

# PINOCHET

## The Father of Contemporary Chile

*Patricio Navia*

*New York University/Universidad Diego Portales*

**Chile: The Other September 11; An Anthology of Reflections on the 1973 Coup.** Edited by Pilar Aguilera and Ricardo Fredes. New York: Ocean Press, 2006. Pp. 100. \$11.95 paper.

**Democracy after Pinochet: Politics, Parties and Elections in Chile.** By Alan E. Angell. London: Institute for the Study of the Americas, University of London, 2007. Pp. 244. \$24.95 paper.

**The Pinochet Regime.** By Carlos R. Huneeus. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2007. Pp. 559. \$69.95 cloth.

**Battling for Hearts and Minds: Memory Struggles in Pinochet's Chile, 1973–1988.** By Steve J. Stern. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006. Pp. 576. \$27.95 paper.

**Remembering Pinochet's Chile: On the Eve of London 1998.** By Steve J. Stern. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006. Pp. 280. \$19.95 paper.

Sigan sabiendo ustedes, que mucho más temprano que tarde, se abrirán las grandes alamedas por donde pase el hombre libre, para construir una sociedad mejor. . . . Tengo la certeza de que, por lo menos, habrá una sanción moral que castigará la felonía, la cobardía y la traición.

*Salvador Allende, Santiago, September 11, 1973*

El dolor de quienes han sufrido no me fue ajeno en el pasado y menos lo es hoy. . . . No podemos negar que quienes hasta ahora hemos sido protagonistas de este período de nuestra historia, no hemos sido capaces de materializar iniciativas suficientes, generosas y creativas que eviten traspasar el problema a generaciones que merecen disfrutar el Chile verdadero que, sin duda, ya ha sido construido.

*Augusto Pinochet, London, September 11, 1999*

Augusto Pinochet (1915–2006) was the most transformative president in modern Chile. After the bloody military coup of 1973, he led the longest government—sixteen and one-half years—in that country's history. His rule is best known for massive human rights violations against political opponents. Thousands were killed; the remains of hundreds were

never found; and many more were imprisoned, tortured, or exiled. Pinochet deservedly became a symbol of brutal military dictatorships in Latin America. Yet through a custom-made constitution promulgated in 1980 and still in force, and a neoliberal economic model adopted before any other country in Latin America, Pinochet also set the foundations of a new Chile. In 1988, caught in an institutional trap of his own making, Pinochet lost a plebiscite for a new eight-year term. Democratic elections were held in late 1989. When he left office in March 1990, almost 40 percent of Chileans lived in poverty. Inequality had worsened. Social exclusion informed many government policies. Indeed, the country was “a nation of enemies.”<sup>1</sup> After peacefully surrendering power, Pinochet stayed on as chief of the army until March 1998, when he took a lifetime seat in the senate.

Pinochet’s unexpected arrest in London in October 1998 on an extradition request issued by Spanish judge Baltazar Garzón, who was trying him on crimes against humanity, effectively brought an end to his political career. After twenty-five years at the center of national politics, this arrest transformed Pinochet from a subject to an object of politics. Pinochet was released on humanitarian grounds in March 2000 and sent back to Chile. A week after his arrival, economist Ricardo Lagos became the first socialist president since Salvador Allende. During Lagos’s administration, Pinochet was tried—but never sentenced—in Chile for human rights violations. The autonomous judicial power also investigated accusations of corruption after revelations of secret accounts held in U.S. banks by Pinochet, his relatives, and his associates. Ironically, these revelations came as a result of legislation passed in the United States after the September 11 attacks against the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. The political and legal repercussions of this later September 11 would inadvertently put the last nail in the already-diminished and deservedly tainted legacy of Pinochet in Chile.

When he died on December 10, 2006, Pinochet was widely perceived as a polarizing and uncomfortable remainder of a difficult period in Chile. Conservative politicians had distanced themselves; dissuaded by revelations of human rights abuses, disregard for democratic principles, or corruption, most prominent public figures who had previously supported him were absent from the funeral. Uncomfortably, the army gave him the military honors he deserved. The government did not honor the tradition of declaring official mourning for this former president. President Michelle Bachelet, a socialist and human rights victim herself, sensibly noted that “it would do violence to the memory of Chile” to honor Pinochet.<sup>2</sup> Un-

1. Pamela Constable and Arturo Valenzuela, *A Nation of Enemies: Chile under Pinochet* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991).

