* in that it reflects the way the Right in Chile has constructed and revised its understanding of the past. But it is also *generative* in the sense that *El Mercurio* itself has become a site that fashions a memory of the past.

For Halbwachs, Foucault, and Nora, moreover, the key concept towards understanding the connection between history and memory is representation. The archive of history resides not in actual events themselves (events which, in any case, we can only access through representation) but rather in the way these events have been *represented* and *refashioned* in our memories. Pierre Nora observes those representations in *lieux de mémoire* whereas Michel Foucault focuses on the discursive practices that have

²⁸ Ibid., 9.

reconceived our traditions over time. Despite different methods, the unifying core of their work is a desire to understand where and how French identity has been represented in the past in order to understand how French national memory will be constructed in the present and future. Without doubt, contemplating why these three men theorized memory specifically in the context of twentieth century France would be a thesis in and of itself. But, building on the work of these French academics, the study of collective memory has become an important field of analysis in the Southern Cone of Latin America where countries such as Argentina, Brazil, and, Chile only recently emerged from long and brutal periods of political and civil conflict.

Memory Studies in the Southern Cone and Chile

The study and understanding of memory in the context of Latin America's Southern Cone and Chile, specifically, is inextricably linked to the traumatic events of repression and government terrorism of recent times. The scholarship of memory, particularly collective memory, within the Southern Cone approaches memory largely from the specific vantage point of a post-traumatic political reality, and sees its work as intimately linked to rebuilding a *truthful* past and achieving justice for the victims.

During but particularly after the violent period of state repression known as the "Dirty Wars" in South America, memory became a powerful and important means for those who experienced personal tragedy to deal with their loss and suffering.²⁹ While "memory" has historically been one of the key ways politically marginalized or suppressed groups have attempted to influence public opinion and historical

²⁹ The term "dirty war" originated with the Argentine military junta which took power in 1976 and claimed that this form of irregular war was needed to root out political subversives.

consciousness, it became a particularly poignant outlet in countries like Argentina and Chile where state repression most often took the form of “disappearing” political opponents. The call to *remember* was a way of insisting both that the “disappeared” person did exist –bodies could disappear, but not memories—and to ensure that such atrocities “never happen again.”³⁰ Groups of women in Chile and Argentina, in particular, used their own inscribed memory (via photographs, kerchiefs made from diapers, and other artifacts), and incorporated them literally on their own bodies, to keep the past alive.³¹

Since the end of Pinochet’s dictatorship, the study of memory—particularly collective and historical memory—has surfaced with even greater force as Chile’s citizens both individually and collectively come to terms with a contentious and troubled past. The historiography of memory in Chile is vast and includes the innovative work of Elizabeth Jelin, Elizabeth Lira, Brian Loveman, and Steve Stern, among others.³² Their work sheds light on why “memory” has become an arena of political struggle in Chile,

³⁰ I explore the phrase “never again” in chapter three. See page 100.

³¹ For more on “inscribed” and “incorporated” memories, see Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

³² For an introduction to memory studies in Chilean context, see, among others, Brian Loveman, *El espejismo de la reconciliación política: Chile 1990-2002* (Santiago: LOM Ediciones, 2002); Brian Loveman, *Las ardientes cenizas del olvido: Vía chilena de reconciliación política 1932-1994* (Santiago: LOM, 2000); Brian Loveman, *Las suaves cenizas del olvido: Vía chilena de reconciliación política, 1814-1932* (Santiago: LOM Ediciones, 1999); Elizabeth Jelin, *State Repression and the Labors of Memory* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); Myriam Olguín, *Memoria para un nuevo siglo* (Santiago: LOM Ediciones), 2000; Faride Zerán, Manuel Antonio Garretón, Sergio Campos, Carmen Garretón, eds., *Encuentros con la Memoria* (Santiago: LOM Ediciones), 2004; Michael J Lazzara, *Chile in Transition: The Poetics and Politics of Memory* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2006); Lessie Jo Frazier, *Salt in the Sand: Memory, Violence, and the Nation-State in Chile, 1890 to the Present* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

and suggests why *El Mercurio*, in particular, is a central actor in the battle to engrave Chile's national history.

One of the most important memory scholars writing about the experiences of nations in the Southern Cone is Elizabeth Jelin. In *Los trabajos de la memoria* (translated as *State Repression and the Labors of Memory*), Jelin emphasizes that the periods of government oppression in countries like Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, and Chile present a whole new set of dimensions to the discussion of collective memory.³³ What frames this debate is that memory retrieves the past so as not to *forget* it, whereas in other circumstances memory retrieves the past in order to *relive* or *revive* “what once was.” Further, in the Southern Cone, as in other places that recently emerged from conflict-laden pasts, memory is connected to the political challenges of the present, namely the reinstatement of democratic government. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, memory studies in cases of trauma present new intricacies because many of the groups and individuals who experienced immense loss and suffering and many of those who inflicted it, are still alive, often times living side-by-side. Memory in this case is a living (daily) experience. In the context of Latin America's Southern Cone, as Jelin keenly observes, “there was no generational renewal, and the conflicts of the past were still part of the ‘lived experience’ of most actors.”³⁴

In *State Repression and the Labors of Memory*, Jelin explores several conceptual frameworks that I find particularly useful with regards to *El Mercurio*'s post-Pinochet historical narrative. In reference to Maurice Halbwachs's “cadres” or social frameworks,

³³ Elizabeth Jelin, *State Repression and the Labors of Memory* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 32.

Jelin supports the claim that collective memory is a social construction; that memories are more reconstructions than they are recollections. The way we as individuals remember the past is a reflection of the social group to which we adhere. Jelin, however, stresses the differences between the memory reconstructions of social groups of privilege and those of dispossession or disadvantage. Because Jelin sees memory as a product of struggle, she also accentuates the role of individuals within Halbwachs' theory of social frameworks in carrying out the "labors" of collective memory. As Jelin notes, "[collective memory] calls for placing primary attention on the processes of development and social construction of these memories."³⁵ Jelin insists that we bear in mind the agency and active participation of individuals in the formation of and struggle for collective memory. Similar to Halbwachs, Jelin argues that the way we reconstruct the past in our minds is connected to present political conflicts. But Jelin's presentism is magnified by the political circumstances in the Southern Cone. As Jelin argues, for Latin American nations emerging from dictatorships, the struggle for memory, to not *forget* or become obstinate becomes linked to the struggle to reinsert democracy. For Jelin, part of retaining a constitutional form of government involves the remembrance of the past in the construction and acknowledgement of collective memory.

Given these underlying postulations about memory, one of the most salient arguments in Jelin's text is of the way in which struggles over the narrative of memory occur. As "memory expresses itself in a narrative story which can be conveyed to others,"³⁶ Jelin suggests that different groups struggle in the public sphere so that *their* memory narrative of the past becomes the truthful one, displaces the *non-truthful* one,

³⁵ Ibid., 12

³⁶ Ibid., 16.

and asserts its hegemony. In the context of the Southern Cone, memory struggles often pit the narratives of those who have personally experienced repression against those who see the establishment of authoritarian regimes as a salvation. As Jelin points out, there is a need for those who have undergone loss and suffering at the hands of the state to counteract the state's "official history" by achieving hegemony over the past. This argument directly relates to the work of *El Mercurio* in this period as it struggles in the public domain to make *its* version of Pinochet's dictatorship the "official" version—Chile's *national* history.

Jelin further argues that the root of a "hegemonic" narrative of the past resides in the notion of a "master" narrative that stems back to the nineteenth century in Latin America. These master narratives, according to Jelin, "serve[d] as a central node for identification and for anchoring national identity."³⁷ In this way, what will be the "official history" or "hegemonic narrative" of the dictatorial regimes in the Southern Cone carries a lot of weight not just for how the past is remembered but also how post-dictatorial national identities are constructed. Jelin reminds us that "the master national narrative tends to be the story of the victors" and so the "memory" struggle surrounds the ability of counter memory narratives to replace the state's "salvation" narrative as the official history.³⁸ This point is again critical as the reader contemplates the power of *El Mercurio*'s memory narrative to define Chilean post-dictatorial national identity and to perpetuate the nation's master narrative of unending democratic stability.

As a final note, Jelin offers some helpful reflections on the connection between memory and history. While she argues that there is "no one way to articulate the

³⁷ Ibid., 27.

³⁸ Ibid.

relationship between memory and history,” she nevertheless suggests that history and memory bear a mutual relationship.³⁹ As she says, “memory is a crucial source of history” while history enables us to question and challenge memory.⁴⁰ In the context of the Southern Cone, memory struggles frequently occur around the representation of conflict-laden pasts, pasts that are typically connected by a specific type of agency expressed through human rights movements. Because of that, “the historian or social scientist may under certain conditions become a public actor, and his or her positions vis-à-vis a particular conflict may have political consequences that extend beyond disciplinary knowledge and academic debate.”⁴¹

Where Jelin makes broader statements about the collective memory of repression in the Southern Cone, historian Steven Stern narrows in on the specific case of collective memory in Chile. While Stern employs similar arguments for the salience of memory in the Southern Cone, he notes that in Chile, the memory question is particularly significant because of the social impasse seen in the country since the transition back to democratic rule (a history capped off, as I suggested, by Allende’s shattered eyeglasses). For Chile, the dichotomy of memory vs. oblivion fails to accurately encompass the myriad ways that memory reaches the hearts and minds of Chileans. The memory struggles of Chile are, as Stern claims, the struggles of those who “are seeking to define that which is truthful and meaningful about a collective trauma,” not simply the struggle to remember so as not to

³⁹ Ibid., 56.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., 49.

forget.⁴² Stern argues that the paradigm of “memory against forgetting” should be revised to reflect a struggle of memory against what he calls “obstinate” memory.

Although he works within the vein of collective memory, Stern’s theory of *emblematic memory*, as set out in the first two volumes of his projected trilogy, *The Memory Box of Pinochet’s Chile*, distinguishes his work from previous scholarship in the field. Emblematic memory, as Stern defines it, is a socially constructed framework that organizes personal memories of the past into a collective narrative as it simultaneously imparts interpretative meaning to the past. For Stern, emblematic memory differs from collective memory in that it isn’t just the fusion of similar experiences and memories into a larger narrative but rather the acknowledgement by a social group of the essential truth of that narrative. In other words “a framework of remembrance is emblematic because many people have come to share the idea that it represents truth.”⁴³

In *Remembering Pinochet’s Chile on the Eve of London 1998*, Stern identifies four emblematic memories that he suggests have developed in Chile since the coup: salvation, rupture, persecution and awakening, and the closed box. These particular memory fields are not naturalized, i.e., they are not triggered by memories themselves, but rather they represent the collective agency of *portavoces* (or as Jelin would call, *memory entrepreneurs*) who struggle to keep their “truths” of the past in Chile’s public imagination.

Like Jelin, Stern highlights the agency of individuals in social groups who perform the labors of emblematic memory making. Stern labels concrete criteria for the creation of emblematic memories, suggesting that tangible work is done and specific

⁴² Stern, *Remembering Pinochet's Chile on the Eve of London 1998*, xxvii.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 130.

conditions—moments of rupture or conflict—are required to elevate “loose memories” to the emblematic. In other words, moments of conflict provide the catalyst for social groups to organize personal lore (personal experiences or memories) into an emblematic narrative that reflects a collective truth. As Stern notes, “when the symbols and consequences of a rupture are widely experienced by adults and youth as a ‘defining issue or moment,’ the necessity to elaborate collective memory and meaning becomes more powerful.”⁴⁴ In Chile, one moment of rupture, the bombing of the Presidential Palace (La Moneda), on September 11, 1973, has come to represent for some the annihilation of Chile’s long-standing democracy (and with it the loss of a family member or close friend), while for others, it is remembered as the truthful representation of Chile’s salvation from Marxist subversion and civil war.

While Stern explores the emblematic memories of salvation and that of the “closed box” that typically align themselves with supporters or sympathizers of Pinochet’s regime, the bulk of his work regards *counter*-emblematic memory narratives, those of rupture, persecution and awakening.⁴⁵ Indeed this focus is not surprising or unfounded given its connection to active, international human rights movements. The question of conservative memory narratives in Chile, as previously mentioned, however, remains virtually unexplored. As Stern and others demonstrate, the predominant conservative narrative represents Pinochet’s government as having saved Chile from a “Marxist Cancer,” while putting the country on the path of successful capitalist growth.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 114.

⁴⁵ “Memory as closed box was more subtle; a certain ‘will to forget,’ a social agreement that some themes and remembrances were so explosive—conflictive and intractable—that little could be gained from a public opening and airing of the contents inside.” Ibid., 89.

But little research has been done to suggest whether this historical narrative has changed over the period since Pinochet left the Moneda, a period of democratic government and accumulating historical documentation on the dictator's methods. To explore this question, I examine one of the "memory entrepreneurs" active in the field of conservative ideological production, *El Mercurio*. In the next section, I locate *El Mercurio* within a broader historical context, highlighting the social and political circumstances that helped lead to the democratic rupture on September 11, 1973.

Twentieth Century Chilean History:

Chile's twentieth century was marked by intense economic fluctuations, social transformations, and the expansion of democratic participation in the electoral and, more broadly speaking, political process. For Chile's Right, however, the decades leading to the election of Salvador Allende in 1970 witnessed a continuation of traditional and uninspired leadership. Despite an unprecedented increase of popular inclusion in politics over the course of the twentieth century, the Right demonstrated a wooden determination not to broaden its base of support outside of Chile's powerful elites and the *campesinos* (peasants) controlled by landlords in the countryside. In fact, it was not until the 1964 election of Christian Democrat Eduardo Frei Montalva, signaling the birth of a party which could challenge conservatives from the center, that Chile's traditional Right would finally act to refashion its image and organize itself around a consolidated ideology which was both anti-democratic, and anti-participatory even as they continued to contend in the traditional electoral arena. By the time Salvador Allende stepped into office, a new conservative force had officially arrived and was awaiting the right moment to reclaim power from the Left and mount an authoritarian regime.

Since the 1830s Chile's government had operated within a fairly conventional two-party structure (Conservatives and Liberals). From the outset, this set-up was notable for its ability to channel the fight over resources into predictable (constitutional) outlets, and because it allowed the country's elites to exercise control over both parties. This pattern, which became known as an *acuerdo de caballeros* (gentlemen's agreement), lessened political violence even as it marginalized the nascent social forces of the twentieth century. Yet even the new parties on the Left that developed after the turn of the century, the Communists and Socialists, parties which located their political base within the newly emerging urban working class, remained within older political alliances led by middle-class parties (Radicals). Conservative parties, as I have said, relied on a loyal and consistent electorate within the country's rural aristocracy and the peasants they controlled, and among economic elites in the cities.

The ideology of this "Old Right" was characterized by the pursuit of its dominant class interests rather than developing a political approach that would allow it to expand its base of support. It more often sought strategic holds at the parliamentary rather than presidential level and sought non-elite votes by using its economic clout in the cities and tradition and intimidation in the rural areas. The Right thus stayed in power for most of the nineteenth century by a clever combination of social inclusion, usually through targeted marriages of important up-and-coming mining, and then industrial elites, or by buying or bullying other electoral supporters.⁴⁶ Yet by the turn of the century and the

⁴⁶ On the development of Chile's politics in the nineteenth century, see Steven S. Volk, "Mineowners, Moneylenders, and the State in Mid-Nineteenth Century Chile: Transitions and Conflicts," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 73:1 (February 1993): 67-98; Maurice Zeitlin, *The Civil Wars in Chile, or, The Bourgeois Revolutions That Never Were* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); Sergio Villalobos R., *Origen y*

crushing blows dealt to Chile by both World War I and the U.S. stock market crash, it was anything but fortuitous that Chile's emerging social groups grew gradually disillusioned with the Right's elitism.⁴⁷

The Build-Up to a Rightist Re-Orientation

The road to Allende's 1970 election, and the birth of a "New Right," arguably began with the 1932 re-election of the patrician Arturo Alessandri, who had already served one, shortened term as president from 1920-24. Alessandri became one of Chile's dominant elite families (his son would serve as president from 1958-64 and would narrowly lose to Allende in 1970), largely because he recognized that Chile's ruling class needed to modernize its political base beyond the tactics of repression in order to gain electoral control. His election in 1932 ushered in what came to be called the Compromise State (*estado de compromiso*) which accepted the interventionist role the state would have to play in the provision of social welfare and in the regulation of labor relations if capitalism itself was to be stabilized in the midst of a world depression. The Compromise State saw a renewed sense of "political bargaining between parties, a process of industrialization, a slow but progressive consolidation of political democracy, increased state involvement in the economy, and the establishment of a relatively open system of

ascenso de la burguesía chilena (Santiago: Editorial Universitaria, 1987); and Ana María Stuvén V., *La seducción de un orden: Las elites y la construcción de Chile en las polémicas culturales y políticas del siglo XIX* (Santiago: Ediciones Universidad Católica de Chile, 2000).

⁴⁷ A basic historiography of Chile's the Right would include, among others, Sofía Correa, *Con las riendas del poder: La derecha chilena en el siglo XX*, (Santiago: Editorial Sudamericana, 2005); Gabriel Salazar Vergara and Julio Pinto, eds., *Historia contemporánea de Chile* (Santiago: LOM Ediciones, 1999); Simon Collier, *A History of Chile, 1808-2002* (Cambridge [England]: Cambridge University Press, 2004) Brian Loveman, *Struggle in the Countryside: Politics and Rural Labor in Chile, 1919-1973* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976).

negotiation between organized workers and the entrepreneurial sector.”⁴⁸ In many ways, it marked the first moment in which Chile’s Old Right recognized the need to respond and act according to the country’s political development—although the tradition of buying or coercing votes, particularly in rural districts, didn’t actually cease until after the 1950s.

Still, the Right’s ability to adjust to a growing electorate and thus a changing political atmosphere only went so far. As Simon Collier and William Sater note, “the parties maintained (albeit within a broadening framework) much of the character that had been theirs in Parliamentary times.”⁴⁹ Thus, while the social conditions demanded legislative reform, the conservative leadership that could have—and should have—helped enact that change, remained aloof and primarily unresponsive. As I have suggested, it was not until the watershed election of 1964 and the emergence of the Christian Democrat Party to the forefront of national politics that the Right in Chile began to shift its ideology and seek votes in new territory based on political competition, and not just traditionally coercive methods.

The years following Arturo Alessandri’s second presidency up to the election of his son, Jorge Alessandri in 1958 was one of competitive party politics and coalition building. If one characteristic of the years between 1938-52 was an increase in the power of Left-leaning parties, particularly the Socialists and Communists, who became regular participants in “Popular Front” style coalitions that were led by the centrist Radical Party, the other was the Right’s continued inability to appeal to those outside of its

⁴⁸ Marcelo Pollack, *The New Right in Chile, 1973-1997* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: MacMillan Press, 1999), 25.

⁴⁹ Collier, *A History of Chile, 1808-2002*, 237.

socioeconomic cohort or to find new leadership. The glory days of Chile's elitist parties (Conservative and Liberal) had passed as they showed "a continuing electoral decline in the face of advancing centrist and leftist political groups."⁵⁰ Indeed, the Right's two elite parties would soon merge into one.

In the 1958 elections, the Right sought a tried-and-true candidate, settling, once again, on Jorge Alessandri. They faced their most serious threat to date from a Left-center coalition, the Frente de Acción Popular (FRAP) led by a stalwart of the Socialist Party, Salvador Allende, who had occupied the cabinet post of health minister in an earlier coalition government. But a new centrist party, the Christian Democrat Party (PDC-Patrindo Demócrata Cristiano), would also diminish their vote, particularly in rural areas. The Christian Democrats had a mixed heritage, a product of Chile's Falangist Party (a derivative of Franco's party in Spain) and reform-minded social Christians. The PDC would come to challenge the Left for votes among urban workers and the nation's lower classes, and the Right among the peasantry. Alessandri won the election by a razor-thin margin (33,000 votes out of 1.2 million cast), but the election results suggested that the "*Hijo del Leon*" (Lion's Son) could not bail out the Right by using privilege and a historic sense of entitlement to continue to win elections.⁵¹ The election of 1958 also, and perhaps most importantly, marked the beginning of a political trend in Chile that would continue until the coup of 1973: the emergence of a political order characterized by a state divided into three political factions (right, center, and left), each able to command similar numbers of voters.

⁵⁰ Ben G Burnett, *Political Forces in Latin America: Dimensions of the Quest for Stability* (Belmont, Calif: Wadsworth Pub. Co, 1970), 179.

⁵¹ Collier, *A History of Chile, 1808-2002*, 214.

Alessandri's economic agenda did not succeed in mitigating the country's stark socioeconomic disparities nor in addressing the high rates of inflation that began to plague it. But his years in office did see an enormous increase in size of the working and middle class electorate, which tended to strengthen the Christian Democrats and the Left at the expense of the traditional Right parties.⁵² In the 1964 elections, the Right wouldn't even run a candidate, pressured by the U.S. Embassy to back the Christian Democratic candidate, Eduardo Frei Montalva, for fear that the Socialist Allende, running for a third time, would use a three-way split to his advantage.

