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## **Review/ Reseña**

Steve J. Stern. *Battling for Hearts and Minds: Memory Struggles in Pinochet's Chile, 1973-1988*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006.

### **Memory Scripts in the Making: Chile's 9/11 and the Struggle for Meaning**

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Over the past few years I have taught several university courses at the undergraduate and graduate levels focused on issues of revolution, dictatorship and post-authoritarian democratization, all of which seek to introduce students to the complex battles over memory that have taken place (and continue to occur) in contemporary Latin American societies struggling to work through traumatic legacies of political violence. The Chilean case—partly because of my own personal interests as a researcher, but also because of its first-hand relevance to many students who come to my courses either having studied abroad there or who are planning to do

so—usually figures prominently on my syllabi. The names Allende and Pinochet, because of their mediatic prominence, almost always resonate with students in tangible ways even if the breadth of their understanding of Chile’s recent history is limited. Because of this uneven exposure to specific historical facts and processes, each new course brings with it the challenge of finding a comprehensive and accessible account that can provide students with the necessary background information and analytical tools to evaluate an array of nuanced primary source materials. For this purpose, I have often turned to Pamela Constable and Arturo Valenzuela’s magnificent book, *A Nation of Enemies: Chile under Pinochet* (1991), which since the early 1990s has served as a key English-language reference on the Chilean case in university courses across disciplines. Rich in detail and populated with excerpts from ethnographic interviews that capture the voices of Chileans representing diverse social strata and walks of life, Constable and Valenzuela’s study has always seemed to me (and still is) a compelling account of the deep-seated rancor and extreme ideological polarization that, until the late 1980’s, forged a “vast psychological and cultural gap” between “two Chiles” (Right and Left, rich and poor, military and civilian) (Constable and Valenzuela 1991, 10). Yet, admittedly, more than a decade-and-a-half has passed since the book’s original publication, a time lag that has left English-speaking readers desiring a new resource on the Pinochet years and a comprehensive analysis of the ways in which Chileans have scripted and assimilated the meanings of 9/11/73. Moreover, the evolution of the Chilean case over the past fifteen years has created need for a text that considers the years of dictatorship not in isolation, but as a prelude to a series of memory battles that would continue to flare up at intervals and warrant sporadic political negotiations throughout the long transition to democracy of the 1990s and 2000s. Steve Stern’s *Battling for Hearts and Minds: Memory Struggles in Pinochet’s Chile, 1973-1988* is just such a resource.

Like Constable and Valenzuela, Stern gives us a keen sense of the ideological polarization of Chile during the Pinochet years, but does so while specifically teasing out the notion of memory and the dynamics of how competing memory scripts about Pinochet’s *golpe de estado* were

forged, consolidated, and modified. In this sense, his book affords readers more than a simple factual rendering of what happened in Chile; it allows them an understanding of the very emergence of *memory* as a culturally significant and politically contested concept—a concept that Chileans discovered and learned to deploy over time (and out of necessity) and that eventually offered a guiding theoretical paradigm for their own acts of historical self-reflection and political activism.

The second book in a trilogy entitled *The Memory Box of Pinochet's Chile, Battling for Hearts and Minds* opens by recapitulating two key conceptual frameworks that Stern elaborated at length in volume one. The first theoretical tool concerns the organic interaction of “emblematic memory” narratives with “loose,” individual memory stories. The author is especially interested in showing how individual stories about the dictatorship era interface with one another and coalesce into broader, socially-legitimated memory narratives. Loose memories have the potential either to accommodate themselves to generally-established macronarrative frames or to stand in opposition to them as a counterofficial narrative challenge. Stern sees emblematic memory frames as dynamic entities that respond to historical changes and acquire new layers of meaning depending on present circumstances. The second theoretical tool, “memory knots on the social body,” refers to those people, places, and events that “unsettle the complacency or ‘unthinking habits’ of everyday life and stir up polemics about memory in the public imagination” (1).<sup>1</sup> Such memory knots “galvaniz[e] appeals for moral and political awareness, [draw] people into identifying with one or another framework of memory truth, and inspir[e] some to join the social actors who [‘perform’] memory work and