2. *La Tercera*, September 6, 2006.

intentionally, but highly symbolically, Pinochet's remains were cremated. Just like hundred of Chileans who disappeared under his dictatorship, Pinochet does not have a burial ground.

Except for its respect for human rights and a consolidated democracy, Chile today looks very much as Pinochet wanted. It is an ardent defender of market-friendly policies and, though modified several times, its institutional structure is still based on a strong presidential system that Pinochet carefully masterminded into the 1980 constitution. In that sense, more than any other twentieth-century leader, Pinochet comes closest to being the founding father of modern Chile, although many have correctly pointed out that the foundations for the neoliberal economic and social reforms championed by Pinochet were laid before him,<sup>3</sup> or consolidated after him.<sup>4</sup>

The decision of the Concertación coalition of center-left parties to keep the fundamentals of the neoliberal economic model, and to reform rather than replace the 1980 constitution, helped to legitimize Pinochet's economic model. It also helped to consolidate Pinochet as the father of modern Chile. But the Concertación also decided to introduce a "human face" to neoliberalism and to shift the focus toward the poor precisely because market-friendly policies were producing good macroeconomic results when Pinochet left office in 1990. Since then, four consecutive Concertación governments have further consolidated a social free-market economy, focusing increased government spending on the poor through demand-side subsidies but maintaining the reduced role of the state in the economy. The pension system remains private, half of Chilean children attend private and voucher schools, many roads are privately built and operated, and the public sector accounts for slightly more than 20 percent of the economy. The Concertación remains critical of neoliberalism (and wins elections by campaigning against it and against the Pinochet legacy), but its policies are squarely within those advocated by the Washington consensus.<sup>5</sup>

For these reasons, seventeen years after he left office under the rules set forth in his own constitution, nine years after his arrest in London on charges of crimes against humanity, and a year after he finally passed

3. Guillermo Larraín, *Chile: Fértil provincia* (Santiago: Debate, 2005); Patricio Meller, *Un siglo de economía política chilena* (Santiago: Andrés Bello, 1996).

4. Humberto Vega Fernández, *En vez de la injusticia: un camino para el desarrollo de Chile en el siglo XXI* (Santiago: Debate, 2007); Patricio Meller, *La paradoja aparente* (Santiago: Taurus, 2005); Oscar Muñoz Gomá, *El modelo económico de la Concertación, 1990–2005: ¿Reformas o cambio?* (Santiago: FLACSO/Catalonia, 2007).

5. Felipe Larraín and Rodrigo Vergara, eds., *La transformación económica de Chile* (Santiago: Centro de Estudios Públicos, 2000); Barry P. Bosworth, Rudiger Dornbusch, and Raul Labán, eds., *The Chilean Economy: Policy Lessons and Challenges* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1994); Meller, *La paradoja aparente*.

away, Pinochet remains the most important political figure in Chile's modern history. The five books reviewed here provide a balanced and complete body of knowledge that can help us to understand why Pinochet built such a lasting social, political, economic, and cultural legacy.

The short volume edited by Aguilera and Fredes includes classic poems by Pablo Neruda and Victor Jara. By also including Salvador Allende's last speech and Fidel Castro's speech of September 28, 1973, denouncing U.S. imperialism in Chile, the authors make it clear that they are more interested in what ended with the September 11 coup than in its aftermath. Although a moving testimony by Joan Jara, poet and musician Victor Jara's wife, reminds us of the horrors committed by the Pinochet dictatorship, the book is much more a eulogy to Allende than a book about contemporary Chile. Ariel Dorfman contributes an excellent essay comparing the Chilean September 11 with that in the United States. Although somewhat out of place, Dorfman's article (the only written after 1973 included in the book) reminds us that the Chilean September 11 was an event that shocked the entire world. The shock would have been much bigger had people known how deeply transformative the Pinochet regime would be for Chile. In contrast to Allende's ideal of a revolution within democratic means ("a revolution with empanadas and red wine"), socialists after Pinochet aspired, as Robert Funk said, to a radically different, more moderate, and market-friendly revolution with Carménère wine and sushi.<sup>6</sup>

Carlos Huneeus, a political scientist, also actively opposed the Pinochet dictatorship and participated in the Concertación's transition to democracy as a militant of the Christian Democratic Party, serving as ambassador to Germany under the Aylwin government in 1990–1994. Huneeus's *The Pinochet Regime* is the most complete rendition of the Pinochet government and a much-improved version of a text originally published in Spanish in 2000. Expanded and modified, the English translation is more appropriate for non-Chilean experts, and also updated.