The 1964 election was a watershed in Chile's recent history. Magnified by the Cuban Revolution of 1959 and a widespread turn in Latin America towards socialism as a viable alternative, the election's stakes were high and the campaign reverberated all over Latin America. Within Chile, the newly mobilized middle and working classes voiced increasing demands for social reform—particularly in the agrarian realm—and a state-driven, nationalist economic policy. Allende ran on a platform of vast political transformation in order to put Chile on the path to socialism while Frei promoted constitutional reforms without undermining “traditional freedoms.”⁵³ Although Allende did better than in the previous two elections, gaining 39 percent of the votes, Eduardo Frei won with a sweeping 55 percent. One of the more valuable lessons for the Right that it could have derived from the election was that its best electoral chances would arise from a coalition with the center. It was a lesson the Right ignored in 1970.

⁵² Thomas E Skidmore, *Modern Latin America*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 131.

⁵³ Brian Loveman, *Chile*, 132.

To the extent that Frei's center-reformist government increased the role of the state in both the economy and social welfare programs at the same time that it threatened conservative control of the rural areas through its agrarian reform legislation, the Right became daily more alienated from Frei and the PDC.⁵⁴ In 1966, in an attempt to halt their slide, the Right's two parties, *Partido Liberal* and *Partido Conservador* coalesced to form the *Partido Nacional* (PN). As the key to the Right's electoral success had long been its iron-fisted control of the rural electorate, a control which was steadily eroded by the PDC's agrarian reform program, it realized that it would have to find a new theoretical grounding, a central project, on which it could appeal to voters outside of its elite circles. In this regard, the new party began to gravitate to one of its earliest heroes, Diego Portales and what became known as "Portalian" politics. Portales, who never served as Chile's President, exercised virtually dictatorial powers from his various cabinet positions in the early 1830's. Conservatives credit him with quelling the post-independence anarchy in Chile, which he accomplished by brutal methods. He believed in authoritarian rule until the time that Chileans might be "ready" for democracy.⁵⁵ Having developed a considerable distrust of political parties and democratic governance, the *Partido Nacional* began to call for a return to more authoritarian systems, suggesting, as Portales did, that Chile was not yet ready for democracy. Marcelo Pollack pointedly

⁵⁴ On the Christian Democratic Party in power, see Michael Fleet, *The Rise and Fall of Chilean Christian Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985); Ricardo A. Yoselevzky, *La democracia Cristiana chilena y el gobierno de Eduardo Frei (1964-1970)* (Mexico: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, 1987); and James Petras, *Politics and Social Forces in Chilean Development* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969).

⁵⁵ Pollack, *The New Right in Chile, 1973-1997*, 27. On Portales, see Alfredo Jocelyn-Holt Letelier, *El peso de la noche. Nuestra frágil fortaleza histórica* (Buenos Aires: Ariel, 2000).

observes that, “for the first time, [Conservatives] began to formulate a national project. Its language adopted concepts of order versus chaos, of promoting the technical rather than the political, of defending private initiative in the face of what they perceived as growing state interference, and of a preference for political authoritarianism.”⁵⁶ Inspired by this nationalist fervor, the PN became an aggressive, anti-party force. Although the Right’s rhetoric deliberately proclaimed an “anti-Left rather than anti-system stance,”⁵⁷ the PN acted not merely out of its disapproval of Leftist and centrist state-led reform, but from a fundamentally *anti-democratic* perspective. In other words, it was not just that the PN would revolt against Allende’s socialist government when it won the 1970 election, but that the “New Right” which had emerged out of electoral disappointments was developing an ideology that rejected the democratic process (liberal democracy) altogether.

The late sixties marked a time of widespread political action, increased dissent, and optimism in Chile’s traditionally marginalized labor and working classes. As the presidential election of 1970 approached, the Left and center-Left again turned to Salvador Allende, now leading a newly formed *Unidad Popular* (Popular Unity) coalition. Frei’s ultimate inability to solve Chile’s political and economic crises coupled with a region-wide movement toward the Left reassured the Left coalition that their own push for socialism was the correct one. The Christian Democrats, however, were more uncertain of full-blown socialism in Chile. In the end, its candidate, Esteban Tomich, represented the party’s left wing and argued for a kind of “socialism lite” program.

⁵⁶ Pollack, *The New Right in Chile*, 28.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

A charismatic doctor turned politician, who preached “the democratic road to socialism,” Salvador Allende offered an alternative of greater economic equality and social justice. To Chile’s privileged sectors and foreign investors, particularly those allied with the United States, the *Unidad Popular* represented the Partido Nacional’s worst nightmare. While the “New Right” had become a profoundly *anti-democratic* force, Allende promised not only the deepening of democracy—via socialist reform—but the dream of a pluralistic society no longer controlled by the elites, operating outside of and against their long-standing *acuerdo de caballeros*.

With the Right failing to heed the lessons of the 1964 campaign, it forwarded its own candidate, Jorge Alessandi, yet again, and the three-way split allowed Allende to slip in with 36.3% of the vote (as against Alessandri’s 34.9%) on September 3, 1970. Because neither candidate had won a majority vote, the final result would be determined by congress, an opening which allowed the United States to covertly attempt to derail Allende’s selection.⁵⁸ When these measures failed in an embarrassing fashion, Allende was confirmed as Chile’s president.

Allende’s election was an enormous victory for the Left, but it served as a crushing defeat for the traditional Right, which, with the defeat of Jorge Alessandri, had reached the end of its historical high-road. By the time Allende and the *Unidad Popular* stepped into office in November 1970, it was the “New Right” elements of the conservative movement that had already begun to articulate the challenge to Allende’s Chile. If the Right was ever more eager to remove Allende and the *Unidad Popular*, it

⁵⁸ Collier, *A History of Chile, 1808-2002*, 328, and Peter Kornbluh, *The Pinochet File: A Declassified Dossier on Atrocity and Accountability*, new ed. (New York: New Press, 2004).

waited, however impatiently, for the right moment and proper support to do it. Despite the PN's emerging hostility towards the democratic institutions that had symbolized Chile's electoral history, a hostility that only fully coalesced when they could no longer control those elections or guarantee their outcome, the Right understood that the military would not act to oust him unless it felt that action would receive ample support, and that required winning over the Christian Democrats to their side. At the start of the UP government, harnessing Christian Democrat support proved difficult for the Right as both Allende and the PDC "shared a strong commitment to representative democracy" and social reform.⁵⁹ But by 1971, as Allende's economic program (and the disruptions of a covert U.S. economic blockade) began to produce "shortages, rising prices, and black markets," as well as the sense that there were political forces being unleashed by the Popular Unity which were operating beyond the historic boundaries of elite control, the PDC became ever more alienated from the UP. This process accelerated when center-Right factions in the PDC asserted their dominance.⁶⁰ The severance of UP/PDC cooperation provided a window of opportunity for the Right to unite forces with the Christian Democrats and mobilize its opposition movement against Allende.

By March 1973, Chile found itself in a state of social and economic chaos. With Allende's government blocked at every move by an opposition-controlled Congress, and

⁵⁹ Youssef Cohen, *Radicals, Reformers, and Reactionaries: The Prisoner's Dilemma and The Collapse of Democracy in Latin America* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 101-2.

⁶⁰ Brian Loveman, *Chile: The Legacy of Hispanic Capitalism*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 298. There is a substantial literature on U.S. relations with Allende's Chile. See, among others, NACLA, *New Chile* (Berkeley and New York: NACLA, 1972); Kornbluh, *The Pinochet File*; James Petras and Morris Morley, *The United States and Chile: Imperialism and the Overthrow of the Allende Government* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975); and Paul Sigmund, *The United States and Democracy in Chile* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

their own supporters often acting autonomously, the president could not find a way out of the skyrocketing inflation, massive protests in the streets, and surging violence between the more militant UP supporters and adherents of the MIR (Movimiento de la Izquierda Revolucionaria), on the one hand, and hard-core authoritarian supporters grouped in *Patria y Libertad*, on the other. As the Right's agenda became increasingly insurrectional, Allende's fate was sealed. On September 11, 1973, with the covert encouragement of the Nixon Administration, the armed forces of Chile, led by General Augusto Pinochet, staged a violent *golpe de estado*.⁶¹

Framed around the notion of “*restauración*,” a “restoration” which stemmed back to the 1830s, the military's overthrow of the Unidad Popular led to the suicide of Salvador Allende and what proved to be the collapse of Chile's long-standing democracy. Subsequently, Chile's political Right and armed forces united in what was proclaimed to be a “pronunciamiento”—a move to save the *patria* from civil war. Yet it would be a new set of political actors, the ultra-conservative, ferociously anti-liberal *gremialista* movement and a coterie of economists trained in monetarist theory at the University of Chicago, who would provide the ideological orientation for the military dictatorship that took shape after September 11th. And more, it would be the right-wing media establishment, *El Mercurio*, which would lend its voice and authoritative support to this most radical of deviations from Chile's democratic traditions.

⁶¹ I explore more closely the events of the coup in chapter two.

El Mercurio: The Traditional Voice of Untraditional Politics

It is necessary to explain a bit of the historical background of *El Mercurio* in order to understand why the newspaper is fundamental to the articulation of a conservative historical vision in Chile, both during and, in this case, after the fall of Pinochet's dictatorship. Because of *El Mercurio's* centrality in conservative journalism, the historical narratives it has propagated since 1990 can point to the ways in which the Right has collectively represented Chile's past over time and how conservatives intend that this contentious period in Chile's history be remembered in the future.

For almost two centuries, *El Mercurio* has been considered Chile's newspaper of record. It is undeniably the country's leading conservative media outlet. First founded in 1827 in Valparaíso by Pedro Félix but later re-located and reestablished in 1900 in Santiago by Agustín Edwards MacClure, *El Mercurio* has since remained exclusively in the hands of the Edwards family. Because of the extensive wealth and investments of its publishers, and because of its location at the heart of conservative politics in Chile, *El Mercurio* has acquired a degree of influence and power in Chilean society and politics unrivaled by any other media source.⁶² How *El Mercurio* came to dominate Chilean journalism—so much so that it became such a crucial element in catalyzing the overthrow of Allende and supporting Pinochet's dictatorship – is key in understanding how the ideology New Right could gain such a popular foothold.

⁶² Correa, *Con las riendas del poder*, 55.

Emulating the concept of “objective” and “impartial” journalism as symbolized by the London *Times* or the *New York Times*, *El Mercurio*⁶³ early on garnered not only a substantial readership but also the coveted reputation as being “de la naturaleza libertaria” [of a more objective nature].⁶⁴ *El Mercurio*’s management recognized that in order for the newspaper to be taken seriously within Chile’s middle and popular sectors as a modern and objective press, it would need to abstain from establishing direct ties with the country’s party Right. To this end, *El Mercurio* claimed to be not just a framer of “public opinion,” which it most certainly was, but a “*representante de la civilización chilena*” [representative of Chilean civilization], even as it simultaneously catered to the interests of Chile’s ruling class.⁶⁵ In other words, while *El Mercurio* maintained its stronghold within elitist circles, it broadcast its image as an unswerving supporter of a free press in a democratic society: it stood for the promotion of truth, for untrammelled freedom of expression, and for an objective journalistic practice. One of the more interesting aspects of *El Mercurio* is not just that it was able to claim objectivity while still representing the interests of Chile’s dominant class – that, after all, is a claim that many media outlets make -- but that it promoted itself as the very embodiment of Chilean identity and civilization, claims that only the most ideological of media make.

Yet from its birth up through the tumultuous years of the 1960s, the discourse of *El Mercurio*, in its news analysis as well as its editorial stance, was unquestionably capitalist, technocratic, and socially conservative. Directed by the corporation *Grupo*

⁶³ From now on, when I refer to *El Mercurio*, I am specifically referring to the edition published in Santiago.

⁶⁴ Claudio Durán, *El Mercurio: Ideología y propaganda, 1954-1994: Ensayos De Interpretación Bi-Lógica Y Psico-Histórica* (Santiago: Ediciones Chile y América-CESOC, 1995), 28.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

Edwards, El Mercurio's fundamental loyalty resided with the country's entrepreneurial sector and, for a long time, with the leaders of Chile's Old Right. With the amalgamation of the Liberal and Conservative parties into the Partido Nacional and the mounting social reformist movement of the late 1960s, *El Mercurio* took on a more overtly political role. Although leftist and student groups began to question its reportorial trustworthiness, *El Mercurio* still insisted on its differentiation from the political parties of the Right. As a result, it was able to promote a conservative ideology without undermining its status as Chile's most powerful and politically independent newspaper.⁶⁶

With the election of Salvador Allende, however, *El Mercurio* shed its "detached" image to become a vital player in the Right's opposition movement. Unlike other conservative outlets, *El Mercurio* had a unique ability to speak to centrist sectors of Christian Democrats that had for so long trusted its "objective" and "impartial" reporting. For that reason, alone, it would become an indispensable platform for the conservative opposition as it mounted its movement to remove the UP.⁶⁷ During the UP's three years in office, *El Mercurio's* news articles, not to mention its editorial stance, reflected an increasingly frantic anti-government tone, adopting a more sensationalist approach to its reporting of Chilean politics. But, as we will see, *El Mercurio* was far more than a propaganda machine. It would become the historical record – for a time, the *only* daily record – of what happened during those years.

While *El Mercurio* was and remains Chile's leading conservative outlet and played an important role in the continuity of Pinochet's brutal regime, this thesis is not concerned with issues of journalistic objectivity. Rather, if we are to understand how

⁶⁶ Correa, *Con las riendas del poder*, 54.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

conservative thought in Chile not just *recorded* but *represented* the past in and for the present, *El Mercurio* becomes a vital source. To borrow from Pierre Nora's *lieux de mémoire*, it can be argued that the archive of *El Mercurio* is a *site of memory* in Chilean society. It represents where and how the Right in Chile recalls and refashions its memories of the past. As historian Steve Stern would suggest, *El Mercurio* is a "mirror of the nation."⁶⁸ Keeping in mind *El Mercurio*'s central role in the formation of Chilean conservative collective memory, we now turn to the reshaping of Chilean conservative ideology during Pinochet's dictatorship.

⁶⁸ Stern, *Remembering Pinochet's Chile on the Eve of London 1998*, 131.

Chapter Two: Pinochet in La Moneda: The Ideology and Practice of Authoritarian Conservatism in Chile

September 11, 1973, the day that Chilean armed forces attacked and disposed of Salvador Allende's Unidad Popular (UP) government, marked a decisive break from Chile's long-running democratic tradition. Since its independence, Chile had prided itself on sustained constitutional government and civilian rule. But on September 11, General Augusto Pinochet and three other military chiefs who made up the ruling Junta began systematically to decimate the democratic institutions that were the bedrock of Chile's political identity. September 11, 1973 not only symbolized the demise of "la vía democrática al socialismo" (the democratic road to socialism), it also foretold a death threat to liberal democracy in general. The bombing of La Moneda, the presidential palace, spoke loud and clear to those who would listen: politics in Chile was about to be severely restructured. Over the next seventeen years (1973-1990), Pinochet's military regime fundamentally transformed Chilean political, economic and social life. As will be discussed below, this entailed the widespread removal of many opponents of the new regime and/or supporters of the UP by means of assassination, torture or exile, as well as the marginalization of coup supporters who opposed the growing repression of the regime and any opponents to General Pinochet within the Army. It also involved—and this is where our subject, *El Mercurio*, becomes key—the production and dissemination of an ideology which was politically authoritarian, socially conservative, and economically monetarist, and the institutionalization of that ideology, most profoundly, through the 1980 Constitution.

In order to discern how *El Mercurio* revised its historical narrative of Pinochet's regime in the post-dictatorial period (chapter three), one must first set the record straight about what *did* happen between 1973-1990. The main target of the forces who carried out the attack on La Moneda on September 11, 1973 was the Left, as represented by Salvador Allende, those active in his governing Popular Unity coalition, and leftist forces outside his government (the MIR). However, what developed under Pinochet's rule was not simply an attack on the UP, Leftists or those otherwise deemed "subversive" by Augusto Pinochet and his secret police. Rather it was an attack on liberal democracy itself. In a project that would later be called a "renovation" by *El Mercurio*, Augusto Pinochet and the three members of his Junta set out to destroy the political institutionality that had existed in Chile prior to September 11, 1973. As such, Pinochet's regime also targeted (although in less brutal fashion) moderate political parties who came to oppose the Junta's methods (Christian Democrats, largely) and even the traditional conservative parties because what they sought was a return to the *status quo ante*.

As we have seen, the years leading up to Salvador Allende's election witnessed a crisis within Chile's traditional ("Old") Right. By the time Allende assumed office in September 1970, it was quite clear that the Right could no longer rely on its historically privileged position to win electoral victories. Thus, while the late 1960s and early 1970s saw the dawn of a new era in leftist politics, it had also led to a crisis in Chile's traditional Right. By September 4, 1970, and continuing throughout the three-year government of Salvador Allende, various leaders from Chile's traditional conservative coalition began shaping the Right's ideological rebirth. The overthrow of Allende in September 1973 and the beginning of military rule—spearheaded by Pinochet, a man

with no previous ideological ties to Chile's "Old Right"—led to the emergence of a new conservative agenda.⁶⁹ During Pinochet's regime—most notably in the decade between the mid-1970s and the mid-1980s—it would be the "*gremialistas*" with their authoritarian predilections, along with the Chicago school economists, who formed what has since been referred to as Chile's "New Right."⁷⁰

As Pinochet's regime and the "New Right" had merged into a singular, hegemonic force by the middle of his regime, how a new, dominant conservative ideology unfurled, and how it was made manifest after 1973 is the focus of this chapter. Yet if seventeen years of military rule oversaw the emergence of a "New Right," it concurrently created a significant ideological split in Chile's conservative bloc. This split ultimately centered on whether the Right would form itself around authoritarian conservatism or attempt to reenergize a traditional democratic conservatism.

El Mercurio, for its part, not only flourished its rhetorical sword to help depose Allende, but subsequently became the singular narrator of Pinochet's regime and its neo-liberal authoritarian ideology. Because *El Mercurio* served both as the producer and the reflection of the new conservative forces in Chile, I will explore the paper's role in the generation of a new conservative project in Chile.

⁶⁹ Sofía Correa, *Con Las Riendas Del Poder: La Derecha Chilena En El Siglo XX* (Santiago: Editorial Sudamericana, 2005). This critically important book has greatly informed my understanding of this period in Chilean history.

⁷⁰ Marcelo Pollack, *The New Right in Chile, 1973-1997* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: MacMillan Press Ltd, 1999), 25.

The Coup and its Consequences:

The swooping planes with their deadly missiles launched over La Moneda on Tuesday September 11, 1973 were only the beginning of what has been described as Chile's darkest hour. Although rumors of a threatened coup had circulated widely for months (and one actual attempt that had been put down on June 29), few would have predicted the level of chaos and violence that ensued on that fateful Tuesday morning.⁷¹ By the afternoon, Salvador Allende was dead and General Augusto Pinochet had seized control of the country.⁷² Over the course of the afternoon, all pro-government radio stations had been forced off the air and the military's voice alone resounded declaring the *Unidad Popular* a failure—a crisis in the democratic tradition—and calling for the restoration of civility in the country. By the evening, Pinochet and the three other members of his Junta—Gustavo Leigh of the Air Force, José Toribio Merino of the Navy, and César Mendoza representing the *carabineros* (a militarized police force)—appeared on national television to present the objectives and policy of their regime. As conservative political forces and other right-wing media outlets (especially *El Mercurio*) had been preparing the country for months by promoting an image of a Chile in threat of being overrun by a Leftist dictatorship, the Junta spoke of September 11 as a day of salvation from Marxist dictatorship and civil war. General Leigh declared that the Junta

⁷¹ On the coup, among others, see Carlos Huneeus, *The Pinochet Regime* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2007); and Brian Loveman, *Las Ardientes Cenizas Del Olvido: Vía Chilena De Reconciliación Política 1932-1994* (Santiago: LOM, 2000).

⁷² For years, supporters of Allende's government argued that he had been assassinated by Pinochet's soldiers in the Moneda palace. But various credible sources have surfaced to argue persuasively that Salvador Allende committed suicide. See Oscar Soto, *El último día de Salvador Allende: Crónica del asalto al Palacio de la Moneda, contada por sus protagonistas* (Santiago: Aguilar), 1999 and Shirley Christian, "Santiago Journal: Allende's Widow Meditates Anew on a Day in '73," *New York Times*, June 5, 1990.

would take all the measures necessary to rid the country of its “Marxist cancer,” save the country’s economy, and return it to civilian rule.⁷³

After the Junta’s first public address, few would have guessed that Pinochet’s regime would last for seventeen more years, becoming the single longest government in Chilean history. And certainly no one could have foreseen the degree of repression and injustice committed by the Chilean state on its own people. Over the course of Pinochet’s regime, more than 35,000 people were tortured, a documented 2,279 were killed (and it is likely that many more undocumented deaths remain to this day uncounted), and tens of thousands were sent into exile.⁷⁴ The military regime, which began by exterminating its real and perceived enemies, ended by formulating a new state.