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<sup>1</sup> “The metaphor of the ‘knot’ is multifaceted: it refers to ‘sites of humanity, sites in time, and sites of physical matter or geography’ that serve as detonators or conduits to facilitate the connection of loose lore to emblematic memory frames’ (Stern 2004, 121). Human beings who actually promote specific memory scripts, symbolic and controversial dates like September 11, unanticipated events like Pinochet’s London arrest, the creation of memorial spaces like the ‘Park for Peace’ at Villa Grimaldi, or the recent re-naming of the Estadio Chile after folk singer Víctor Jara (murdered by the military on that site in 1974), all serve as examples of knots that ‘project memory and polemics about memory into public space or imagination’ (121). Identifying ‘memory knots’ is precisely what allows us to isolate critically the moments and manners in which emblematic frames are made and unmade. Knots, in essence, are dynamic sites of change around which memories are both propagated and evolve” (Lazzara 194).

identification in public spaces” (1). Starting with these general concepts, Stern is then able to develop a typology of four key emblematic memory frames—“memory as salvation,” “memory as rupture,” “memory as persecution and awakening,” and “memory as a closed box”—and trace their emergence and evolution throughout the 1973-1988 period.<sup>2</sup> While volume one focused on the period just prior to Pinochet’s 1998 London arrest, the current volume scrutinizes the years of dictatorship in order to grasp how the four aforementioned emblematic memory frames, culturally entrenched by 1998, evolved over a period of two decades. Volume three, set to be published next year, will look at the development of memory debates in Chile from the start of the transition to democracy to the present.

At its core, Stern’s book paints a picture of two Chiles—that of the 1970s and that of the 1980s—thus proving that the years of dictatorship were not uniform in terms of memory struggles or oppositional dissidence. Throughout the 1970s, Pinochet and the junta retained a vice grip, through censorship, on the flow of information, and, as a result, only certain “voices in the wilderness” (the Catholic Church, emerging human rights organizations, victims’ families, etc.) managed to speak in dissident tones and raise public awareness about the regime’s egregious human rights violations. By the 1980s, however, international attention on Chile, the vociferousness of exile communities, growing synergies between the Catholic Church and human rights groups, and emblematic events like the assassinations of Carlos Prats (1974) and Orlando Letelier (1976), or the discovery of human remains at Lonquén (1978), helped mobilize Chileans of different walks of life and forge a counterofficial political movement that would eventually oust the dictatorship, by a slim margin, in the October 1988 plebiscite.

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<sup>2</sup> In short, “memory as salvation” refers to the idea that, by intervening in 1973, the military “saved” Chile from the political and economic ruin of Marxism. “Memory as rupture” views the coup as an unresolved catastrophe, a wound from which victims have never truly recovered. Narratives of “persecution and awakening” refer to many long, dark years of suffering under military rule, but go on to cite an eventual awakening to political consciousness and/or activism to combat the regime’s repression. Finally, “memory as a closed box” refers to the well-known script whereby adherents of the dictatorship suggest that it is best to forget the past in order to forge a non-divisive future based in civic friendship and reconciliation.

Within the first half of *Battling for Hearts and Minds*, Stern's discussion of Chilean "exceptionalism" deserves mention as a noteworthy contribution to the debate on contemporary Chile. A broad survey of the academic literature on Chile's dictatorial period yields myriad references to the idea that Chile is somehow an anomaly among Latin American nations, a historical bastion of democracy and the rule of law. Like Brian Loveman and Elizabeth Lira before him, Stern demonstrates that the idea of Chilean "exceptionalism" played into attitudes about the coup, while pointing out that the notion is as much a cultural myth as it is a reality.<sup>3</sup> Although it is the case that between 1933 and 1973 Chile (for the most part) avoided the frequent violent swings between civilian and military rule that plagued other countries in the region, it is also true that the "resilient democracy built up since the 1930s" had "a repressive underside" that left power largely in the hands of a conservative ruling elite (29). Consequently, in historical perspective, the coup of September 11, 1973 was a "coup that everyone saw and no one saw"—or, more accurately, that no one wanted to see (28). The notion of Chilean exceptionalism (i.e. the idea that "it couldn't happen here") competed with signs of a "coup foretold": the June 1973 *tancazo* affair in which a renegade army regiment touted its brawn in front of La Moneda palace, political battles waged at all points on the ideological spectrum, street clashes among leftists and the military, an intense war of rhetoric in the media, the struggle to obtain basic foodstuffs, and U.S. support of military intervention, all pointed to the eventuality of 9/11/73.

In the latter half of part I, Stern describes how dissidents and critics of the regime, in grassroots fashion, began the "ant's work" of combating the erasure and denial of human rights violations and managed to create "a contentious memory culture" that would draw a significant amount of public attention to the regime's crimes (241). Nonetheless, despite their successes, these isolated activists found themselves battling inexorably against the military's manifold attempts to misinform the populace and divert public attention from its misdeeds. By the late 1970s, public knowledge of the junta's crimes (especially in the international press, but also within Chile) spun the dictatorial state into a moment of crisis:

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<sup>3</sup> See especially Loveman and Lira 1999, 2000 and 2002.