Pinochet’s rule between 1973 and 1990 can be divided into three key periods. The first period, which begins with the coup and extends to roughly 1975, entailed *cleansing* the country of Marxism. The second phase (1975-1980), opened the move toward a new institutionalism in Chile by consolidating the political and economic basis of Pinochet’s regime. The final period, beginning with the implementation of the 1980 Constitution and ending with the plebiscite of 1988, marked the full *institutionalization* of Pinochet’s regime in both the economic and political spheres. This final period also witnessed the deepening of political divisions within the regime’s supporters, which produced the Right’s split into two main conservative parties, Unión Demócrata Independiente

⁷³ Huneeus, *The Pinochet Regime*, 46.

⁷⁴ Brian Loveman, *Chile: The Legacy of Hispanic Capitalism*, 2nd ed., (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 316. This is the number of deaths reported from the Rettig Report. See Thomas C Wright, *State Terrorism in Latin America: Chile, Argentina, and International Human Rights* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 187-90.

(Democratic Independent Union, UDI) and Renovación Nacional (National Renovation, RN).⁷⁵

The First Period: Repressive

The first phase of Pinochet's government (1973-1975) was marked by clumsily constructed decrees and widespread repression. Despite his plan to rid the nation of Marxist influence, when Pinochet first assumed power, his regime lacked a coherent driving ideology. In fact, most actions undertaken by the Junta in this first period were deemed "emergency" measures designed to "cleanse" the country—politically, socially, and economically—of any UP influence and to resuscitate Chile's shattered economy.⁷⁶

In the first several weeks of military rule, Pinochet systematically suspended or fully eliminated the most important political and governmental bodies that characterized pre-1973 Chile. Since he blamed democratic party politics for the crisis engendered by the UP, Pinochet closed Congress, outlawed pro-UP political parties (and suspended all others), asserted his control over trade union organizations and suppressed the main labor federation, imposed a strict curfew, took control of mainstream media by either censoring or disbanding radio, television and written press, and appointed military men as rectors of Chile's main universities.⁷⁷

The early years of Pinochet's rule were characterized by regime's attempt to remove those considered to be "enemies of the state." From the onset, the Junta insisted

⁷⁵ Pollack, *The New Right in Chile, 1973-1997*, 109-39.

⁷⁶ Brian Loveman, *Chile: The Legacy of Hispanic Capitalism*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁷⁷ Simon Collier, *A History of Chile, 1808-2002*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 359.

“there [could] be no dialogue with [the] enemy, only elimination.”⁷⁸ As reports, which began to appear as early as October 1973 insisted, this meant the kidnapping, torture, or assassination in clandestine detention centers of individuals who were suspected of opposing the military or of sympathizing with the overthrown government. In November 1973, after those considered to be immediate threats had been removed, Pinochet established the Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional (DINA), a secret intelligence agency led by Army Colonel Manuel Contreras and reporting directly to Pinochet, to continue the “purification” of subversives in a more systematic fashion.⁷⁹

While it was clear that the Junta would not tolerate a return to pre-1973 Chile, it remained uncertain from the outset exactly *how* Pinochet would reform the country. While most leaders of the Right remained supportive, at least regarding the elimination of Marxism, the Junta’s lack of agenda led to internal political conflicts among its conservative supporters, a divergence that foreshadowed future splits within the Right. The first problem concerned how long military rule would last. Traditional sectors of the Right and Christian Democrats who had supported the coup called for a relatively quick return to civilian rule. Still guided by the historical practices of the “*acuerdo de caballeros*,” the Partido Nacional promoted the restoration of political parties and electoral politics, although without the presence of Marxism. At the other end of the spectrum were the *autoritarios* (authoritarians), comprised predominantly by Jaime Guzmán and his *gremialista* followers who envisioned a complete transformation of

⁷⁸ Pollack, *The New Right in Chile*, 54.

⁷⁹ Mary Helen Spooner, *Soldiers in a Narrow Land: The Pinochet Regime in Chile* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 83-5. See also Pablo Policzer, *The Rise and Fall of Repression in Chile* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), and John Dinges, *The Condor Years: How Pinochet and His Allies Brought Terrorism to Three Continents* (New York: New Press, 2004).

Chilean society which could only be carried out through an extended period of dictatorial rule.⁸⁰ As we will see, this divergence, in many ways, was at the basis of two main memory narratives of Pinochet's years in power, the "restorationist" and the "renovationist".

In 1974, Pinochet issued the Junta's first communiqué, the *Declaración de Principios del Gobierno de Chile* (Principles of the Government of Chile). It addressed the Junta's governing principles, and indirectly spoke to its intention to stay in power for a prolonged period of time.⁸¹ The Declaration also disclosed the growing influence of Jaime Guzman and the *gremialistas* (analyzed below) in the national planning organization, and therefore signaled that the authoritarian Right was emerging as the leading voice in the military regime.⁸² In the *Declaración*, Pinochet evoked the spirit of Diego Portales and imagined a return to what many Chilean conservatives suspicious of democracy had long seen as Chile's golden era, the period of authoritarian rule in the 1830s and 1840s that established a tradition of strong presidents, weak congresses, and a silent public. He revealed that the Junta intended to reorganize the country's economy—and concomitantly its social system—to ensure the freedom of the individual from government intervention. With the Junta's intentions to remain in power publicly disclosed, Pinochet moved toward the creation of an economic program to put its goals into effect and a political strategy that could secure the stability it needed.⁸³

⁸⁰ Huneeus, *The Pinochet Regime*, 76.

⁸¹ Paul E Sigmund, *The Overthrow of Allende and the Politics of Chile, 1964-1976* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977), 267.

⁸² Huneeus, *The Pinochet Regime*, 277.

⁸³ Pollack, *The New Right in Chile, 1973-1997*, 53.

The Second Period: Consolidating Power

While the first several years had succeeded in destroying much of Chile's previously powerful social and political order, the second phase of Pinochet's regime (1975-1980) saw the consolidation of military rule under the auspices of a New Right ideology. The years between 1975 and 1980 witnessed the emergence of a political project which combined neoliberal economic policy (derived from University of Chicago economists' orthodox monetarism) with *gremialismo*, a political ideology which was based on Catholic traditionalism and corporatist social doctrine. As I will explore below, Pinochet's political economic approach would translate to all facets of Chilean life and serve as the basis of *being* Chilean, "*chilenidad*."⁸⁴ First, the economic model.

By the end of 1974, it was evident that the Pinochet regime's initial efforts to rescue Chile's failing economy were not working. The worldwide recession led to a steep decline in the demand for Chilean exports and inflation remained rampant. By this point, the Junta was in desperate need of an economic program beyond emergency decrees and the political measures needed to sustain it.⁸⁵ As the regime's supporters, in particular, Sergio de Castro, a prominent economist at the Catholic University, continued to blame the UP's statism for the country's financial crisis, Pinochet reached out to a group of economists at the *Universidad Católica* for advice. These economists, nicknamed the "Chicago Boys" because so many had received post-graduate degrees in the University of

⁸⁴ Pinochet's appropriation of the notion of *chilenidad* is key both during his dictatorship and as we will later see, for *El Mercurio's* reconstruction of the term *after* Pinochet. See Marcelo Pollack, "Jaime Guzmán and the *Gremialistas*: From Catholic Corporatist Movement to Free Market Party" in Will Fowler, ed., *Ideologues and Ideologies in Latin America* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1997), 151-170.

⁸⁵ Loveman, *Chile*, 321.

Chicago's economics department, endorsed Milton Friedman's philosophy of a "new orthodoxy of monetarism and unrestrained laissez-faire" and were eager to apply such a model to Chile.⁸⁶ Completely opening Chile's market to foreign influence and privatizing all its companies seemed the first and most logical step in Pinochet's plan. Soon the Chicago Boys found themselves appointed as the Government's top advisers and economic ministers.⁸⁷ As Brian Loveman pointedly notes, however, the Chicago Boys' objective was not only to "rewrite the wrongs," of the UP, but to "reverse the entire state-interventionist trend that had developed in the 1920s."⁸⁸ It was clear that a neo-liberal "restructuring" of Chile's economic and social order was, in part, a reaction to the social and political mobilization unleashed by the political accommodations set forth during the "compromise" or social welfare, state.

Although the economy was deeply affected by a planned downturn in 1975, by 1976, the country's inflation rate had receded and exports increased, giving the impression that Chile's financial crisis had begun to subside. Naturally, Pinochet and his supporters were overjoyed. While the economic program would later crash on the hard rocks of the recession of the early 1980s, its successes emboldened Pinochet and his advisers to think more globally about the nature of the changes they could achieve in the second half of the 1970s.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 321. On Chicago economics in Chile, see Juan Gabriel Valdés, *Pinochet's Economists: The Chicago School in Chile* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁸⁷ Pollack, *The New Right in Chile*, 62.

⁸⁸ Loveman, *Chile*, 322; and Huneus, *The Pinochet Regime*, 139-169, Chapter 5.

Gremialismo:

Since 1975, the Junta and its Chicago Boys adherents were actively planning a new social framework where the dominant market relations within the economic sector would be imposed upon social relations as well. It was Jaime Guzmán, the most prominent supporter of *gremialismo*, who helped organize and articulate the political vision to go with neoliberal economics. As Marcelo Pollack argued, neo-liberalism and *gremialismo* “became the economic, ideological, and political pillars of the regime.”⁸⁹

The main tenets and underlying philosophy of *gremialismo* are not easily defined.⁹⁰ As briefly mentioned, *gremialismo*'s roots can be traced to nineteenth-century Spain where Catholic social dogma and nationalist ideas of “hispanism” were experiencing a re-birth. By the mid-twentieth century, *gremialismo* had been deeply influenced by Franco's corporatist (“falangist”) project. In Chile, *gremialismo* found a home with those in the Catholic Right, especially the prominent conservative historian Jaime Eyzaguirre. *Gremialismo* moved out of its reduced intellectual circles during Frei's Christian Democrat government in the 1960s as it began to resonate with political groups that had become increasingly distressed by liberal democracy. It surfaced as an influence in the student movement of that time, under the intellectual leadership of Jaime Guzmán, a law professor at the Catholic University's Law School in Santiago.⁹¹

Somewhat ironically, *gremialismo*'s 1960s revival came from a desire to depoliticize Chile's university system and student politics, which, for a variety of reasons, had become increasingly dominated by leftist parties. At the heart of

⁸⁹ Pollack, *The New Right in Chile, 1973-1997*, 59.

⁹⁰ Pollack, “Jaime Guzmán and the *Gremialistas*,” 151-2.

⁹¹ Wright, *State Terrorism in Latin America*, 214.

gremialismo was a belief that all “intermediary” institutions – not just civil society forces operating between the individual and the state, but economic institutions as well – must operate *autonomously* in society, *free* from state intervention. These organizations, *gremios*, had a natural right to organize themselves and realize their own objectives independent from state control.⁹² According to *gremialismo*, the role of the state, then, was solely to serve in the realms of foreign affairs and national defense.⁹³

Gremialismo sees a strict hierarchy as the “natural” structure of society and in practice favors the hierarchical authority of a strong leader, a carry over from its conservative Catholic roots. In this societal structure, *gremios*, freed from state interference, can establish their own agenda and realize their own goals. According to *gremialismo*, because hierarchy maintains order it also fosters social harmony, and because the interests of the individual supersede those of society, the state cannot impose its agenda on man. Yet for *gremialistas*, because the rights of the individual trump those of society, the social autonomy of *gremios* (the groups which connect these ontologically superior individuals) must be maintained. The notion of social autonomy as envisioned by the *gremialistas* is today most commonly referred to as “subsidiarity.”⁹⁴

As stated above, *gremialismo* re-emerged shortly after the 1964 election of Christian Democrat Eduardo Frei. But it flourished during Allende’s government as Jaime Guzmán was among the UP’s most vociferous opponents. In the months preceding the coup, *gremios* (everything from truck owners’ organizations to the professional associations of doctors) and the *Movimiento Gremial de la Católica* (Gremial Movement

⁹² Pollack, “Jaime Guzmán and the *Gremialistas*,” 152.

⁹³ Agustín Cueva, *Ideología y Sociedad En América Latina* (Montevideo: Ediciones de la Banda Oriental, 1988), 241.

⁹⁴ Huneeus, *The Pinochet Regime*, 225-261.

of the Catholic University) constantly attacked Allende by organizing strikes and boycotts that publicly defied the government. Indeed, *gremialismo*'s ability to reach out to a worried middle class and its increased involvement with the right-wing opposition movement helped fashion Allende's demise.⁹⁵

In the immediate aftermath of the coup, the *gremialistas* became key proponents of the authoritarian position, advocating for the institution of a new "protected" democracy in which their views of society would be fostered. However, although Pinochet had appointed Guzman to his most important national planning committee, during the first several years of his rule, *gremialismo* remained restlessly in the regime's shadow.

Consolidating the Right:

It was not until well into Pinochet's regime, particularly after the first repressive period, that Guzmán and his main adherents fully embraced the Chicago Boys' approach to economic neo-liberalism. While both movements maintained an anti-interventionist, depoliticized approach to government, Pinochet's "Chicago Boys" and their neo-liberal counterparts were unrelenting in their belief that it was "the responsibility of individuals to defend their freedom rather than the *gremio*."⁹⁶ This naturally clashed with the *gremialistas* who were hesitant to merge with the neo-liberalist program for fear that it might dilute their own approach. However, as the first phase of dictatorship came to a close still lacking a political agenda that could rationalize both the junta's "emergency" actions and the fact that Chile's economy remained fundamentally weak, the *gremialista* concept of "subsidiarity" helped justify the dismantling of the state apparatus which both

⁹⁵ Ibid., 234.

⁹⁶ Pollack, *The New Right in Chile*, 65.

gremialistas and neo-liberals wanted, even though, in the end, it did not retain any protection for the “intermediary” groups which the *gremialistas* defended.⁹⁷ Thus for their part, the *gremialistas* abandoned the more strident aspects of their corporatist agenda and recognized that neo-liberalism could provide “a monumental opportunity to carry out the political and social elements of their ideology.”⁹⁸

By 1975/6 and as the economic “shock” policy sponsored by the economists had finally started to spur economic recovery, it was clear that the neo-liberals and the *gremialistas* had finally settled their differences and converged. A neo-liberalized *gremialista* model which promoted a market-driven vision of both economic and political society had replaced the *gremialistas*’ historical vision of conservative corporativism as the Junta’s political project.⁹⁹

By 1977, with both the *gremialistas* and the neo-liberals on board, Pinochet began to take steps to legally ensure the permanence of a new, projected institutionality. In the *Plan de Chacarillas* which he issued later that year, Pinochet would reveal the regime’s intent to institutionalize its political and economic initiatives. Although he had not spoken to what would *take the place of* Chile’s historic liberal democracy, Pinochet nevertheless announced that the Junta would facilitate a transition back to civilian rule. The *Plan de Chacarillas* helped deflect pressure from Junta supporters who wanted a quick return to civilian rule, but it was vague in its time-table and in detailing exactly

⁹⁷ Pollack, “Jaime Guzmán and the *Gremialistas*,” 154.

⁹⁸ Mark Ensalaco, *Chile Under Pinochet: Recovering the Truth* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 126.

⁹⁹ Luis Roniger and Carlos Horacio Waisman, *Globality and Multiple Modernities: Comparative North American and Latin American Perspectives* (Portland, Or: Sussex Academic Press, 2002), 190.

what steps would be taken to move toward civilian rule or what that rule would look like.¹⁰⁰ The regime's opponents, for their part, remained skeptical of Pinochet's plans, but the economic boom of 1978-9 helped Pinochet garner widening support among his elite allies. Indeed, the macroeconomic successes of the neo-liberal program (particularly for the elites) led the Chicago Boys to stake claim to a "Chilean Miracle." In their eyes, no other country had such a successful economy. As 1979 came to an end, Pinochet carefully prepared the country for a new decade of military rule. His first step: the Constitution of 1980.¹⁰¹

Third Phase: From Constitution to Plebiscite

By the beginning of the 1980s, Pinochet's regime, having consolidated its ideological framework, focused its energy on deepening its permanent hold over Chilean society. Pinochet and his closest advisors began drafting a new Constitution that would stipulate the conditions for a "new Chilean democracy." While Jaime Guzmán and the *gremialistas* assumed a leading role in this, the Chicago Boys, focused on a set of pervasive social reformulations (known as the "seven modernizations") which included the privatization of social security as well as reforms in the areas of education, health care, agriculture, and justice. With the "modernizations," the Chicago Boys would move toward their goal of *depoliticizing* and *privatizing* many aspects of Chile's political, as well as economic, society.¹⁰²

In the political arena, the emerging Constitution was met by dissent within Chile's conservative bloc. In particular, the disagreement concerned questions of the transition

¹⁰⁰ Pollack, *The New Right in Chile*, 63-68.

¹⁰¹ Spooner, *Soldiers in a Narrow Land*, 84.

¹⁰² Huneeus, *The Pinochet Regime*, 314-322.

away from military control as well as provisions for voting in the new system. The *gremialistas* remained critical of the concept of an expanded electorate characteristic of universal suffrage models both for ideological reasons and because they feared the revival of pre-1973 politics when Marxists could win power electorally. To this end, they proposed a drawn-out transition period in which their political beliefs could be fully enacted. They promoted the notion of a “democracia protegida” (protected democracy) in which the military would play a central role ensuring the stability of the homeland and while implementing the institutions embedded in the new Constitution. On the other hand, more traditional sectors of the Right stressed a quicker return to party politics and the re-implementation of a broad electoral system. In their eyes, democratic rule entailed the freedom of the individual to elect representation at all levels of government. Like other indicators, this division on transition politics and electoral schemes foretells the eventual split between the two contemporary right-wing political parties, UDI and RN.

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Despite the differences, on September 11, 1980 exactly seven years after he first assumed control, Pinochet saw his Constitution ratified (even if in a suspect plebiscite, given that no electoral rolls existed when the voting occurred). The passing of the 1980 Constitution offered Pinochet not only a means of legitimizing his massive transformations, but also the opportunity to guarantee the legal basis of his rule for at least a decade, and possibly almost two decades. The Constitution decreed that Pinochet would remain President of Chile until 1989 when a plebiscite would be conducted to

¹⁰³ Pollack, “Jaime Guzmán and the *Gremialistas*,” 157.

determine his (potential) extension in power until 1997.¹⁰⁴ The Constitution stipulated that electoral votes would count towards the election of the President and two-thirds of the Senate seats while the remaining one-third of the Senate would be automatic appointments. Two of the most controversial aspects of the Constitution were Articles 8, which made “class struggle” illegal and removed their political rights, and Article 24 which declared the military as the ultimate arbiter and protector of the newly restored *chilenidad*.¹⁰⁵ Other articles gave a “Security Council” made up largely of the military and its allies the right to lawfully intervene in the political process.

In March 1981, the Constitution of 1980 became the official law of the land, and, as such, the date needs to be recognized as the “high water” mark of Pinochet’s regime. But the next several years would nonetheless see a sharp decline in the credibility and legitimacy of Pinochet and, especially, his economic policy. The worldwide recession of 1982 led to a drastic decrease in the demand for Chilean exports. For a country that was completely dependent on foreign investment, this had devastating effects. As worldwide prices plummeted, domestic production dropped and inflation again began to rise precipitously. As Chile’s citizens, even those in the upper classes, began to feel the effects, and as it became clear that many of the free market reforms had simply opened the way for strategically placed financial groups to consolidate larger market shares for themselves, Pinochet and the Chicago Boys’ reputation diminished. Despite its efforts to

¹⁰⁴ It is not within the scope of this thesis to fully examine the Constitution of 1980, but suffice it to say that it significantly changed the basis of government and elections in Chile, introducing the concept of ex officio seats in the Senate, the inauguration of a “bi-nomial” electoral system, the lessening of legislative power and the strengthening of presidential power. On the Constitution, see Robert Barros, *Constitutionalism and Dictatorship: Pinochet, the Junta and the 1980 Constitution* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

¹⁰⁵ Pollack, *The New Right in Chile*, 79-81.

ignore the flaws in its free-market reform, ultimately the regime did what it had foresworn and intervened economically by devaluing the peso.¹⁰⁶

1983 to the Plebiscite

Ten years after the overthrow of Allende and the installation of military rule, Pinochet's regime could no longer ignore or repress a growing opposition not only from the Left but even from certain sectors of the Right. Further, with the economic crisis of 1982, even some prominent elite allies had become alienated from Pinochet and his prized neo-liberal reforms.

In August 1983 Pinochet opened conversations with some of his more moderate allies to devise a transfer of power that, he hoped, would maintain the security and integrity of his political project. While still adamantly opposed to a full reemergence of political parties, Pinochet, nevertheless, began talks with the democratic opposition and conservative leaders to “replace the neo-liberal economic team with a more pragmatic and flexible group.”¹⁰⁷ He appointed the moderate nationalist, Sergio Onofre Jarpa, a former Partido Nacional Senator, as interior minister, with hopes that he would mediate the growing political tension. Yet it became clear that the two blocs were unyielding in their positions and despite modest efforts from actors on both sides, they could not reach political consensus.¹⁰⁸

In the midst of a generalized and growing political opposition, all factions of the Right faced the decision of whether they would continue to “associate with the military

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. 82-84.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. 87.

¹⁰⁸ Loveman, *Chile the Legacy of Hispanic Capitalism*, 299.

regime and [with] Pinochet himself.”¹⁰⁹ This question, however simple it may appear, generated no simple answer or solution. In fact, it is precisely the Right’s inability to reconcile its perspectives of Pinochet, the man and his project, that has become the defining characteristic of conservative politics in Chile. As the end of the transitional period loomed, the Right had to decide how to prepare for the revival of party politics. For seventeen years, regardless of its internal divisions, the Right had maintained the privileged position to dictate national politics. Now it would have to confront the “possibility or impossibility of preserving the model and regime with a leadership different from that of Pinochet.”¹¹⁰ Would it organize as an authoritarian force that operated within a democratic framework, or would it re-embrace liberal democratic politics and define a new conservatism accordingly?

One of the other main things to note about the split in the Right is that its divergence and inability to reach consensus regarding Pinochet was not a reflection simply of how its factions stood in relation to Pinochet’s actions during his dictatorship. It was also a result of the different ways the two Right parties which emerged *envisioned* Pinochet’s dictatorship within Chile’s broader history: as a period of democratic continuity—and therefore consistent with the longstanding conservative master narrative of Chile, or as a rupture in Chile’s democratic history which needed to be attended to? The way these two parties understood the meaning of Pinochet’s dictatorship would speak to the way each would construct a vision of the past that could serve in the post-dictatorship contest for power.

¹⁰⁹ Pollack, *New Right in Chile*, 89.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 88.

To the extent that it was unable to reach a political agreement in the years preceding the presidential plebiscite of 1988, the Right had dissolved into several de-facto parties.¹¹¹ Yet it wasn't until the internal elections of 1988 that differences hardened and the factions officially split into two distinct parties: UDI and Movimiento de Unidad Nacional (National Unity Movement-MUN, later the RN). Although it was established in August 1983, by the latter half of the '80s, the *Union Demócrata Independiente* (UDI) became the most influential party within the Right. With Jaime Guzmán as its leader, UDI primed to become Pinochet's heirs. From the outset, the party emphasized the deepening of neo-liberal relations and the consolidation of corporatist conservatism. UDI was loyal to all conditions set forth by the Constitution of 1980 and felt that it was its responsibility to protect and carry out the country's new institutional order. On the other hand, the (MUN), precursor to *Renovación Nacional*, advocated dialogue with the opposition and welcomed the notion of political liberalization. The MUN/RN, with Sergio Onofre Jarpa and Andres Allamand as its main leaders, was seen as the descendent of the traditional Right's *Partido Nacional*. Indeed, both men had been active in the PN's leadership. While it was supportive of the last fifteen years of military government, it could nevertheless look somewhat critically at the actions taken during Pinochet's regime—particularly surrounding human rights. As a result, *Renovación Nacional* (as it became by 1988) “became the only right-wing movement to contemplate a future without Pinochet”.¹¹²

¹¹¹ While there were other parties on the Right, I will only look at the two most powerful groupings.

¹¹² Pollack, *New Right in Chile*, 90.

The transitional articles of the Constitution of 1980 stipulated that the military would put forward one candidate to stand for election in 1988 in a Yes/No vote. While some in the Right thought Pinochet was not the best candidate given the rise in popular disapproval, they were overridden by the general who insisted on standing for election, presenting the center-left opposition with a blatant target and the Right with a crucial choice. For some on the Right, a YES victory would validate the last fifteen years of *Pinochetista* rule and ensure its completion over the next decade. In addition, a win for Pinochet (and his UDI supporters) would mean that Guzman's party could further develop its ideology and organize authoritarian principles within the framework of a civilian system. For *Renovacion Nacional*, the plebiscite campaign sparked division. Some key players from RN joined the YES campaign while others, including the up-and-coming Sebastian Piñera, who trained in economics at the Universidad Católica and went on to become a billionaire based on his successful introduction of credit cards into the Chilean economy, worked toward a NO victory. From their perspective, a loss for Pinochet would mean that the RN could run its own candidate in the forthcoming presidential elections.¹¹³

As the plebiscite date approached, what remained beyond a doubt was the impending opportunity for political forces that had been bottled up for 17 years to re-emerge. This meant notable changes in the ways in which Chileans who had been disenfranchised since 1973 would reconnect to the political system. In this context, it also suggested that the media, those who *represented* the political life of the nation to large numbers of people, could re-fashion their ideological positions in a new political

¹¹³ Loveman, *Chile the Legacy of Hispanic Capitalism*, 304.

framework. In the months leading up to the plebiscite, as it would once Pinochet finally *left* La Moneda, the media became increasingly important in determining the meaning of both the past seventeen years of Pinochet's rule and of the transition as it unfolded in the present. For the Right, this task lay in the hands of *El Mercurio*, not only because it played the privileged role of publishing while other media sources had been shut down, but because, in its role as a spokesperson for the Right, it had in the past provided a unified conservative perspective.

El Mercurio Before and After September 11, 1973:

El Mercurio, as we saw in the first chapter, has long been Chile's newspaper of record, and this continued from a privileged position under Pinochet.¹¹⁴ Although over the last several decades, other news sources had emerged as Pinochet lessened his censorship rules, *El Mercurio* nevertheless maintained its status as Chile's most important and influential media source.¹¹⁵ *El Mercurio*, however, is not just a shaper of public opinion; it refers to itself as the "representative" of "Chilean civilization." In other words, *El Mercurio* not only informs the public in a particular way, it also claims itself to be the agent with enough cultural authority to determine what it means to *be* Chilean. Guillermo Sunkel put it best when he argued, "*El Mercurio* never defines itself within the context of any class-based interests, but rather within a national context, a context of the general good, of the moral values which underpin the unity of the nation."¹¹⁶ In short, for

¹¹⁴ Ken Leon-Dermota, *Chile inédito: El Periodismo Bajo Democracia, Crónica actual* (Santiago de Chile: Ediciones B, 2002).

¹¹⁵ Correa, *Con Las Riendas Del Poder*, 191.

¹¹⁶ Guillermo Sunkel, *El Mercurio: 10 Años De Educación Político-Ideológica, 1969-1979* (Mexico City: Instituto Latinoamericano de Estudios Transnacionales, 1983), 91.

its owners and editors, how the country is represented in *El Mercurio* is how the country actually is.¹¹⁷

It might be argued, then, that *El Mercurio* possessed the power to write a particular vision of the nation into existence, even more so when it was the only mainstream publication allowed to publish in the aftermath of Pinochet's coup. Benedict Anderson has argued in his influential work that the nation—which he characterizes as an “imagined community”—came into being in chorus with the rise of print culture. He suggests that the latter helped generate the nation in so far as print can connect dispersed individuals within a shared political community. Newspapers, as Anderson says, “provided the technical means for ‘re-presenting the *kind* of imagined community that is the nation.”¹¹⁸ While Anderson's work has been critiqued and supplemented, it nevertheless offers important insights as regards print media's ability to foster a particular vision of this imagined community, which is certainly the case with *El Mercurio*.

El Mercurio has been increasingly analyzed since the return to civilian rule in Chile in 1990. A documentary entitled “El Diario de Agustín” has recently been released in Chile to critical acclaim and numerous theses on the paper have been published at the Universidad de Chile.¹¹⁹ Scholars are focusing on *El Mercurio* as one of the main social

¹¹⁷ This is, of course, written with a tone of irony although José Peláez y Tapia's, 1927 *Historia de El Mercurio*, presents just such an understanding. José Peláez y Tapia, *Historia de El Mercurio [microform]* (Santiago de Chile: Talleres de "El Mercurio", 1927).

¹¹⁸ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 25

¹¹⁹ Among others, see Claudio Salinas Muñoz, “*El Mercurio y el Plan Z: El periodismo no ha tenido Lugar*” October 2007; Paulette Dougnac Quintana, “Los Derechos Humanos bajo la lupa de El Decano” October 2007; María José Vilches García, “Con Tinta de Sangre: Carmen Soria, crimen político/caso policial Una Mirada desde *El Mercurio*” October 2007; Elizabeth Harries Muñoz, “La Prensa sin Fe de Erratas: el caso de los 119 según *El Mercurio*,” October 2007; Hans Stange Marcus, “El Silencio es la

and cultural agents during the dictatorship.¹²⁰ *El Mercurio*'s complicity with a regime that has largely been condemned internationally for its human rights violations is being re-examined. Even though *El Mercurio* has yet to acknowledge its one-sided support for the Pinochet regime, the paper's journalistic flaws—its lack of integrity, its misinformation vis-à-vis the arrested and disappeared, has been increasingly scrutinized.¹²¹ Those are important studies, but my own work focuses not on the newspaper's moral stance vis-à-vis the Pinochet government, but rather on its role as arbiter of national identity, how it has represented *chilenidad* to the nation, both during Pinochet's years in power, and most importantly, after he left Chile's presidential palace. Understanding *El Mercurio*'s historical memory narrative will help us to understand how those who not only tolerated but supported Pinochet's brutal regime saw themselves as acting within a particular narrative.

Some of the most interesting work on *El Mercurio* suggests, following the broad lines of Gramscian theory that “the mass media can take on, in specific political-

Pauta: Los Desparecidos de Lonquén en las páginas de *El Mercurio* (1978-1979)” October 2007. All of these undergraduate theses have come from Universidad de Chile Instituto de la Comunicación e Imagen, Escuela de Periodismo and were advised by Professor Claudia Lagos. For information on the Documentary, “El Diario de Agustín,” written and directed by Director and Screenplay: Ignacio Agüero and Fernando Villagrán, 2008. See: <http://www.eldiariodeagustin.cl/>

¹²⁰ The studies I will focus on are entitled, “*El Mercurio: 10 Años de Educación Político-Ideológica 1969-1979*” by Guillermo Sunkel, “*El Mercurio: Ideología y Propaganda 1954-1994: Ensayo 1 Propaganda de Agitación En El Periodo Agosto 1972-MARZO 1973*” by Claudio Duran and I will refer to the the conclusions drawn from the work of Carlos Ruiz, “La Ideología Política del diario *El Mercurio de Santiago entre 1970 y 1975*” and from the work of Fernando Reyes Matta. Latinoamericano de Estudios Transnacionales, *Investigación Sobre La Prensa En Chile, 1974-1984* (Santiago, Chile: CERC, 1986).

¹²¹ Patricio Donner, *Periodismo y Política: La Prensa de Derecha en Chile 1970-1973*, (Santiago: Instituto Chileno de Estudios Humanísticos, 1989).

ideological contexts, the functions of a political party.”¹²² These studies maintain that at a certain point—and some will argue that it begins at the height of the Compromise State—*El Mercurio* stopped operating as an impartial and independent paper, supportive of the ideals of liberal democracy.¹²³ Instead it began to espouse authoritarian ideals and diffused them, because of its history and status in society, as if it were a political party working to bring its readers to action, in this case, against Salvador Allende and his Popular Unity coalition. *El Mercurio* thus became a central player in the political struggles of the times, leading its editors to no longer see their task as presenting a conservative alternative in their editorial or informative sections, but rather to participate in the “councils of state” of the Right intended to hasten Allende’s political demise.¹²⁴

A number of social historians have argued that *El Mercurio*, for most of the twentieth century, filled an ideological vacuum which existed among conservative forces. As one historian put it: “Given that the Chilean Right historically has not counted on the presence of important ‘intellectuals,’ their role has been filled by specific organizations and institutions, among which the mass media have played a central role.”¹²⁵ This observation speaks to the key role played by the media, and *El Mercurio* in particular, in generating conservative political ideology. Since *El Mercurio* was the foremost outlet for the traditional Right, it was able—and at a certain level expected—to develop a political

¹²² Fernando, Sunkel, Reyes, Matta, *Investigación Sobre La Prensa En Chile, 1974-1984 / Ruiz, Carlos*. (Santiago Chile : CERC 1986), 119.

¹²³ Claudio Durán, *El Mercurio: Ideología Y Propaganda, 1954-1994: Ensayos De Interpretación Bi-Lógica Y Psico-Histórica* (Santiago: Ediciones Chile y América-CESOC, 1995)

¹²⁴ Guillermo Sunkel, *El Mercurio: 10 Años De Educación Político-Ideológica, 1969-1979* (Mexico City: Instituto Latinoamericano de Estudios Transnacionales, 1983),

¹²⁵ Fernando, Reyes, Sunkel, Matta, *Investigación Sobre La Prensa En Chile, 1974-1984*, 19.

discourse that more closely resembled that of a political party. Guillermo Sunkel agrees, arguing that *El Mercurio* not only articulated the concerns of the Right but helped it shape its ideology, even more so when Allende was president.

During the three-year UP government, *El Mercurio* began to “educate” its readers about the perils of Marxism. While its rhetoric became more insurrectional in the latter half of 1973, still, for most of Allende’s government, *El Mercurio* condemned Allende as “totalitarian,” using its media platform to denounce the UP for depriving it of freedom of expression, which was paramount for a free society. It was also during this period that the paper began to redefine the how it thought about democracy—or at least what democracy *was not*: Allende’s brand of socialism. But a crucial component of *El Mercurio*’s discourse between 1970-73 was what Claudio Durán has named its “incitement propaganda” (propaganda de agitación).¹²⁶ Durán argues that *El Mercurio*’s agenda was not only to identify the government as an “enemy,” but to incite the opposition into action. Durán employs the phrase “Imagen Angustiosa del Mundo” (“The Anguished Image of the World” - IAM) to elucidate how *El Mercurio* helped create a visceral climate of fear in Chile. As he argues, *El Mercurio* depicted Chile and the world as existing in a state of chaos and disorder. Not only did the paper highlight everything from natural disasters to delinquency and international instability, but it did so in a way that placed the blame for all these crises on Marxism. *El Mercurio* used the frame of the IAM to lend weight to the argument that “Chile [is] sick” and that “The Popular Unity, controlled by Marxism, is incapable of making the country work and has produced an

¹²⁶ Durán, *El Mercurio*, 30.

economic crisis.”¹²⁷ In this way, *El Mercurio* blamed (international and local) Marxism for any disorder and affirmed that the ideology cannot do anything to rectify its mistakes. Durán suggests that the IAM was one of five other frames employed by *El Mercurio* in the period between 1970-73 when it delivered its news: (1) the primacy of order; (2) Marxist violence; (3) attacks on democracy; (4) the UP’s incompetency; and (5) the international bankruptcy of Marxism.

In the period prior to the overthrow of Allende, *El Mercurio* helped formulate the “salvation” narrative, which Pinochet and his supporters later used to frame the coup and rationalize military governance. But *El Mercurio* also played a crucial role throughout Pinochet’s seventeen-year rule. As it was mentioned before, once the Junta assumed power, Pinochet, disbanded all forms of media that were sympathetic to the UP. *El Mercurio*, however, remained open and was converted into the Junta’s privileged media outlet.

In so far as it was, at least for a short period, the only paper to continue publishing, *El Mercurio* ideology further reflected the Junta’s agenda. As Marcelo Pollack writes:

During the Pinochet years, *El Mercurio* became the principal instrument of information and ideological direction of the different factions which constituted the ruling social and political bloc. While television and radio, which reached over 80 percent of the population, functioned as a means of communication for the popular sectors, *El Mercurio* performed the function of orienting and ideologizing the classes which adhered to it. While television tended to act as an instrument of cultural indoctrination over the masses, the written character of this long-established daily

¹²⁷ Ibid. 31.

validated it as an ‘oracle’, all knowing and all-powerful, like the Bible.¹²⁸

Still operating as an “educator” of the “ruling class” *El Mercurio*, particularly in the first period of Pinochet’s regime began to promote the need to “take apart the traditional political apparatus.”¹²⁹ Instead of redefining democratic ideals—as was the case in the 1970-73 period—*El Mercurio*’s rhetoric became noticeably antidemocratic. As Sunkel notes, *El Mercurio* began to advocate for “an extraordinary, even radical, solution”—encouraging the destruction of the traditional mechanisms used to mediate civil and political society. It must be noted that the confluence between when *El Mercurio* became literally the only print media allowed after the coup and its decision to promote an authoritarian model of government is significant and highly consequential. This shift is even more notable given *El Mercurio*’s former orientation of supporting the “free press” as the only mechanism for “saving” democracy (under Allende).

Throughout Pinochet’s regime, *El Mercurio*—its discourse and ideology—helped shape and promulgate the Junta’s neo-liberal project. But on a deeper level, *El Mercurio*, began to refashion Chile’s history by projecting an image of the Junta as the natural inheritors and protectors of *chilenidad*. Guillermo Sunkel highlights this as he notes, “the second important element of the political discourse of the period lies in presenting the Military Junta as the representative of a “historic effort” (*gesta histórica*) which was carried on over a long and difficult period in order to achieve Chile’s sovereignty.”¹³⁰ Thus while *El Mercurio* was an agent of the Junta’s neo-liberal agenda, its most crucial service to Pinochet was to *historicize* him—to place him and his government in a

¹²⁸ Pollack, *The New Right in Chile, 1973-1997*, 195.

¹²⁹ Sunkel, *El Mercurio*, 65.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.* 105.

particular historic framework and (eventually) to organize his legacy. *El Mercurio*, “actively participate[d] in the construction of [Pinochet’s] Historical Memory” even before Pinochet ha[d] left the Moneda.¹³¹ As we will see in the next chapter, *El Mercurio*’s ability to re-insert Pinochet’s dictatorship into a longstanding narrative of Chilean democracy continues into the post-dictatorship period.

Chapter Three: *El Mercurio* —Re-Shaping Conservative History and Memory after 1990

In this chapter, I explore the development of *El Mercurio*’s shifting historical memory narrative of the years 1970-1988 as it is constructed in the post-dictatorship period. To be sure, a study of *El Mercurio*’s daily output over the 1970-1988 period is central to analyzing any study of its larger representation of the dictatorship. But as Sunkel and Durán demonstrate (see chapter two), many have already interrogated this period. Rather, my central focus is on the changing ways *El Mercurio*, via its editorial and news articles, represents Allende’s government, the coup of September 11, 1973, and especially Pinochet’s seventeen-year rule, after Pinochet leaves the Moneda. By using a close reading of the texts, this discursive analysis seeks to elucidate how the self-proclaimed “referente de la civilización Chilena” [“interpreter of Chilean civilization”] re-interpreted and revised Chile’s recent history. It does so by analyzing the ways *El Mercurio*, between 1990-2004, inserted the Pinochet dictatorship into what historians refer to as a “whiggish” narrative of these troubling years. The narrative that emerges from *El Mercurio*’s writers and editors insists that rather than a break in Chile’s

¹³¹ Ibid. 107.

democratic past, the Pinochet dictatorship is best understood as an attempt to strengthen democracy itself.