By the end of May [1978], the converging pressures on the regime—the Letelier affair and international tensions, internal junta divisions and erosion of Center-Right support, the long hunger strike and deteriorating health of relatives of the disappeared, the related mobilizing of Church and solidarity networks, the language of truth-versus-silencing that discredited official truth—seemed to require a moment of reckoning. (151-152)

Not only did the military dissolve the by-then stigmatized DINA (Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional), Pinochet's secret police organization, and replace it with the CNI (Central Nacional de Informaciones), an entity that essentially continued the DINA's dirty work under another guise, it also launched a massive cover-up campaign and retooled its original salvationist memory script. Signals of the end of an officially-declared state of exception led to a more nefarious situation in which the exception became the norm as the military sought to institutionalize its rule. Pinochet's idea of Chile as a "protected democracy," made manifest in the Constitution of 1980, quickly took hold as the junta developed a sophisticated euphemistic vocabulary to talk about the past. Concepts like reconciliation, forgetting, and unity frequently arose in political speeches, while an Amnesty Law (1978) sought to close definitively the controversial Pandora's Box of the past. At the same time as opponents of the regime who originally supported the coup re-scripted the military's salvationist discourse as "betrayed salvation," the military urged the forgetting of old divisions and stressed that, thanks to them, Chile was now on its way to a brighter, more prosperous future as a neoliberal market economy. Curiously, this same future-oriented discourse (although modified) would characterize the political rhetoric of the Concertación governments during the transition's initial years, thus demonstrating a continuity between authoritarian and civilian rule.

Part II of Stern's study goes on to examine how, in the 1980s, memory politics overcame isolation and became mass experience. As memory knots on the social body multiplied and fused, the military gradually lost its stronghold on public space, and the street became a major battleground for disseminating stories of rupture, persecution, and awakening. Brazen acts of public violence, like the immolation by the military of Carmen Gloria Quintana and Rodrigo Rojas during a street

protest (July 2, 1986), only evoked rage that inspired the further entrenchment and organization of the opposition. Waves of protests by workers, urban youth, clergy, and women were answered time and again by overt acts of military violence (e.g. public shootings) and repeated declarations of states of siege. The opposition's protests, however, unflaggingly gained momentum despite the regime's repressive tactics. A yearning for unity and a "culture of life" triggered concrete acts of political mobilization that would garner sufficient political support to bring down Pinochet by late 1988.

Perhaps the most interesting analyses of part II come in the book's final two chapters, which examine how different memory narratives were deployed in the Chilean media, particularly in the period immediately preceding the 1988 plebiscite. In a certain sense, the regime's own decision to allow a more pluralistic media helped spell its own demise. By the 1983 period of political opening, official censorship (*censura previa*) had been lifted and the government seemed more interested in abating in-the-moment critiques of its policies and actions than in quelling those proffered after-the-fact. The result was an increased possibility of counterofficial protest in newspapers, books, on the radio, and on television. As the media war intensified, one thing became clear: although Pinochet retained political clout because of the authoritarian enclaves he crafted into his 1980 constitution, throughout the 70s and 80s he gradually lost almost all of his cultural capital. In fact, polls taken in 1983 showed the dictator's popular approval ratings to be as low as twenty percent. Except for a relatively small faction of supporters, the vast majority of Chileans (including a new democratic Right headed by Renovación Nacional) recognized the regime's human rights violations to be unacceptable. Notwithstanding these attitudes, political pragmatism necessitated that politicians of all stripes form inter-party alliances and negotiate a political transition that would involve the military. Renovación Nacional took the lead in trying to unite an electorally-divided Right, while the Center-Left Concertación coalition emerged in February 1988 to join forces against Pinochet.

As Stern narrates the twists and turns of Pinochet's struggle to maintain power, he thoughtfully adds that although Pinochet's approval

ratings were indeed low in the early-to-mid 80s, by the time of the 1988 plebiscite the dictatorship managed to improve its public image sufficiently to accrue a much larger percentage of the electorate (nearly 50%). Patronage, especially housing subsidies for the poor, allowed the regime to garner support even among lower-class citizens who otherwise may not have supported the regime's free market reforms or who would have detested its human rights record. Such patronage functioned in tandem with a vast media campaign whose memory script repeatedly reminded Chileans of the hardships of the Allende period and emphatically stressed the current, healthy state of the economy. "Chile, a Winning Country" (*Chile: un país ganador*) became the SÍ (or pro-dictatorship) campaign's slogan, even though the dark iconography of many of its television spots proved far from upbeat. The regime's commercials, as one might expect, made a concerted effort never to mention human rights or political violence and focused instead on the country's economic prosperity as it contrasted with the misery of the 1970-1973 Popular Unity period. One memorable pro-regime commercial employed the image of a steamroller trampling a family's material possessions and poised to roll over a child sitting in the center of the road. The implication: voting "NO" to Pinochet's continuation in office for eight more years would mean throwing away the material security of one's family and a potential return to the chaos of life under socialism.