Before exploring *El Mercurio's* emerging revisionist account that began to take shape after the departure of Pinochet from La Moneda—a narrative that seeks to define *how* society should remember the dictatorship – it is critical to keep in mind what a wide variety of national and international sources have confirmed about the reality of Pinochet's years in power. These sources have demonstrated (usually using fairly conservative metrics) that during Pinochet's 17-year long dictatorship, approximately 3,000 people died from political violence, the vast majority state-led, and there were over 40,000 cases of Chileans tortured or abused.¹³² To put these figures into a comparative framework, the 3,000 Chilean deaths would be equivalent to about 40,500 deaths in the United States and more than a half a million confirmed cases of torture. Beyond these atrocious human rights abuses, Pinochet took a variety of measures to militarize the Chilean state and decimate the country's previous democratic institutions. His regime closed Congress, insured the compliance of a supine judicial system, outlawed the parties which had made up the Popular Unity coalition and suspended all others, established new controls over trade union organizations, imposed strict curfews at will, took control of mainstream media by either censoring or disbanding radio, television and written press, appointed military men as deans of Chile's main universities, and dismissed most social

¹³² Historical Record in this case is signifies the various Truth Commissions, the Rettig Commission and Valech Commission that reported such information. International Association against Torture, *Los Derechos Civiles Y Políticos: Exposición Escrita* (Ginebra: Naciones Unidas, 2005).

science faculties.¹³³ From these hard historical *facts* one observes that life in Chile between 1973 and 1990 was undeniably *undemocratic*.¹³⁴

Yet during the first fourteen years of restored civilian government (1990-2004), and even as its discourse incorporates a “counter-memory” that human rights abuses did occur, *El Mercurio* will nevertheless present a narrative of Pinochet’s dictatorship that re-inscribes it as a time of progress towards the achievement of a “true” Chilean democracy. The post-dictatorial period reveals how Chile’s most influential conservative media voice worked to re-insert what was, by all conventional standards, not just a serious breach of democratic practice but a rule so reviled that Pinochet has become almost metonymic for dictatorship itself, back *into* a narrative of democratic progress.¹³⁵

This chapter, then, illustrates how *El Mercurio* has been able to paint a picture of a past that is, in so many respects, the opposite of what it actually was. In *El Mercurio*’s narrative, Allende, a democratically elected President, will be converted into a dictator and his *Unidad Popular* into a totalitarian government while the Pinochet dictatorship will emerge as a *revolution* of democracy and freedom. Yet much is at stake with inscribing such a positivist interpretation of Pinochet’s dictatorship. Despite turning history on its head, *El Mercurio*’s ability to insert Pinochet’s regime into Chile’s master narrative of unending democracy suggests, in a troubling fashion, that neither it nor the

¹³³ Simon Collier, *A History of Chile, 1808-2002*, 2nd ed., (England: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 359.

¹³⁴ Mark Ensalaco, *Chile Under Pinochet: Recovering the Truth*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 50.

¹³⁵ As just one case in point, a recent review of a movie about the manager of an English soccer team talked about his (Brian Clough) ability to be anti-authoritarian until it was his authority which was being questioned, “whereupon he mutated into General Pinochet.” Rod Liddle, “Playing the Game for Laughs,” Culture Section, *The Times* (London), March 29, 2009. (Steve Volk brought this example to my attention.)

conservative political forces it represents offer a sincere critique of the dictatorial period. More distressing, this suggests that if the individuals who were complicit with or responsible for the vast number of human rights abuses between 1973-1990 can, after the fact, re-write the history of human suffering into a period of democratic progress, then it leaves the way open in the future for a repeat performance.

El Mercurio's approach to the production of a positivist, post-Pinochet Chilean history is not original in relation to Chile's longer historiography (see Introduction). Yet the newspaper's ability to do so in the post-dictatorial period given the empirical challenge that Pinochet's dictatorship presents, merits further investigation. Why has writing the history of this period been so fraught that, over the last eighteen years, different sectors of society have waged battles to define how this laden past will be remembered? As stated above, to the extent that the coup of 1973 and Pinochet's dictatorship is certainly the most contested period in contemporary Chilean history, the pulls of "history" and "memory" contend to shape not just the meaning of this period *for* the present, but the meaning of the past *in* the present, how the past is made to matter to those who learn of it.¹³⁶ As the years between 1973-1990 represent a *recent* past, issues of personal and collective memory conflate as individuals who actually *lived* the past contest their memories to emerging "historical" interpretations. Further, Pinochet's dictatorship signified an exceedingly painful moment in the lives of many Chileans. Due to the nature of the repression, particularly his regime's use of "disappearances," many families and friends have yet, over thirty-five years later, to uncover the fates of their

¹³⁶ As per communication with Professor Steven Volk in April 2009, see Oren Baruch Stier, *Committed to Memory: Cultural Mediations of the Holocaust* (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 2.

loved-ones. Finally, to produce an historical narrative of Pinochet's regime is to constitute Chile's *national* history. As with most *national* histories, the stakes of inscribing a narrative of Pinochet's dictatorship are extraordinarily high because it will, at a certain level, not only help to define a Chilean post-dictatorial political identity, but also frame a revision of Chile's historical past.¹³⁷ These are the challenges to writing the history of Chile's recent past and help explain why, in particular, it is useful to observe closely the way in which one active participant allied with the dictatorship, *El Mercurio*, has constructed a narrative of the Pinochet dictatorship from the vantage point of the post-Pinochet years.

In the post-dictatorship period, *El Mercurio*'s political and cultural influence has waned somewhat. As the years of the dictatorship wore on and eventually ended, *El Mercurio*'s monopoly grip on the print media in Chile declined as other print sources, and then competing TV, and, ultimately, internet news outlets emerged. Additionally, nearly twenty consecutive years of center-left government (via the *Concertación* coalition) have seen public (official) disclosures, truth and reconciliation commissions, continued public debate, and continual international attention about Chile's recent past. Indeed, in these years significant work has been done to change the popular memory of Pinochet's rule and to reveal *El Mercurio*'s role in both the overthrow of the UP and the stability of the military regime. These reasons, among others, have weakened *El Mercurio*'s ability to "write" the nation in the same way it had prior to 1990.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Recall Elizabeth Jelin's argument about master narratives in her book *State Repression* (See Chapter One).

¹³⁸ Ken Leon-Dermota, *Chile inédito: El periodismo bajo democracia* (Santiago, Chile: Ediciones B, 2002).

Despite its changing reputation, *El Mercurio* is nevertheless still Chile's newspaper of record. And, in spite of its support of a lengthy period of media censorship, *El Mercurio* still maintains what it claims to be its historic posture as an advocate of free speech and democracy. Of course, one can question how *El Mercurio* is able to defend Pinochet's dictatorship at the same time that it defends its own reputation as an aggressive supporter of democratic ideals. As this is an essential question on an ideological level – how dictatorships can write themselves as democracies – this chapter will examine whether *El Mercurio's* narrative of the past has changed as its own (privileged) position in political society—and concomitantly that of the Right—has been undermined or at least challenged by Pinochet's exit from La Moneda, and then from governing power. How do the traditional 'winners' re-evaluate and refashion their stories of the past when faced with political defeat? To what extent do they turn to "history" in order to gain or re-establish their (former) ideological hegemony, insuring that it is *their* memory that will influence how future generations come to view the past and its meaning *in* the present. For William Porath, a leading scholar of Chilean history and a professor at the Catholic University's School of Journalism, the matter has already been decided: "The official history [of the past 35 years] will come slowly, but I believe it will be the version of *El Mercurio*," he told me.¹³⁹ Whether Dr. Porath is correct remains to be seen, but at the very least his words suggest the importance of paying close attention to the ways in which *El Mercurio* constructs this history and subsequently how the newspaper attempts to make its narrative "official."

¹³⁹ Interview conducted on August 7, 2008 in Santiago, Chile by Julia Brown-Bernstein (see Bibliography). All the citations from the original Spanish have been translated with the much-appreciated help of Professor Steven Volk and Carlos Cáceres.

Methodology:

As Jeffrey Olick has noted, “Changes in historical images...are not just one-time interactions between the meanings of the distant past and the needs of the present. Rather, from the moment being remembered, present images are constantly being reproduced, revised, and replaced.”¹⁴⁰ Keeping Olick’s words in mind, this chapter focuses on five key moments between 1990-2004 during which *El Mercurio* revises its narrative of the 17-year period of dictatorship into a whiggish interpretation, emphasizing the on-going (successful) struggle for democracy in Chilean history.

As specific “commemorative” moments often times provide the means to judge change over time, I will use the anniversary of the Chilean coup of 1973 as one particular moment to assess how the past itself has changed. in an interpretative sense. My other time points include dates that mark the release of significant research and legal investigations which revealed much about the nature of Pinochet’s regime.

My first temporal point is March 1990, a moment that marks Chile’s transition back to civilian rule; the second comes in February 1991 with the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s final report, the “Informe Rettig.” The third moment occurs in October 1998 with General Pinochet’s arrest in London. Next, I examine *El Mercurio*’s reports of the events surrounding the 30th anniversary of the coup—September 11, 2003. Finally, I consider the paper’s coverage of the release of the “Valech” report from the National Commission on Political Imprisonment and Torture in November 2004.

¹⁴⁰ Jeffrey K. Olick, *The Politics of Regret. On Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility* (New York and London: Routledge, 2007), 56.

These dates represent key moments when Chile, as a nation, has had to consider and engage with the specific history of the Pinochet dictatorship. And as such, they are moments in which social actors representing different political projects have attempted to inscribe a particular memory of the recent past on Chile's political and cultural landscape. While others have examined the role of the political Left in this process of constructing a "counter-memory" to that of the Pinochet dictatorship, my work considers only the way in which the political Right, through *El Mercurio*, has re-examined its relationship to the past—at times to defend it, change it, acknowledge it, or ignore it – in light of cascading historical disclosures and documentation.

My research methods were guided predominantly by a close reading of the newspapers. For each time-moment mentioned above, I examined *El Mercurio* for a month surrounding the event. For September 11, 2003, for instance, I began my analysis on September 1, 2003 and ended on September 30th. For some events, such as the release of Informe Valech, when news coverage spanned more than a single month, my analysis shifted accordingly—continuing through the first week of December 2004.

The specific sections I focused on were news articles and news analysis taken from the front page, the national news section, and the editorial section—which included both *El Mercurio's* formal editorial columns as well as invited opinion columns (i.e., "op eds"). I also, at times, studied the weekend Report ("Reportajes"), the Economics and Business section, and occasionally the weekend magazine supplements. My research targeted articles that specifically addressed or somehow evoked the past. The majority of the articles that analyze Chile's history came from the opinion section while coverage of contemporary events surfaced in news articles and the news analysis sections.

Some central questions guided my reading of *El Mercurio* during these moments. The first is the fundamental historical inquiry: does *El Mercurio*'s narrative of the past change from date to date and if so, what new elements/ingredients does it employ to construct an understanding of the past that might reflect positively on Pinochet's regime? Does *El Mercurio*'s account incorporate dissident or "counter-memory" narratives? If so, how does it approach those themes? Finally, if *El Mercurio*'s narrative evolves to reflect new perspectives and incorporate new realities of the past, then is it also the case that right-wing politics in Chile has come to understand itself differently and has absorbed the critique of its own past? Or has Pinochet's regime been normalized in such a fashion as to allow the Right to maintain a fundamentally authoritarian ideology under the guise of a democratic framework?

In my analysis I emphasize six specific themes in *El Mercurio*'s coverage: political institutionalism; economic and social modernizations; the concept of *chilenidad* (Chilean identity); human rights abuses; the symbolic interactions between Allende and Pinochet; and the question of History itself, including attempts to close off the past. As one or more of these themes emerge throughout the different dates, the reader discerns how *El Mercurio* constructs its narrative of democratic progress.

I. The Return to Civilian Rule (March 1990)

March 11, 1990 was a watershed in Chilean history for two interrelated reasons. First, it was the day that General Augusto Pinochet officially stepped down as ruler of Chile and the military returned the institutional political system to civilian hands. Pinochet, of course, would remain as Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces until 1998, at which point, and under the terms established by his own Constitution of 1980, he

became a Senator for Life. Second, this month also marked the return of a center-left government to Chile as Patricio Aylwin and his *Concertación* coalition, which included Allende's Socialist Party, assumed power.¹⁴¹

How does *El Mercurio*—the paper that had for the previous seventeen years offered its unfaltering support to Pinochet's dictatorship—interpret the transfer of power from Augusto Pinochet to Patricio Aylwin? In its coverage of the transition to civilian rule, *El Mercurio* will assert a Chilean “renaissance” narrative, stressing that between 1973 and 1990 Chile experienced nothing less than a national re-birth. According to the paper, Pinochet and the Junta were not only the “saviors” of the nation, having rescued Chile from at the hands of the Popular Unity government, but more importantly, they were the “fathers” or the “founders” of a *new* democratic Chile. *El Mercurio*'s discourse invokes key themes of political institutionalism, economic and social modernization and nationalism to establish what could be called a *renovationist* narrative of Pinochet's rule.

Renovation and Restoration of Democracy in Chile:

On observing Pinochet's exit from La Moneda in March 1990, *El Mercurio* credits the dictator with leading two projects that, at first glance, appear to be contradictory. Pinochet is honored for conducting both a process of democratic *restoration* and one of democratic *renovation*.¹⁴² The *restoration* refers to the return of democratic electoral processes when, on December 14, 1989, the Chilean people again went to the polls and elected as their president the leader of the *Concertación*, Patricio Aylwin. Even though Pinochet had suspended the Chilean electoral process in 1973; even though there are numerous credible accounts from Pinochet's closest collaborators in the

¹⁴¹ Ensalaco, *Chile Under Pinochet*, 156-180.

¹⁴² *El Mercurio*, March 11, 1990 editorial “Restauración de la democracia.”

military that he veered toward falsifying the results of the 1988 plebiscite and imposing emergency rule as it became clear that the voters were rejecting him; and even though the majority of historical accounts will credit the broad popular opposition movement beginning in 1982 with finally forcing Pinochet's hand, *El Mercurio* still depicts the 1989 elections as a gift from Pinochet.¹⁴³

The theme of “restoration” gradually merges into that of “renovation” as *El Mercurio* stresses the continuity between the out-going and the in-coming governments. In the days leading up to Aylwin's inauguration on March 11, *El Mercurio* readers are inundated with photos, particularly on the front page or the first page of the national news section, of Aylwin and Pinochet together. In the photos, the two men, often referred to as “los dos mandatarios” (“the two heads of state”), are seen conversing inside the nation's “democratic” statehouses (See Appendix, Article 1).¹⁴⁴ These photos convey political *continuity*—the stable and peaceful transition of power from one democratic leader to the next. There is nothing to suggest that Pinochet and Aylwin did not assume the role of head of state in the same way. To not represent the crucial difference that Aylwin was elected President whereas Pinochet seized power in a bloody coup and lost the only popular election he was part of, is key to understanding the manner in which *El Mercurio* shapes a history to accommodate its larger political narrative. Although a *restoration* of democratic electoral processes had, indeed, occurred, it becomes blurred to the extent that it is narrated as a *transition*—a passing of the presidential sash between two legitimate heads of state.

¹⁴³ Ensalaco, *Chile Under Pinochet*, 178-179.

¹⁴⁴ *El Mercurio*, March 8, 1990, “Diálogo de Pinochet con Presidente Electo.” For “los dos/ambos mandatarios” *El Mercurio*, March 11 “Restauración de la Democracia,” A3.

As *El Mercurio* represents it, the restoration of democracy in Chile was not only one mission of Pinochet's government but its central task, and the transition to civilian rule certified that it was a "misión cumplida" (mission accomplished.)¹⁴⁵ In that sense "restoration" (understood as the return to democratic governance after a period of absence) was conflated with an opposite term, "renovation," which implies that under Pinochet, democracy was never really abandoned. In an op-ed piece entitled "Presidente Pinochet," Juan Eduardo King writes, "I feel a need to say that President Pinochet carried off this period of transition initiated on October 5, 1988 in an impeccable fashion."¹⁴⁶ Many op-ed pieces in *El Mercurio* comment on the nature of the transition back to democracy, emphasizing the military's central role in its peaceful orchestration: "Chile's military was not expelled from power. They began to return [*devolver*] power [to the civilians] voluntarily and systematically."¹⁴⁷ With the verb "devolver"—to return—the author displaces agency from the electoral process, a process increasingly impelled by anti-Pinochet protesters, and instead privileges the military's role.

To emphasize this interpretation, writers in *El Mercurio* argue that a restoration of the democratic electoral process was always Pinochet's plan, although his own speeches make little reference to this for many years: "On being defeated in the plebiscite of October 1988, Pinochet never doubted in the least that he would hand over [*entregar*]

¹⁴⁵ *El Mercurio*, March 8, 1990, "Misión Emprendida en 1973 ha sido superada con Creces" C1, 10.

¹⁴⁶ *El Mercurio*, March 16, 1990, Juan Eduardo King "Presidente Pinochet," A3.

¹⁴⁷ *El Mercurio*, March 25, 1990, James R. Wheland "La Revolución Que Nadie Conoce" A2. James Whelan is a conservative North American journalist and historian whose book, *Out of the Ashes: Life, Death, and Transfiguration of Democracy in Chile, 1833-1988* (Washington, D.C: Regnery Gateway, 1989), mirrors the views of those who, in a largely uncritical fashion, supported Pinochet in his attempts to "stop communism." See Appendix, Article 2.

power, according to the calendar established [by the Constitution of 1980] on March 11, 1990, and this is exactly what he did.”¹⁴⁸ The reader again observes the intentional use of the word “entregar”—to hand in/deliver—which stresses Pinochet’s intention to return Chile to civilian rule. Again, one should keep in mind that the historical record suggests a very different process in which Pinochet “flirted with the idea of ignoring the electoral results... [H]e denounced his advisors, demanded emergency powers, and then impetuously threatened to resign when other members of the junta counseled against the maneuver.”¹⁴⁹ The restoration of democracy is presented not as a process whereby a dictator is removed from power following a popular rejection and a stern warning from his fellow generals, but rather as the gift from a leader who voluntarily and democratically *gave it back*. Further, throughout the first eight years of Concertación governance (1990-1998), Pinochet would constantly threaten to return to power if the Concertación, in his words, “touches even one hair on the heads of my men.”

For *El Mercurio*, the theme of democratic restoration allowed it to narrate a Chile that never really detoured from democracy during the Pinochet years. In an editorial from March 11, entitled “La Restauración de la democracia” (“The Restoration of Democracy”), the newspaper figuratively merges Aylwin and Pinochet, giving them equal standing and, again, crediting the military for having upheld this passage to democracy:

The presence of both leaders represents a foundation of republican continuity, which is essential in order to assure the political stability of the country...[and that] the transition to democracy is able to reach its culmination. ...The whole country, and *especially the Armed Forces and*

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ Ensalaco, *Chile Under Pinochet*, 178.

forces of Order, are those who have led this process, and they should be very proud of what they have done.¹⁵⁰

As the Armed Forces are given the responsibility for the return of civilian elections, Aylwin becomes a figure not of change but of *continuity*. Whereas this move indicates a political displacement, in which the figure of *change* (Aylwin) becomes somehow complicit with Pinochet, another move in the same editorial marks an important historical displacement: “The transition thus has reached its culmination. Now no one can doubt that Chile has returned to full democracy.”¹⁵¹ The syntax of this sentence is key. Where *El Mercurio* could have suggested that the country’s transition process *would begin* with Aylwin’s presidency (thereby implying that the success of the transition would depend, as the success of all such transitions) on the willingness of the military to return to the barracks and not threaten a return to power, instead it sees this moment as the *culmination* of the transitional process. To suggest that the transition has ended now that Pinochet is no longer President essentially makes Aylwin accountable for any ensuing “failures” of democracy and relieves Pinochet from that burden, regardless of his behavior. This point is further driven home when *El Mercurio* reports Aylwin’s vow to maintain the “historic institutionality” of the Fuerzas Armadas. For *El Mercurio*, while full democracy has been restored in Chile, its permanence rests on the Concertación’s pledge to preclude civilian attempts to meddle with the Armed Forces. Thus, challenges

¹⁵⁰ *El Mercurio*, March 11, 1990, “Restauración de la Democracia,” A3 (emphasis added).

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*.

to Chile's restored democracy will not be due to any threats that the military will place on the civilian government (which will happen frequently).¹⁵²

In that sense, then, *El Mercurio* credits Pinochet for *restoring* democracy, while also pointing, in broader terms, to Pinochet's *renovation* of Chile's political system and the (new) democratic social order it engendered. As one op-ed suggests, "[Pinochet] tried to put his vision for what would be best for the country in an institutional framework."¹⁵³ In a salient news article entitled, "Impulsan Amplia Reestructuración," ("Projecting a Broad Reconstruction"), *El Mercurio* quotes from the president of the Supreme Court as he concludes,

In our country...we have been actors as well as witnesses to the triumph of democracy. The Chilean people have influenced the open enthusiasm of the Supreme Government to begin with renewed energy on the road to liberty, to a [renewed] faith in man, and to the full observance of law, the only guarantee of human dignity.¹⁵⁴

The Supreme Court President—and here it must be stressed that the Supreme Court remained loyal to the military government until long after 1998—once again highlights the *end* of the transition and, thus, the triumph of democracy. Pinochet's rule has past and, as the Supreme Court President continues, it is that rule that has enabled Chile to emerge to a new stage of liberty and freedom:

As citizens, we are grateful for this new stage and we ask God to enlighten the new government with the ability to lead the country in democracy, using the path of reconciliation, peace and truth, so that the dignity of the rights of man will always be the basic

¹⁵² *El Mercurio*, March 8, 1990 "Aylwin a Pinochet: No Alterará a la institucionalidad de las FF.AA," A 1. It is important to note here that between 1990-1998, Pinochet constantly threatened Concertación leaders who made efforts to alter his political legacy.

¹⁵³ *El Mercurio*, March 25, 1990, "La Revolución que Nadie Conoce" A2. (Appendix, Article 2).

¹⁵⁴ *El Mercurio*, March 3, 1990, "Impulsan Amplia Reestructuración," A1.

principle which guides and animates the actions of each one of those who carry on their shoulders the heavy responsibility which comes with leading the nation to the achievement of its common interests.¹⁵⁵

In this excerpt from 1990, the chief magistrate of the judicial body that will, for the next decade, consistently rebuff any legal challenges by human rights groups to Pinochet and the military, implicitly links Pinochet, who has led “us” to this day, to the observance of human rights and the continued search for the “bien común.”

In a notable editorial, “Restauración de la Democracia,” (“Democracy Restored”, which would be more accurately translated as “Democracy Re-Invented”), *El Mercurio* summons all Chileans to feel pride in Chile’s new democracy and all that the military regime has bequeathed them.

The military put on their shoulders an historic responsibility. From the very first moment, they declared their intention to restore the lost democracy, and they committed themselves to that task with seriousness and with the energy to accomplish all the necessary transformations needed to reach institutional, social, and economic *renovation*.¹⁵⁶

While *El Mercurio* constantly encouraged its readers in this crucial month that “we will never forget...that we were capable of lifting Chile from ruin, and that we have built a new, modern, and booming country,” it will also suggest that it was Pinochet who established a whole *new* kind of democracy.¹⁵⁷ An editorial from March 25 entitled, “La Revolución que Nadie Conoce” (“The Revolution that No One Knows”) further illustrates this point:

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ *El Mercurio*, March 11, 1990, “Restauración de la Democracia,” A3 (emphasis added).

¹⁵⁷ *El Mercurio*, March 8, 1990, “Expresó el Presidente Augusto Pinochet: Misión Emprendida en 1973 ha sido superada con Creces,” C1, news article.

How does one translate the Chilean case to the Third World as a whole? The people who reached power in 1973 realized that not only was a democratic civilization not flourishing [in Chile] – an image which the world’s intelligentsia adopted – but rather all that remained in this polarized country was the formal skeleton of democracy... [T]hey realized that they had to do something more to prevent the reestablishment of the system which existed before, to prevent the return of the leaders of yesteryear. They had to build a new institutional superstructure, and the model which they chose was the same one which had allowed Chile to become a clear example for the great part of the world during almost all the Nineteenth Century.¹⁵⁸

Through this editorial, *El Mercurio* makes several crucial points. In the first place, it insists on the fact that it wasn’t Pinochet who challenged democracy in Chile, it was Allende’s government, and, by implication, the weak (reformist) governments that preceded it. In the place of democracy’s feeble (pre-coup) skeleton in Chile, the Junta constructed a robust new democracy. In the second place, *El Mercurio* suggests that the military could accomplish this only by creating a “new” institutional order, an order which pointed back to the nineteenth century, a golden age when Chile was the envy of the world. This excerpt reveals *El Mercurio* as it removes Allende from Chile’s democratic narrative and inserts Pinochet into his place.

The Constitution of 1980 often stands at the center of *El Mercurio*’s whiggish narrative, the concrete proof that Pinochet’s rule was not a deviation from democracy but rather a well-conceived plan to renovate it. In a March 8th news article, *El Mercurio* quotes Pinochet as he notes that “The political constitution approved in 1980 and ratified in 1989...came to definitively consecrate the democratic values which our government

¹⁵⁸ *El Mercurio*, March 25, 1990, James Whelan “La Revolución que Nadie Conoce,” A2.

supported.”¹⁵⁹ Of greatest importance here is the sacralization of the Constitution of 1980, the assertion that not only was democracy highly valued by the dictatorship, but it was only through Pinochet’s efforts—most notably, his Constitution – that Chile has democracy. (As I noted in the previous chapter, the Constitution of 1980 seriously revised some basic tenets of liberal democracy, refusing political participation to those who held certain beliefs and filling the upper chamber of the legislature with unelected senators).

Further, *El Mercurio* suggests that through his Constitution, Pinochet achieved political consensus (a consensus that did not exist in reality) and has thus garnered the support of President Aylwin and his Concertación alliance, “The new authorities have understood that these advances only were possible thanks to a very profound change in the focus of government, such as placing liberty and personal initiative ahead of the old state.”¹⁶⁰ By showcasing a consensus that does not exist, particularly one that cast the dictatorship as the sponsor of “liberty” and the government previous to Pinochet as representing the “old state,” *El Mercurio* rhetorically connects the new government with Pinochet’s project.

By arguing that the Pinochet regime *renovated* democracy in Chile, *El Mercurio* reverses history discursively: Allende becomes the dictator and Pinochet the democrat. In the same sense, the paper will suggest, within this *renovation* frame, that Pinochet and his government did not just “right the wrongs” of the Popular Unity, but went further to carry

¹⁵⁹ *El Mercurio*, March 8, 1990, “Misión Emprendida en 1973 ha sido superado con Creces,” C1, C10. Pinochet goes on here to say that, “es tarea ineludible para cada hija e hijo de esta tierra ampararlo por las mismas vías que nuestra Constitución ha previsto para defender la democracia que con tanto esfuerzo, abnegación y sacrificio hemos construido.”

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

out a democratic *revolution*: “[Chile] is, in a word, a country which has experienced a revolution: a revolution which, truly, was successful.”¹⁶¹ In the opinion piece entitled “Memorias del Gobierno” (“Memories of the Government”), which argues that only Pinochet has achieved what had been attempted unsuccessfully in the past, the anonymous author places Pinochet in comparison with both Allende and the Christian Democrat Eduardo Frei, noting that while these two “socialists” failed to bring about “a complete renovation of national life,” Pinochet succeeded beyond all expectations:

...it is interesting to note that the programs of the last three presidents – Frei, Allende, and Pinochet – all had the same goal, although they employed different terminologies. But if one measures [their success] from the standpoint of achieving their aims, of the three, the military regime was the only one which could be considered to have achieved them in a very high degree.¹⁶²

The comparison is notable because it suggests that the military regime acted not against the “socialist” Allende, but rather against Chile’s tradition of reform governments. To be sure, the article does not consider either the violent methods Pinochet used to achieve his ends or the fact that the general was in power for 17 years while Allende was violently overthrown after only three. Yet more important for my discussion is that *El Mercurio*’s narrative works to invert the facts of Chile’s history, placing the Pinochet regime within a positivist narrative that sees Chile’s history as a journey to democratic fulfillment. Thus,

¹⁶¹ *El Mercurio*, March 25, 1990, James Whelan, “La Revolución que Nadie Conoce,” A2. This is a critical editorial as Whelan will excuse Pinochet for his errors because his government initiated a revolution that justified its means: “I am not trying to say that Pinochet’s regime was flawless nor deny its responsibility. But I do insist that, compared to other revolutionary regimes, it accomplished the construction of a country, not its destruction and presided over the installation of a solid democratic frame, not a totalitarian dynasty. And this was carried out with less blood shed and less suffering than most of all ‘revolutionary’ regimes. Again, see Appendix, Article 2.

¹⁶² *El Mercurio*, March 10, 1990, “Memorias del Gobierno,” A3.

Allende becomes the dictator and Pinochet the democrat; Pinochet the revolutionary and Allende the conservative state bureaucrat.

At this first temporal point, March 1990, then, we can see how *El Mercurio* begins to construct a narrative with two central threads, both of which identify Pinochet with a democratic project. One, the *restorationist*, will credit Pinochet with returning Chile to a full-fledged democratic government, modeled on those who brought Chile to glory in the nineteenth century. The second, *renovationist*, argued that Pinochet's intention to leave Chile with a stronger democracy had become nothing short of a democratic revolution. With these narratives in place, the paper also firmly establishes the success of Pinochet's project and declares that it has garnered broad consensual support and, therefore, is unassailable. All parties have agreed to Pinochet's terms; history is over and cannot be reopened. Indeed, to do so, to "go back in time," as it were, would undermine the nation's reconciliation process. As such, *El Mercurio's* approach carries an implicit threat to the Concertación that it should not attempt to "alter" or even examine the past. *El Mercurio* will employ these unifying themes repeatedly throughout the post-dictatorship period.

II. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report (February 1991)

Two months after assuming office as the first democratically elected President of Chile since Allende, Patricio Aylwin, convened a National Truth and Reconciliation Commission to investigate the gross human rights violations that had been committed during Pinochet's regime. This eight-member body, lead by Raúl Rettig, a well-respected lawyer, ambassador and former minister from the Radical Party, was allotted nine months

to report on human rights violations during the military's rule. Although the Commission was restricted to investigating only murders and disappearances (i.e., presumed killings), the Commission's main goals were, nevertheless, to reveal the causes and circumstances of political deaths during the previous regime and to determine, to the extent possible, the victims' fates. The Commission began work in March 1990 with an extensive interviewing process that culminated on February 11, 1991 with the submission of its final report to President Aylwin. President Aylwin disclosed the major findings of the report to the public in a televised national address by in March 1991. In this speech, arguably the most significant of his presidency, Aylwin called upon the entire Chilean nation to recognize "the moral unacceptability of human rights abuses perpetrated by state agents,"¹⁶³ and the need for a better future contingent on the "moral reconstruction of society and the consolidation of democratic institutions."¹⁶⁴

The release of the Rettig Report, as it became known, was thus the first time the military government—and its credibility and "salvation" legacy—was directly challenged by the new government. It marked the first time the regime's own "official" history confronted a counter-narrative delivered not by opposition politicians, but rather by an authorized governmental entity. The very fact that *El Mercurio* reported the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the release of its report is telling in and of itself. One must acknowledge that for *El Mercurio* – the singular media voice of Pinochet's regime—allocating print space to an issue that subtracted from the military regime's credibility was noteworthy. As Ignacio Aguero argues, *El Mercurio* still had not acknowledged the extent to which it misinformed its readers about the disappearances

¹⁶³ Amstutz, *Healing Nations*, 153.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 154.

that occurred during the dictatorship.¹⁶⁵ *El Mercurio*'s coverage of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 1991 findings, then, is a central moment to see how it will incorporate what might be called an "inconvenient truth" into its historical account of the military regime, a history that it has already claimed was based on a mission to provide Chile with a functional and modernized democracy.¹⁶⁶

Throughout February 1991, one observes the way in which *El Mercurio* uses the Rettig Report and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission itself as evidence not of Pinochet's abusive rule but rather as a way to mark Chile's road to progress. Although it could no longer deny that human rights abuses occurred, *El Mercurio* maintained a defensive posture towards the Rettig Report. Even as its news articles and editorials stressed that the report should in no way challenge the military's amnesty laws, most notably the broad Amnesty decree which Pinochet authored in 1978, *El Mercurio* simultaneously established a "bad apples" narrative to absolve Pinochet and the military of criminal responsibility.¹⁶⁷

Amnesty Law of 1978 and the Closure of History:

For *El Mercurio*, the very task assumed by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission – the interrogation of the past – is problematic. As such, the paper will attempt to discursively close it (history) off by suggesting that historical inquiry itself challenges the authority of the Constitution of 1980 and therefore threatens Chilean

¹⁶⁵ This has been explored and exposed in a variety of different sources. Among others see, Gianfranco Betettini. *Lo que queda de los medios: Ideas para una ética de la comunicación*. Navarra, Spain: Ediciones Universidad de Navarra, 2001; Ignacio Aguero documentary "El Diario de Agustín"; the theses written in 2007 at the Universidad de Chile Instituto de la Comunicación e Imagen (see footnote 120).

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ A "bad apples" narrative is often used to shift responsibility from those who control the design of policy to those lower down who carry it out.

stability and the nation's democratic *renovation*. Consequently, right-wing opposition to a proposal to strike down the military's amnesty, becomes a rallying point for *El Mercurio* to defend Pinochet's regime and, concurrently, its positivist narrative of his rule.¹⁶⁸

In a news article, *El Mercurio* quotes Andres Allamand, the leader of the conservative *Renovación Nacional* Party (RN) as he notes, "therefore, the 1978 Amnesty [decree] should be kept – it is legally indispensable, politically necessary, and is a positive element in the desire for reconciliation."¹⁶⁹ *El Mercurio* will acknowledge the past; its choice is not to negate the revelations now emerging from the government. But at the same time the paper will implicitly suggest that "too much history" could yield negative consequences for Chile's new democracy. Thus, if *El Mercurio*'s first move in March 1990 is to recast the history of the Pinochet regime, with the Rettig Report it will imply that there are dangers to the present (and future) in looking too deeply into the past.

To the extent that Chile's dark past of torture and disappearances has been examined by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *El Mercurio* will claim that Rettig's is a one-sided view of history that errs by failing to explain the historical context in which human rights were violated. *El Mercurio* gives ample coverage to RN leader Andrés Allamand who argues just this point: "If one wants to reach the complete and historic truth about what has happened in Chile, it is fundamental to take note of the

¹⁶⁸ "Propuesta Por La Paz" see Brian Loveman, *Chile: The Legacy of Hispanic Capitalism*, 3rd ed., Latin American histories (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 318. "Propuesta Por La Paz" proposed to eliminate the Amnesty Law of 1978, specifically Article 5. This would legalize judicial action against military personnel by families of the disappeared. (specifically removing Article 5 thereby sanctioning judicial action)

¹⁶⁹ *El Mercurio*, February 7, 1991, "Andres Allamand: Informe Rettig No Puede Individualizar Culpables."

background, the causes which set the stage for the violation of human rights in Chile.”¹⁷⁰

According to Allamand, human rights violations ensued as a result of the chaotic social and political context generated by Allende’s government. From Allamand’s outlook, Pinochet’s amnesty was a correct act and must not be challenged.

Several other editorials that address the Rettig Report broadly assume this same defensive posture, and are wary about probing the Pinochet period too deeply. As an editorial from February 3 entitled, “La Concertación en 1991,” suggests that

Historical forgetfulness has led the leaders of the governing alliance, who previously challenged the country’s [growing] success and, even earlier, failed to acknowledge the danger which totalitarian Marxism and its armed cadre presented, to now become the accusers and judges of the forces which, heeding the call of a democratic citizenry, had to suffocate the extremist revolutionary plot.¹⁷¹

For *El Mercurio*’s editors, the Rettig Report signifies an unwarranted incursion into the field of history. Their editorials scantily address the subject of the report itself—the disturbing and dark past it unearths – but rather focus on the “forgetfulness” of the Left (i.e., the *Concertación* government). According to *El Mercurio* what has been “forgotten” is defiantly *not* the human rights abuses of the Pinochet government, but rather the actions of “totalitarian Marxism and its armed cadre.” In another reversal, Allende’s supporters, having conveniently “forgotten” their past, become responsible for the abuses that followed—while *El Mercurio* refrains from passing judgment on the actions of the military government.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ *El Mercurio*, February 3, 1991, “La Concertación en 1991,” editorial.

In several editorials, however, *El Mercurio* does remind its readers who is the real threat to Chilean democracy. In “Amenaza Comunista” (“Communist Menace”), for example, the editors argue that the real threat from Communism is not its terrorism, but its willingness to break from Chile’s democratic tradition at any moment: “The behavior of Chilean communism betrays a surprising stubbornness which suggests that their devotion to democracy, today as yesterday, is a promise that can be unilaterally severed at any moment.”¹⁷² Because of this, according to *El Mercurio*, Chile must not allow the Communists to define “what democracy is [or] what human rights are and how they should be protected and defended.”¹⁷³ Again, *El Mercurio* has reversed the field of history. In Chile it was the Left which was elected democratically in 1970 and the opposition Center-Right which “unilaterally severed” its “devotion to democracy” three years later. Indeed, it was the Chilean military that, according to the Rettig Report, violated human rights on a massive scale. While *El Mercurio*’s coverage of the Rettig report accepts the confirmation of large-scale human rights violations under the military government (as opposed to denying that anything untoward occurred, as Pinochet himself would continue to maintain almost until his death), it discursively blames the violations on the Left and disputes their right to raise any critiques at all.

Nunca Más:

After the release of the Rettig Report, *El Mercurio* incorporates the slogan “Never Again” (*Nunca Más*) into its narrative. The phrase, of course, was borrowed from post-Holocaust discourse to emerge as the slogan of human rights movements throughout Latin America. “Nunca más” has since the 1970s become a way to call upon the national

¹⁷² *El Mercurio*, February 4, 1991, “Amenaza Comunista,” editorial.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

and international community to bear witness to the abuses that occurred in the past and to work to ensure that these violations never happen again. Despite its origins, however, the phrase over time has been adopted by sectors of the Right, and even by Pinochet who appropriated it, suggesting the instability of even the most historically grounded signs. For Pinochet, “never again” would Chile return to the conditions of 1970, with an elected Socialist president and a left-wing government.

El Mercurio also integrates “nunca más” and the perspective that “human rights violations should never happen again,” into its discourse. But as several news articles suggest, *El Mercurio* uses the phrase both to absolve Pinochet from any legal responsibilities for his actions and to seal off the past from further exposure. Further, for *El Mercurio*, human rights violations happened but they were committed by some “bad apples” who, responding to the needs at the time, did what they thought was best for the stability and progress of the Chilean nation.

In addition, *El Mercurio*'s adoption of a social justice slogan underscores its perspective that changing the Amnesty Law—which it sees as altering the past—would legitimize a subjective reading of history and, consequently, threaten Chile's newly restored democracy. *El Mercurio* frames this discussion of human rights as a warning: If Chile continues to examine the past—if it goes beyond simply acknowledging the past (as the paper, itself, has done in its news articles and editorials), democracy will itself be endangered. In other words, returning to the theme of history and memory, *El Mercurio* will accept that these new disclosures (“subjective” and “uncontextualized” as they are characterized by the paper) can have a meaning “for” the present – as History – but they cannot have a meaning “in” the present – as Memory; they cannot be a cause for *action*,

only study. But as with its reporting a year earlier, *El Mercurio's* reports on the Rettig Report leave it up to the reader to determine what would happen and who would jeopardize Chilean democracy if the past were to be fully examined and made meaningful in the present.

III. Pinochet's Arrest in London (October 1998)

Pinochet turned over executive power to a civilian government in 1990, but that did not mean he relinquished all his institutional controls. To the contrary, he continued to serve as Commander in Chief of the Army until 1998, a post from which he frequently harassed both President Aylwin and his successor, Eduardo Frei Ruiz-Tagle (son of the Christian Democratic president from 1964-1970, Eduardo Frei Montalva). That title he would only give up in 1998.¹⁷⁴ Shortly after finishing his term as Army head, Pinochet traveled to London on an arms purchasing trip, to visit his close confidant, Margaret Thatcher, and for a routine surgical procedure on his back. While in London, Pinochet was detained by Scotland Yard personnel acting on an international arrest warrant filed by Spanish Judge Baltasar Garzón on a variety of charges. Specifically, the warrant which called for Pinochet's extradition to Spain charged him with 94 counts of torture and the assassination of Spaniards in Chile during his dictatorship. Pinochet's case unfolded over sixteen months of intense dispute in a variety of London courts, ultimately landing with the Law Lords, Britain's closest equivalent to the U.S. Supreme Court.

The issue before the Law Lords was whether Pinochet could be extradited to Spain to face trial. The courts questioned the lawfulness of "sovereign immunity"—a

¹⁷⁴ As stipulated in the Constitution of 1980, Pinochet became a Senator for Life when he retired from the Army.

concept whereby heads of state were exempt from prosecution for crimes committed during their time in power by virtue of the fact that they were acting on behalf of the state. The Chilean government, under President Eduardo Frei Ruiz-Tagle, defended Pinochet's immunity because of his status as former president and the current immunity he enjoyed as Senator-for-Life. The prosecutors (along with human rights organizations and the United Nations) argued that Pinochet should be extradited under the notion that crimes against humanity are subject to universal jurisdiction and can be tried anywhere if there is strong evidence that they won't be brought to justice in their own courts.