In contrast to the SÍ campaign's dark imagery and its blatant emphasis on the 1970-1973 period, the NO campaign stressed the violence of the dictatorship years without mentioning the controversial Allende period. In addition, the NO campaign made a conscious choice not to refer to torture in graphic terms, but rather to highlight the possibility of reconciliation and a unified, joyful future. "Chile: Happiness is on the Way" (*Chile: la alegría ya viene*) was the slogan crafted by the campaign's publicists, and their symbol was a rainbow that would include Chileans of all colors and political stripes.<sup>4</sup> In all, over a twenty-seven day period in late

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<sup>4</sup> In an interview I conducted in Santiago de Chile in August 2002, former Chilean president Patricio Aylwin referred to the symbolic politics behind the 1988 plebiscite. A group of publicists and politicians from the Concertación went on a weekend retreat to discuss the nature of the NO campaign, its iconography, and its



1988, nearly two thirds of Chilean households watched the television spots for the SÍ and NO campaigns and consumed their competing narratives of historical memory. Ultimately, the NO campaign proved more effective because it managed to appeal in an upbeat way to “average” Chileans: men and women who were tired of the odious divisions that had existed in the country since the 1960s and who longed for a future free of rancor and hatred.

To my mind, the most meritorious aspect of Stern’s discussion of the SÍ and NO campaigns is his observation that each campaign was scripted in a very particular way. In other words, memory was consciously manipulated by each side as a function of present and future desired outcomes. Nevertheless, it should also be pointed out that despite each campaign’s intentional positioning of the human rights issue, the plebiscite and its narrative trappings in no way assured that human rights would be dealt with adequately during the transition. How this contentious, unresolved memory saga played out over time will be the subject of Stern’s third volume.

In the end, *Battling for Hearts and Minds* is a powerful testimonial to Chileans’ will to overthrow tyranny. Rich in statistical and ethnographic detail, an exhaustive amount of research has gone into producing this

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use of memory: “Hubo consenso en que teníamos que hacer una propaganda no odiosa, una propaganda que pusiera el énfasis más en la esperanza de una cosa mejor que en la recriminación por lo que había ocurrido. Entonces, claramente yo creo que uno de los factores que facilitó el triunfo era que la sociedad chilena estaba cansada de muchos años de una confrontación muy odiosa, no sólo los dieciséis años y medio de la dictadura sino también los tres años del gobierno de Allende y en alguna medida los últimos años del presidente Frei. El país se había polarizado, y entonces las campañas eran muy agresivas. Los chilenos estábamos muy divididos. Se respiraba amargura, odiosidad y belicosidad, y nosotros queríamos superar eso y hacer una campaña amable, alegre, una campaña que tendiera a disminuir las controversias y a entusiasmar en torno a un proyecto que pudiera ser lo más amplio posible [There was consensus among us that we had to come up with propaganda that was not hateful, propaganda that emphasized the hope of something better rather than retribution for the past. So, clearly, I think that one of the factors that facilitated the NO’s victory was that Chilean society was tired of many years of odious confrontation, not only sixteen and a half years of dictatorship, but also Allende’s three years and, to a certain extent, the final years of Frei’s government. The country had become polarized, and for a long time the campaigns were very aggressive. Chileans were quite divided. The country was breathing an air of bitterness, hatred, and bellicosity, and we wanted to overcome that and create a friendly, happy campaign, a campaign that would diminish controversy and generate enthusiasm around a project that would cast as wide a net as possible].

volume, much of it artfully masked behind Stern's fluid prose. Those familiar with the archival sources on Chile's dictatorship will certainly sense the extent of the research between the lines. Moreover, by including sections on often overlooked political actors, particularly youth and indigenous peoples, Stern successfully paints a broad picture of the dictatorship, its effects, and the struggle against it. Elegant and accessible, his book is likely to remain, for many years to come, a central reference text on the Pinochet regime and its ensuing battles to define historical memory.

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