The House of Lords ultimately rejected Pinochet's defense and, in the process, created a new standard in international law by denying claims of sovereign immunity for such charges as crimes against humanity and genocide. Ultimately, the Law Lords would only charge Pinochet for crimes occurring after 1988 (the date when the UK adopted legislation from the United Nations Convention against torture).¹⁷⁵ Irrespective, Pinochet was released to Chile on March 3, 2000 after Home Secretary Jack Straw determined that he was unfit to stand trial in Spain. Yet the Chile that Pinochet returned to was a different one than he left, largely due to the intense publicity and controversy his arrest had occasioned. For the first time, prosecutors and judges (in Chile they are the same person), led by Judge Juan Guzmán, began the laborious process of bringing legal actions against Pinochet. In August of 2000 the Chilean Supreme Court stripped Pinochet of his immunity as Senator-for-Life, but although a variety of suits were brought against him,

¹⁷⁵ <http://www.hrweb.org/legal/undocs.html>

his legal team, largely claiming his physical unfitness to stand trial, succeeded in keeping him out of the courthouse until his ultimate death in December 2006.¹⁷⁶

Pinochet's arrest in London made international headlines, but caused an huge uproar in Chile. Despite eight years of democratic government and continuous talk of "reconciliation," those pursuing legal justice against Pinochet had achieved meager aid and few results. Pinochet's position as Senator for Life, the Amnesty law of 1978, and other protections written into the 1980 Constitution made it almost impossible to charge him with crimes committed during his time in power. In fact, by 1998, as Brian Loveman notes, President Frei decided to "negotiate with the political elite a *ley de punto final* [full-stop law]...to 'finish' with the human rights issue" once and for all.¹⁷⁷ But Pinochet's arrest would only serve to unveil the historical and memory disputes which continued to divide how the Chilean people understood their past and its meaning in the present. Pinochet's arrest also provoked new conversations about how Chile, in a new era of democratic government, would situate itself vis-à-vis a Pinochet who, in his time in London, had become a metonym for dictator.¹⁷⁸

Reactions to the General's detention in London were varied. For many, particularly in the center-Left, Pinochet's arrest was met with the triumphant cheers of those who had fought for social justice. It meant that Chile and the world would bear witness to the truth that Pinochet and his regime were responsible not just for "excesses," but for crimes against humanity. For another sector of Chile's populace, however, Pinochet's arrest was seen as both without merit and nothing short of a direct

¹⁷⁶ Ensalaco, *Chile Under Pinochet*, 456-457.

¹⁷⁷ Loveman, *Chile the Legacy of Hispanic Capitalism*, 324.

¹⁷⁸ Thomas C Wright, *State Terrorism in Latin America: Chile, Argentina, and International Human Rights* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 201.

infringement on Chile's national sovereignty. This group—the so-called *pinochetistas*—found Pinochet then (and now) either innocent of all charges or to be praised for acting in the best interests of the Chilean state. Harkening back to a Chile of “three thirds,” another substantial portion of Chile's population came down in the middle of the debate. This section of society—which included some conservative leaders—recognized the need for legal action and agreed that Pinochet needed to stand trial for the charges against him, but was also critical of what it saw as an international *prepotencia* (arrogance) and backed the argument that for Pinochet to be arrested in London or tried in Spain undermined Chilean sovereignty.¹⁷⁹

Throughout its coverage of Pinochet's arrest, *El Mercurio* invokes Chilean identity—using Pinochet to represent Chilean nationhood and sovereignty—to normalize Pinochet's actions and bring him under its whiggish interpretation of Chilean progress. Specifically, *El Mercurio* employed a narrative of collective (national) guilt, which acted to absolve Pinochet of any individual responsibility. In order to place historical blame on the Chilean nation, the most salient change in *El Mercurio's* narrative throughout this month is the separation of Pinochet, the man, from the political and social project for which, previously, he had been directly credited. *El Mercurio* summons the whole populace to take responsibility for its past and to defend Pinochet for the sake of their present and future.

El Mercurio attempts to convert Pinochet into the symbol of Chilean identity, offsetting a dominant international discourse which increasingly sees him as the personification of dictatorship. Demanding Pinochet's release, then, opens a way for

¹⁷⁹ Loveman, *Chile, The Legacy of Hispanic Capitalism*, 325.

Chile to defend the democracy and the progress the nation has achieved since the transition back to democracy while simultaneously eliding the need to bring Pinochet to trial. Adopting a similar perspective as it did during the release of the Rettig Report, *El Mercurio*, calls for a *punto final* [final stop] to any misgivings about the past and demands a focus, instead, on the future. The paper includes a number of op-eds, editorials and news articles from authors with different political leanings to reinforce the point that to investigate or alter Chile's history would threaten the nation itself. In a news article from October 18, for example, *El Mercurio* quotes RN representative Alberto Cadenmil:

The arrest of Senator Pinochet represents the gravest problem the country has confronted in terms of reconciliation. This is not a question between *pinochetistas* and *antipinochetistas* but rather a question of State that affects the politics, liberty, and security of all Chileans...The Chilean society had closed the transition [process] and now the international community wants to open it—which represents an enormous threat to the country and all its citizens.¹⁸⁰

A key issue to arise in Chilean society after Pinochet had left the Moneda was exactly *what* posed the greatest threat to the stability of Chile's democracy. For *El Mercurio* and most conservative thinkers, the greatest threat came in re-opening the “transitional process” for examination. As we have seen, conservative writers tend to see the entire Pinochet regime as one of “transition” since his intention was “always” to return the country to a “renovated” democracy. For much of Chile's Left, the greatest threat was just the opposite—*not* examining the past. Here one observes Cadenmil not only assert that the transition is a matter of concern *only* for Chileans, but in the context of Pinochet's “mission accomplished” statement, examination of this process is closed. This

¹⁸⁰ *El Mercurio*, October 18, 1998, “Ex Ministros de Pinochet: Alegan Requerimiento Ilegítimo,” C4.

reinforces *El Mercurio*'s argument that the past is something that must be sealed off, put away, *punto final*.¹⁸¹

Countless other news articles and op-ed pieces intimate that Pinochet's arrest opens up historical fissures that Chile, as a nation, had successfully stiched together during the last eight years. Pinochet's arrest puts "our dignity and national honor up for grabs," whereas, in the view of *El Mercurio*, what the international community hasn't understood is the progress that Chile has experienced because of Pinochet's leadership:¹⁸²

The political transition that Chile has achieved during these last ten years has been considered successful by the national and international community. After having gone through traumatic moments of national division, of economic crisis and serious social problems, [the country] has been able to relocate itself on a path of political and economic accord to which the great majority of the nation's political actors have given their consent.... [O]ur country has been able to reach this social consensus which has allowed us to move from the military government toward a democratic regime [marked by] economic development and social progress.¹⁸³

Much as with other articles, the author of this op-ed emphasizes that the past is over and that there is no use in *revising* or unearthing these "traumatic moments of national division." But the basis for claiming that the past has *passed* and shouldn't be reopened is the assumed success of the transition, which itself is demonstrated by a supposed "agreement" reached by the nation's political actors. What this, and *El Mercurio*'s view in general, tends to ignore is the large part of the Chilean population left out of this consensus, for whom the past remained a painful wound.

¹⁸¹ Putting the livelihood of a restored democracy in question, I must note, feels awfully familiar as when Pinochet first came to power, it was the permanence of *his* rule that was put into question and not just by Leftists but among the traditional sectors of Chile's right-wing!

¹⁸² *El Mercurio*, October 18, 1998, "Situación de Pinochet en Londres: Oposición Lo Considera Agravio al País," C3.

¹⁸³ *El Mercurio*, October 20, 1998, "Ataque a La Transición," A2 op-ed.

While it seeks to close the past, *El Mercurio* consolidates its vision of Pinochet's legacy and Allende's failure. In a sharply partisan editorial written by Pablo Rodríguez Grez, the former leader of the neo-fascist "Patria y Libertad" terrorist group which harassed the Allende government, and the man who later became Pinochet's lawyer, argues:

What is the road to national reconciliation? In my opinion it begins with an honest interpretation and analysis of what happened in Chile from 1970 forward, admitting that there is blame to be shared... [T]he military regime began a long process of reconstruction and, what is more important, of a restructuring of our fundamental institutions. This last task was absolutely necessary in order to reestablish [*refundar*] a democracy that will not be at the mercy of revolutionary adventurers. The military regime committed errors. This is true, particularly in terms of excesses committed in the area of human rights. All revolutions – and this was a revolution – have a price... [T]he military government did its best, and successfully, to restore a liberal democracy capable of defending itself, so that it can avoid future rabid tyrants. It is this reality, which we so clearly face.¹⁸⁴

If his arrest translates to a threat to the nation, then *El Mercurio* must remind its readers of what Pinochet did for Chile. In this rhetorical tour de force, Rodríguez Grez makes several points that, more than anything, aid *El Mercurio's* inversion of history. As with earlier *El Mercurio* articles, here the question of who is a "real" revolutionary arises again. The paper dismisses the Chilean left as "adventures" and declares that the "real revolution" came from Pinochet. Secondly, while accepting that errors were made by Pinochet, Rodríguez Grez excuses the military's human rights violations by claiming that all revolutions have their costs and, as the Chilean case proves, the ends justify the means. Last but not least, the author asserts that Chile now has a new institutional system

¹⁸⁴ *El Mercurio*, October 31, 1998, Pablo Rodríguez Grez, "Historia y Unidad Nacional" A2. See Appendix, Article 3.

that will prevent another “*embestida liberticida*.” One must pause here to consider the author’s use of this phrase, for it contains the central reversal within a rhetorical scheme that *El Mercurio* has employed since 1990. “*Liberticida*” is the term for tyrant. Rodríguez Grez turns Allende into the “tyrant” (and a bestial one, at that) and Pinochet into Chile’s democratic savior. While historians still debate how best to represent these two men, it remains beyond argument that it was only Pinochet who acted as dictator in Chile (i.e., without an electoral mandate or legislative constraints), and only Pinochet who was condemned by national and international human rights agencies for actions perpetrated during seventeen years in power. Yet *El Mercurio* depicts Pinochet’s dictatorship as a *democratic revolution* whose errors, while admitted, must be forgiven.

The rhetoric of historical inversion emerges in yet another news article from October 27:

They have tried to hide from international public opinion the historic truth that under the Chilean military government, the country which had been destroyed by a Marxist dictatorship was reconstructed, and that with the support and initiative of this military government, a solid, prosperous, and stable democracy was installed, along with a free economy that is achieving progress and winning the fight against poverty.¹⁸⁵

Through this article and others to surface in *El Mercurio* during this month, the newspaper changes its narrative in several ways. Although most of *El Mercurio*’s articles recognize that Pinochet’s leadership sparked divisions in society, they nonetheless argue that these divisions have lessened over the last eight years of reconciliation and democracy.

¹⁸⁵ *El Mercurio*, October 27, 1998, “Ex Legisladores: Defienden Obra del Gobierno de Pinochet,” C4.

Consistent with other moments (March 1990 and February 1991), *El Mercurio's* editorial approach contains a set of veiled threats as it reports on Pinochet's arrest. As the historic roles of Allende and Pinochet get reversed, the claim that Chile's new democracy will "never again" witness the rise of another tyrant is seen to refer back to Allende, and not Pinochet. "Nunca más" thus rhetorically confirms Pinochet's understanding of history: never again will Chile allow "Allende" to come to power, not never again will the country acquiesce to the disappearances and torture of large numbers of its citizens. But given that Allende rose to power by elections, *El Mercurio's* discourse questions whether Chile's conservative parties will accept an electoral decision that counters their perceived interests. Further, the question *El Mercurio* raises is the extent to which the examination of Chile's past itself might constitute a return to a forbidden past.

IV. The Thirtieth Anniversary of the Coup (September 11, 2003)

While the 25th Anniversary of the coup of 1973 (1998) may seem like the most logical commemorative marker for looking back at the coup and what followed, , the 30th anniversary (2003) became more salient for several reasons. In the first place, the 25th anniversary occurred shortly before Pinochet arrest in London. His arrest and the legal proceedings it unleashed produced the first serious public investigation into Pinochet's own actions and responsibilities. Additionally, in March 2000, Ricardo Lagos, the first Socialist president since Allende, assumed leadership of the country. Unlike his predecessor, Eduardo Frei Ruiz-Tagle, who had tried to close off the "Pinochet" and human rights stories, Lagos more strongly encouraged Chile's examination of its past. Lagos initiated a "Mesa de Diálogo" ["Dialogue Forum"] in 2000 to confront "the legacy

of the military regime's human rights abuses," which as he saw it, was essential to achieving the "shared dream of national unity and political reconciliation."¹⁸⁶

For these and other reasons, the 30th anniversary provides an important commemorative moment through which to explore transformations in *El Mercurio's* historical narrative, as it re-opened with newfound fervor the opportunity for Chile to confront its recent past. Examination of the 30th anniversary, a historical memory bonanza, can demonstrate to what degree *El Mercurio's* dominant narrative had accommodated to the rapidly accumulating documentation and the growing counter-memory narratives that had emerged more forcefully since 1998.¹⁸⁷

For memory work, anniversaries are inherently prolific: As one editorial from *El Mercurio* explains, "Anniversaries are moments when one can exorcise the ghosts of the past which continue to pursue us, preventing us from constructing the future in peace."¹⁸⁸ The 30th anniversary of September 11, 1973 is certainly no exception as the reader is led to wonder exactly what "ghosts" *El Mercurio* thinks require exorcising. Not surprisingly, the paper's coverage portrays the day of the coup, its meaning and how it should be observed, as a day that continues to divide Chileans: "Thirty years after September 11, 1973, the wounds persist and are still open."¹⁸⁹ In the face of this undeniably meaningful anniversary, *El Mercurio* digresses from its argument that the past can be closed off.

¹⁸⁶ Loveman, *Chile: The Legacy of Hispanic Capitalism*, 355-6.

¹⁸⁷ This period was also marked by President Clinton's release of a huge number of US government documents devoted to U.S.-Chilean relations during the period leading up to the coup and during the Pinochet government. These documents that are summarized and analyzed in Peter Kornbluh, *The Pinochet File: A Declassified Dossier on Atrocity and Accountability* (New York: New Press, 2003).

¹⁸⁸ *El Mercurio*, September 9, 2003, Eugenio Tironi "Allende en la Memoria," A3.

¹⁸⁹ *El Mercurio*, September 14, 2003, "11 De Septiembre, fecha que sigue dividiendo a Chile," news analysis from "Reportajes" D23.

Instead, it recognizes that the wounds left by Chile's recent past are still painful, particularly given the on-going revelations about the human rights violations committed under Pinochet's regime, and moves to engage the past rather than promote a *punto final*.

Three historical representations (re)surface in *El Mercurio's* coverage during September 2003. In the first place, the paper reprises its own reporting of the coup as it (alone of all the newspapers) was able to record it. As it unearthed its original coverage of the period, *El Mercurio* reformatted one section of its "National" pages everyday (from September 1-11, 2003) to insert images of the coup (See Appendix, Article 4).

The second representation is of the *anniversary* of September 11, 1973, the commemoration of the event, rather than the event itself. This self-reflective posture offers insights into whether and how *El Mercurio's* interpretation of the coup has changed over the intervening three decades.

A third representation to play out in *El Mercurio's* pages during this month concerns the way the Chilean nation will (or should) remember September 11, 1973 in the present, i.e., on September 11, 2003.

El Mercurio's narrative of the 30th anniversary reinforces the paper's dominant interpretation of September 11, 1973 as the ultimate crisis of Chile's political institutions. Although *El Mercurio* reasserts that the crisis emerged primarily because of Allende and the *Unidad Popular*, as its narrative evolved over the previous thirteen years, the paper found itself more willing to acknowledge that on September 11, 1973, the military *did* overthrow a civilian elected president and that throughout Pinochet's rule human rights abuses *did* occur. But the paper still proposed that the ultimate meaning of the coup lay in the fact that it opened the door to a stronger democracy in Chile and, therefore, can be

understood as a period that fits comfortably within Chile's older history of continual progress.

During this month, *El Mercurio* establishes a new approach to the question of history and the effort to understand what happened in Chile's past. While it temporarily abandons its well-worn approach that the past should not be examined, *El Mercurio* instead intimates that what matters when one reviews the past is one's interpretive understanding. This particular perspective surfaces in many of *El Mercurio's* news articles, editorials and op-eds. In the first place, *El Mercurio* will accuse the Left for what it finds to be its subjective examination of September 11, 1973 and, therefore, for its falsification of history. Secondly, the paper insists that, unlike the Left, the Right can see the past as it actually occurred. Thus, *El Mercurio* will reinforce that it was Allende who converted a democracy into a tyranny and Pinochet who, while he made errors along the way, ultimately brought progress and stability to Chile. Finally many of *El Mercurio's* articles assume a more troubling tone, hinting that there are consequences, a price to be paid, for misinterpreting the past. If the past is to be examined then Chile's leaders and the public better draw the "right" conclusions from that examination.

The Left and the Writing of History:

As previously stated, a frequent assertion in *El Mercurio* is that since the coup, the Left only understood the past from its own perspective whereas the Right was able to view it more objectively and more holistically. While this narrative thread emerged before 2003, *El Mercurio* returns to it vigorously in early September 2003. A news article quotes RN representative Sergio Romero saying, "If some want to falsify history, stubborn facts, as those socialist comrades would say, are stronger and demonstrate that

here, the only ones responsible for the political violence which occurred are those who wanted to change our democracy into a tyranny.”¹⁹⁰ Romero accuses the Left of falsifying history and reiterates that it was Allende who wanted to turn democratic Chile into a totalitarian state. Pinochet’s former interior minister, Sergio Onofre Jarpa, echoes this position and takes it further, calling for the Concertación to recognize that “it was an error to try to impose a Marxist system which was rejected by the majority.” *El Mercurio* quotes Jarpa’s argument at length:

The debate in the Concertación around the events of [September] 11 helps us know who were the ones truly responsible for the chaos of that period...[W]e have seen the positions taken by those in positions of responsibility who had the possibility of taking Chile along a constitutional, democratic road and who preferred to encourage confrontations, illegal seizures of property, and the organization of illegal armed groups.¹⁹¹

A close reading of Jarpa’s argument is quite productive. For Jarpa, the very fact that the center-left Concertación government was still debating the meaning of September 11 *proves* (reveals) (“ha servido para saber”), by that act alone, that it (the Left) was responsible for producing the “chaos” which led to the coup of September 11, 1973.

An editorial written by Pablo Rodríguez Grez, the former leader of the terrorist organization, *Patria y Libertad*, further explores the project of history, observing that “History cannot be written by hiding matters of such magnitude,” which seems fair enough. Yet for Rodríguez Grez what was overlooked by the Concertación’s leaders, and by implication, the Left, was “the totalitarian project of the Popular Unity”¹⁹² Consistent

¹⁹⁰ *El Mercurio*, September 3, 2003, Pilar Molina y Nieves Aravena, (missing title), news article, C3.

¹⁹¹ *El Mercurio*, September 5, 2003, news article, Cinthya Carbajal, “Jarpa Afirma que quienes vivieron la UP no pueden mirar solo el futuro,” C6.

¹⁹² *El Mercurio*, September 5, Pablo Rodríguez Grez, “La Raíz de La Crisis,” A2.

with the arguments of many of *El Mercurio*'s roster of editorialists, Rodríguez Grez suggests that those who seek to honor Allende are unable to see that their fallen hero's real desire was to promote a "totalitarian project," and are thus liable for the falsification of history. In a relatively subtle step, yet one which *El Mercurio* is willing to take, the paper suggests that those who read history incorrectly—who do not interpret the past as its writers do—constitute a threat to Chile's present.

In an editorial entitled "Los Dos Rostros del 11 de Septiembre" ["The Two Faces of September 11"], Joaquín Fernandois suggests that there is a critical need to examine *both* sides of September 11, 1973, again, a reasonable approach to the past. Yet he stresses that a failure to appreciate the "positive" side of September 11, 1973 can lead to a reliving of Chile's "extremist" past:

...[T]he present attempt [by those in the government] to totally delegitimize [the coup of] September 11 and the military government speaks to the future of the country... The intent of such a unilateralist view of the past, as has been generated over these past few months, could cause us to slip off the path of (re)building onto one of extremism and thereby to repeat another 1973.¹⁹³

Fernandois' contention that any historical account that fails to acknowledge what he calls the "positive side" of the coup and the military government, thereby threatens the stability of the country. As he repeats and extends the arguments of the much more radical Rodríguez Grez. Fernandois embeds two important understandings in this statement. In the first place, he asserts that any "thorough" historical examination of the military's actions on September 11, 1973 and thereafter must be "balanced," and to be balanced the "positive" must be presented alongside the "negative." While those who

¹⁹³ *El Mercurio*, March 2, 2003, Joaquín Fernandois, "Los dos rostros del 11 de septiembre," A2.

write history cannot afford to close off perspectives that challenge their conclusions, this outlook fails to recognize that the production of history is never a balancing act: if you say something bad, you have to say something good.

More unnerving is the argument that a failure to read Chile's history "correctly" can lead to "another 1973." This raises the central historical question of the meaning of "1973" and its discursive instability, just as the meaning of "nunca más" has never been stabilized. What is another 1973? Assuming that Fermandois does not view it as a fertile period of leftist organizing and popular power but rather as a period of chaos, another "1973" would require military intervention once again. The logic of the statement, then, suggests that because the Left examines the past in a manner not considered to be "balanced," it implicitly opens the doors to another military intervention.

And yet, while Fermandois' editorial seems to reflect a continuing conservative narrative about the dangers of interpreting the past incorrectly, it also opens a new line of commentary that only appeared among conservative writers after years of revelations of Pinochet's abuses. "The country re-encountered its direction and established its political and economic strategy only at a high cost and not without errors and abuses which, besides those in the human rights sphere, included dangerous temptations such as that of identifying the State with a person."¹⁹⁴ This marks a process by which *El Mercurio* and the Right will distance itself from Pinochet without either challenging the accomplishments of the Junta (the country had, after all, "re-encounter[ed] its direction") or supporting any legal moves against him. Yes, it was dangerous to one's leader think

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

that he *was* the State, but that is part of history, and what's done is done. History cannot be revised or reversed.

Broader Perspectives and the Resurrection of Salvador Allende:

By the 30th anniversary of the coup, *El Mercurio* had opened up its columns to a wider group of commentators, and one notes opinion from more moderate voices. This becomes evident as *El Mercurio* includes articles that reintroduce Allende as a historic figure and honor him for his commitment to democratic ideals. Of course, Allende will be more on people's minds as the nation looks back at the 30 years since his death, but his presence is also noted because of burgeoning efforts on behalf of the Concertación (in particular President Lagos) and other members of Chile's Left to commemorate Allende's memory in public ceremonies, bringing him within a national spotlight, not just as part of leftist remembrance.¹⁹⁵ And yet if conservative commentators begin to separate the military's project from Pinochet the man, so one can see in the pages of *El Mercurio* a move to encourage the separation of Allende from his project.

To be true to the facts, Chilean democracy should give senator Allende the honor of recognizing his democratic outlook...[O]ne has to recognize senator Allende for the way in which he fulfilled the [democratic] norms and practices of the Senate. And although no one can exonerate him of the enormous responsibility which he carries for the errors of his government, [which were] the fundamental and determining cause for the destruction of democracy, 30 years after his death his memory deserves to be honored and respected.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁵ This change is evident in the countless op-ed pieces that contemplate Allende's location in Chile's collective memory: September 2, 2003, "Salvador Allende"; September 3, 2003, "Homenajes a Salvador Allende"; September 9, 2003, "Allende en la memoria-September 9."

¹⁹⁶ *El Mercurio*, September 2, 2003, Jorge Schaulsohn, "Salvador Allende: Convengamos en que el gobierno de la Unidad Popular fue uno de los peores que hemos tenido," editorial A3.

The author of this piece, Jorge Schaulsohn, was a member of the Concertación and was therefore not the typical *El Mercurio* spokesman. Yet Schaulsohn (*El Mercurio*, which printed his article) pay Allende a decidedly backhanded compliment. On the one hand, the destruction of Chile’s democracy is laid directly at his doorstep. On the other hand, if Allende is to reappear in the public imagination, as controlled by *El Mercurio*, his reentry will be limited: he is memorialized not as “President” Allende, but as a senator. It is Pinochet who is remembered as Chile’s “President.” *El Mercurio*’s inclusion of a more moderate voice thus actually helps reinforce its own memory narrative in which the roles of Allende and Pinochet are stood on their heads.

In the days leading up to the 30th anniversary of the coup and in the weeks that followed, *El Mercurio* engaged with Chile’s recent past in new ways. While it ultimately adhered to its master narrative that Allende’s government destroyed Chilean democracy, the paper abandoned its posture that Chile’s past must remain *in the past*. The presence of the past, was almost palpable in Chile in 2003 and that “ghost” could not be put back into the closet. While over the previous thirteen years *El Mercurio* approached the writing of history from a point of negation—leave it in the closed box—around the 30th Anniversary it realized that it could not ignore the wounds that continued to fester in the present. Yet while its narrative shifted to reflect the continuity of history in the present, *El Mercurio* used the anniversary year to reinforce its argument that it was the Left which continues to disfigure history (by not acknowledging the UP’s role in destroying democracy in Chile), thereby putting the Chilean nation at risk of repeating that past. But as before, *El Mercurio* remains coy about *who* might cause Chile to relive its dark past.

V. The National Commission on Political Imprisonment and Torture (November 2003)

In August 2003, President Lagos issued an order to investigate those human rights violations committed during Pinochet's rule, which, unlike those examined in the Rettig Report, did not result in death. The "Comisión Nacional Sobre Prisión Política y Tortura" (National Commission on Political Imprisonment and Torture) or the Valech Commission, as it became known after its chairman, the Auxiliary Bishop of Santiago, Sergio Valech, was comprised of eight members and sought to locate victims of the military, hear their testimony, and deliberate as to whether they should receive any reparation.¹⁹⁷ In November 2004, the Commission released a final report with the names and testimony of the 35,000 Chileans it documented to have been tortured or abused for political reasons between September 11, 1973 and March 10, 1990. The investigation and its supporting documentation, which stretched to more than 1,000 pages, are heart-wrenching and startling in their sheer magnitude.¹⁹⁸

The release of the Valech Report represented a crucial step forwards in Chile's reconciliation process. Despite fourteen years of center-Left leadership, the victims of political imprisonment and torture had not gained official or public recognition for the injustices committed against them during Pinochet's dictatorship. For over fourteen years, victims of torture had lived side by side with their torturers and had yet to see Chile's government assume responsibility for the abuses carried by the state. The Valech

¹⁹⁷ The eight-person commission was comprised of Maria Luisa Sepúlveda (executive Vice-President), human rights lawyers Miguel Luis Amunátegui, Luciano Fouilloux, José Antonio Gómez, Lucas Sierra, and Álvaro Varela, and psychologist Elizabeth Lira. The Commission did not include any relatives of the victims or representatives of associations of ex-political prisoners. <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2004/11/28/chile-government-discloses-torture-was-state-policy>.

¹⁹⁸ Wright, *State Terrorism in Latin America*, 214.

Report was a sign of progress, and it was followed, in November 2004, by a public acknowledgement by the head of the Armed Forces, Juan Emilio Cheyre, that the military and other public officials were responsible for human rights violations. In a national address following Cheyre's, President Lagos echoed the Army chief, marking the first "official" admission of the Chilean government's responsibility for 40,000 cases of human rights abuses.¹⁹⁹

The Valech Report without doubt presented *El Mercurio* with a central challenge since it has long insisted that human rights abuses under the military were not as widespread as the report demonstrated. As the research shows, this moment demonstrates how *El Mercurio*'s narrative evolved to incorporate a growing "counter memory," in particular the theme of human rights, into its own pages. Yet the Valech Report—and the particular way *El Mercurio* represents it—is perhaps more significant inasmuch as it shows the degree to which *El Mercurio*'s integration of counter or dissident memory had become so standard that the reader barely notices, and may even expect it. Over the years *El Mercurio*'s narrative has so "naturally" incorporated a version of the past that admits to human rights abuses that its readers may forget that the narrative of human rights violations was ever considered a *counter* memory. This is significant because it allows *El Mercurio* and the Right to absorb counter memory narratives and normalize them into its whiggish interpretation of Chile's recent, authoritarian past.

Still, *El Mercurio*'s coverage of the Valech Report is critical because it signals the end of the first phase of the construction of the paper's post-Pinochet memory narrative. In November 2004, one detects *El Mercurio* shifting its discursive efforts towards

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

shaping a present and future that will protect its central post-dictatorship narrative. Thus around the release of the Valech Report, *El Mercurio* uses its historic positioning to define *chilenidad* (Chilean national identity) as a means to safeguard against the destabilization of its narrative.

El Mercurio's coverage of the Valech report, then, reflects the paper's work to "rethink the nation" and prove that Chile is stronger, more united and more democratic *because of* Pinochet's government, a move which allows Chileans to look *past* the abuses committed. At this historical juncture, *El Mercurio* begins to use its narrative as a means to create the imagined community of the future, not just to interpret the past.²⁰⁰

El Mercurio employs a notion of Chilean nationalism to counter the negative past unveiled by the Valech commission in November 2004. Specifically, the paper uses the release of Valech both to demonstrate that Chile is united by its past and to inscribe a new definition of *chilenidad*. While *El Mercurio* deploys this approach through a variety of its articles, one of the most interesting examples comes from an editorial entitled "El Cuerpo de Chile" ["Chile's Body"], written by Eugenio Tironi.²⁰¹ Tironi begins by suggesting that, "It was time already to look straight on at this tragedy, our tragedy."²⁰² Tironi refers to the revelations contained in the Valech Report of the massive human rights abuses as "our tragedy." But, he argues, Chile is finally strong enough to confront the brutal reality of the Valech Report, and that it must do so requires the remembering of what happened in the country: "only nations that have memory, and that can reveal their

²⁰⁰ Benedict R. O'G Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Rev. ed. (London: Verso, 2006), 35.

²⁰¹ Eugenio Tironi is a Chilean public intellectual. He is a professor of Sociology at Pontificia Universidad Católica in Santiago.

entire past, without hiding even the most atrocious parts, can build a common dream which they can share with others.”²⁰³ Through Tironi, *El Mercurio* argues that the Valech Report has allowed the Chilean nation to overcome its *shared* past— “our tragedy”—in order to realize a *shared* future with the common dream of national unity. While this isn’t an unusual move for the paper, it does mark one of the first moments *El Mercurio* invokes the role of *memory* in the project of creating national unity.

Chile, for Tironi, can now afford to remember because “today’s Chile is different. We can now take on board...all the pain that led us to attack one another. We have to do this in order to jointly look at the past without the weight of fear, shame or guilt, and launch ourselves as a single community toward the future.”²⁰⁴ As generous as Tironi’s commentary appears, it is highly problematic in a moment when the crimes of the past largely have not been adjudicated. If the past becomes “our tragedy,” and “our collective responsibility,” than individual responsibility disappears. If Chile can accept that “the entire Chilean society failed,” then the past can be referenced without *actual* or *literal* consequences in the present.²⁰⁵ Resorting to notions of collective guilt, as it did during Pinochet’s arrest, has allowed *El Mercurio* to absolve individual actors (in particular Pinochet) for the crimes of the past and also ensure that the past remains, safely, at a distance. If we give Tironi the benefit of the doubt, his claim of a collective responsibility at the moment of the release of the Valech Report encourages Chileans to evaluate both their relationship and their government’s relationship to events of the past. But what is

²⁰³ *El Mercurio*, November 16, 2004, Eugenio Tironi, “El Cuerpo de Chile,” editorial A 3.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁵ *El Mercurio*, November 18, 2004, Eugenio Droguett, “Torturas: Lavín y el informe: “toda la sociedad chilena falló,” news analysis, C7.

troubling about Tironi's 'collective responsibility' is that he suggests that those who lack responsibility for the torture of 40,000 people must assume as much of a burden of guilt as those whose deeds had only just been reported.

Collective memory, the need to revisit the past and remember the facts of history, emerges in *El Mercurio's* discourse as a way for the paper to construct a sense of shared guilt for the past as a "tragedy" rather than a crime. Yet it also emerges as a means of fostering Chilean community and nationhood. To such an end, *El Mercurio* turns the Valech Report into a point of national *pride*. Agustín Squella's editorial entitled, "Sobre la Tortura," ["About Torture"] illustrates this: "I don't know of another country which has had similar experiences in the area of human rights which can show such results as these... It is essential to establish a collective memory which is not only about repression, but the solidarity expressed in hopes and dreams."²⁰⁶ Like Tironi's opinion mentioned above, Squella locates Chile's strength in its ability to collectively confront its past, even though he seems to have overlooked other post-authoritarian regimes such as South Africa where, many have argued, the process of reconciliation has gone much further than the Chilean. Squella, however, hopes that Chileans see in the Valech Report a past that is not only about repression but about future solidarity. What he doesn't suggest is whether those who suffered from the abuses should reside in the same collective memory as those who abused them.

One of the main ways that *El Mercurio* frames Valech is to instill, to employ Benedict Anderson's terms, a sense of "imagined community" between the victims and

²⁰⁶ *El Mercurio*, December 3, 2004, Agustín Squella, "Sobre la Tortura," opinion A3. Agustín Squella is a regular columnist of *El Mercurio* and was also a cultural attaché under President Lagos.

the nation.²⁰⁷ To achieve this, *El Mercurio* emblemizes the victims (their faces and testimonies) as the new Chilean nation, the new *chilenidad*. In a special report, *El Mercurio* profiled several of the torture victims as they openly recounted their experiences in detention centers (see Appendix, Article 5). Deceptively simple, this article speaks volumes about *El Mercurio*'s project vis-à-vis the Valech Report. As the faces of Chile's tortured become the new *face* of the nation, *El Mercurio* capitalizes on its traditional power to "think the nation" and enables "rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways."²⁰⁸ That *El Mercurio* will put a literal face on the "ordinary" Chileans who were tortured during the military government suggests that the paper, and the country, have modified their views since 1990. And yet, framing a dark past by asserting a supposed unity of purpose in the present is disingenuous and still allows *El Mercurio* to argue that history, i.e., the process of investigation, documentation, and analysis of the past, is over. *El Mercurio* thus distinguishes between acknowledging the past, on the one hand, and "re-opening" it, on the other.

El Mercurio reasserts the same need to not re-open the ideological divisions of the past in an editorial entitled "To Heal the Wounds, Not Reopen Them." The author writes, that "we should now avoid the danger that the Valech Report will be used to carry on [preexisting] divisions [so that some can] obtain modest political advantages."²⁰⁹ *El Mercurio* implies that "a society which wants to be healthy and democratic" must confront its past, but then then lay it to rest in the catacombs of history.

²⁰⁷ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 5-6.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 36.

²⁰⁹ *El Mercurio*, November 30, 2004, "Sanar las heridas, no reabrir las," editorial A3.

In conclusion, *El Mercurio*'s coverage of Valech marks the closure of a long phase of its historical reconstruction. It has normalized an interpretation of the past that reflects a seemingly "upside down" approach to history, in which Pinochet operates as the democratic paradigm and Allende the totalitarian tyrant. After Pinochet's arrest in 1998 and five years of incriminating revelations about his dictatorship, *El Mercurio* had been forced to expand its narrative to represent at least the existence, and sometimes the voice, of Chile's torture victims. Yet while *El Mercurio* broadened its narrative in the face of an unfolding reality, including evidence of personal corruption as revealed in the Riggs Bank, it has done so in such a way that reinforces its whiggish interpretation that Chile's history has been one of unending democratic progress.²¹⁰

Indeed, prevailing themes reappear even as new evidence is inserted. The Valech Report, an investigation into the experiences of individuals who "threatened" the nation, now converts them into the *faces* of post-dictatorial *chilenidad*. *El Mercurio* revises the place of torture victims in the collective imagination and in so doing, not only searches for a way to finally close off history, but also manages to navigate a very deliberate set of criminal actions onto the terrain of national tragedy. As Simone Weil so importantly observed, tragedy should not be confused with crime; in crimes, the choice is between a morally good act and a morally reprehensible one, there are criminals and victims. Tragedies are the product of having to choose between two morally equivalent acts set

²¹⁰ Many individuals will argue that the Right's "split" from Pinochet occurred most defiantly after the Riggs Bank disclosures in July 2004. In the summer of 2004, the *Washington Post* reported that, beginning in 1985, Pinochet deposited secret checks worth millions of dollars in secret accounts he and his family kept at Washington's Riggs Bank and elsewhere. The cascading investigation of Pinochet's 'platas' became a spectacle in Chile and put Pinochet's reputation and integrity on the line creating the first serious rift among some of his staunchest backers.

against each other. As the Velech Report, the Rettig Reports, and so many others have revealed, what happened in Chile was a crime, not a tragedy.

Conclusion: *El Mercurio* and Social Memory After the Fact

During an interview I conducted in August 2008, I asked Matías Tagle Domínguez, a senior history professor at Santiago's Catholic University, how he thought the Chilean people would remember the past 35 years of its nation's history 50 or 100 years from now. Expecting (quite naively) that Tagle Domínguez would confirm my supposition that the period between the coup of 1973 and the end of Pinochet's seventeen year dictatorship would be remembered as a heart-rending chapter of human suffering, he responded: "as a period of deepening democracy." Tagle Domínguez himself did not see Pinochet's rule as a period in which democracy was strengthened ... but he thought Chilean society would. After examining *El Mercurio's* narrative reconstruction of Chile's recent history, Professor Tagle Domínguez' answer sounds remarkably clairvoyant.

Indeed it is as a period of democratic strengthening and progress that Chile's newspaper of record has re-inscribed Pinochet's brutal rule from its post-dictatorship vantage point. After analyzing the way Chilean history is popularly represented in the pages of Chile's leading newspaper, who can fault Professor Tagle Domínguez' outlook on the way in which future generations of Chileans will remember their past? *El Mercurio's* narrative, as we have seen, has turned a democratically elected government into a Marxist "dictatorship," and brutal dictatorship into a "revolution of liberty and freedom."

As this thesis has shown, *El Mercurio*, the foremost voice of the Right, the media outlet which has given itself the power to determine what *is* Chilean, has in many disturbing ways succeeded in converting what has been confirmed by broad historical consensus as a period of democratic *rupture*—a period of immense loss and civil discord—into its own whiggish narrative of democratic progress. *El Mercurio* has not only used *history* to absolve Pinochet and his military regime of the 40,000 cases of torture and “disappearance” (some 3,000 of which resulted in death), but has used *memory* to forewarn Chilean society and its center-Left government that if the past is not “closed” —if the meanings it has created about the Pinochet dictatorship are not accepted as inviolate by those in the present — Chile will run the risk of reaping the same gruesome harvest in the future as it has in the past.

To be sure, *El Mercurio*'s national history narrative evolved and expanded during the fourteen years covered in this study. From an analysis of the period beginning in March 1990 with Chile's transition back to civilian government and ending in November 2004 with the release of the Valech Report, one observes how the paper's historical account has broadened to include the memory narratives of those it did not initially include—nor even *acknowledge*—before Pinochet left La Moneda. Of course the most salient and concrete changes in *El Mercurio*'s discursive reconstruction are its recognition and eventual incorporation of human rights violations into its own account. Since it never previously admitted that such abuses were committed—certainly not at the moment in which they occurred—*El Mercurio*'s integration of this “counter-memory” is significant and speaks to the narrative evolution that has undeniably taken place in the post-dictatorship period. In fact, one can argue that the disclosure and publication of

numerous “official” reports on human rights violations committed during Pinochet’s rule, beginning with those of the Rettig Commission, served as the basis of *El Mercurio*’s emerging historical revisionism.

Yet, while *El Mercurio* accommodates and includes the narratives that reveal Pinochet’s brutality, it does so in a way that nevertheless maintains both the paper’s posture as a staunch defender of democratic ideals and Chile’s master narrator of democratic continuity. As detailed in my analysis of each specific event covered, *El Mercurio* deployed a variety of discursive approaches—variously mobilizing issues of political institutionalism, economic growth and social integration, *chilenidad* (Chilean nationalism), human rights abuses, symbolic exchanges between Allende and Pinochet, and history and historiographic investigation—to support its positivist reading of Pinochet’s regime. But, in the end, it is *El Mercurio*’s linking of Chile’s *present*—the period *after* Pinochet—to the dictatorial regime that ultimately influences how future generations will come to view Chile’s national past and its meaning to their present. If those who study Pinochet’s brutal rule in 50 or 100 years *remember* (as *El Mercurio* suggests) that the roots of Chile’s democratic fulfillment were planted as early as September 12, 1973, then Pinochet is credited for a political project which, his own writings reveal, he disdained at best and despised at worst.²¹¹

Who knows what will eventually join Allende’s shattered eyeglasses in the *Museo Histórico Nacional* to bring the narrative of Chile’s history into the 21st century. The sole issue that remains beyond dispute by those who study contemporary Chilean history is

²¹¹ An examination of General Pinochet’s speeches and public statements between the coup and 1976, in particular, will reveal his political and temperamental dislike of democracy, particularly when it could produce results with which he disagreed.

the highly contentious nature of that examination. And, to the extent that the project of history is built on competing interpretations of historical data, then we should not feel disheartened. But if this examination of *El Mercurio*'s historical narrative has succeeded, my hope is that it will have raised for its readers the risks of writing a history that not only inverts the facts, but simultaneously insists on *its* interpretation and warns against future revisionism.

In conclusion, this study has probed the complex dynamics governing the relation of historical "truth" to social memory. It has intended to continually raise the question of how lay citizens, not professional historians, are to understand and remember their past when deliberately inaccurate historical narratives vie to become the "official" record of what happened.

El Mercurio produced a narrative *after the fact*. Its veracity needs to be questioned by citizens who not only lived during the Pinochet era but also by those who seek the truth beyond a comfortable social memory.

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Appendix

1. *El Mercurio* March 8, 1990 A1 Photo of President-Elect Patricio Aylwin (Left) with General Augusto Pinochet (Right).
2. *El Mercurio* March 25, 1990. A2 Editorial Patrick Whelan, “La Revolución que nadie conoce”
3. *El Mercurio* October 31, 1998. A2 Editorial Pablo Rodríguez Grez “Historia y unidad nacional”
4. *El Mercurio* September 11, 2003. C4 Image of *El Mercurio* front page from September 12, 1973.
5. *El Mercurio* November 11, 2004. D14 Profiles of the torture victims from “Informe Valech.” I interviewed Mrs. Marcia Scantlebury who appears in this article.