Huneeus provides a detailed account of how the Pinochet regime consolidated and deepened its grasp on power. Yet Huneeus unnecessarily enters into debate on whether the regime should be classified as personalist (like that of Francisco Franco in Spain) or as a bureaucratic authoritarian regime. Unconvincingly, Huneeus argues for the former. Others have shown how Pinochet himself was constrained by the military junta and that some balance of powers within the authoritarian regime did exist.<sup>7</sup>

6. Robert Funk, ed., *El gobierno de Ricardo Lagos: La nueva vía chilena hacia el socialismo* (Santiago: Universidad Diego Portales, 2006).

7. Genaro Arriagada, *Pinochet: the Politics of Power* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1988); Robert Barros, *Constitutionalism and Dictatorship: Pinochet, the Junta, and the 1980 Constitution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

Moreover, as Fernando Matthei, one of the junta's members, correctly assessed when commenting on the 1980 constitution, "even custom-made shoes bind."<sup>8</sup> Fortunately, Huneeus's claims in defending the notion of a personalist dictatorship do not harm the other arguments of the book. His superb discussion of the intricacies of the transition process shows how Pinochet found himself trapped in his own constitution. The democratic opposition skillfully used the 1980 constitution to force Pinochet to organize a fairly free and clean plebiscite. Pinochet was defeated and the transition ensued. True, Chile's democracy had important authoritarian enclaves,<sup>9</sup> but the transition advanced slowly but decisively toward democratic consolidation. In a new chapter written for the English version, Huneeus shows how the first three governments of the Concertación "dismantled the institutions and authoritarianism left behind and consolidated the new political order" (xv).

Huneeus's book is the most comprehensive and complete account of the Pinochet regime written by a political scientist. It nicely complements the two-volume biography written by Pinochet advocate Gonzalo Vial.<sup>10</sup> Not surprisingly, having been minister of education during the dictatorship, Vial is much less critical of Pinochet than is Huneeus. Yet Vial shows a much deeper understanding of Pinochet's personality. Focusing more on his political legacy, Huneeus brilliantly shows how the economic model was implemented, how Pinochet shuffled the support of different constituencies and strategically played his cards to stay in power, and how the new institutional order was both custom made for Pinochet but designed for a post-Pinochet Chile.

Huneeus joins a lively debate on who was responsible for the adoption of neoliberal policies under Pinochet. Robert Barros has made the case that Pinochet was limited by the junta and that some policies, particularly those related to the economy, were more influenced by the navy. Renato Cristi has argued that conservative thinker Jaime Guzmán played a crucial role as Pinochet's adviser and in drafting the 1980 constitution.<sup>11</sup> In focusing on Pinochet, Huneeus does not ignore the nuances of such deeply transformative political processes. Yet he correctly puts emphasis on the man who ultimately decided to bring in, and keep, Guzmán as his adviser. In fact, one of the best chapters of the book discusses in detail

8. Fernando Matthei, quoted in Robert Barros, *Constitutionalism and Dictatorship: Pinochet, the Junta, and the 1980 Constitution*, 255 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

9. Manuel Antonio Garretón, "Balance y perspectivas de la democratización política chilena," in A. Joignant and A. Menéndez-Carrión, eds., *La caja de Pandora: El retorno de la transición chilena*, 49–88 (Santiago: Planeta, 1999).

10. Gonzalo Vial Correa, *Pinochet: La biografía. Volumen I y II* (Santiago: El Mercurio/Aguilar, 2002).

11. Renato Cristi, *El pensamiento político de Jaime Guzmán: Autoridad y libertad* (Santiago: LOM Editorial, 2000).

how Guzmán and his unionist group (which later evolved into the Unión Demócrata Independiente conservative party) established and increased their influence over a government that initially comprised mostly military officers.

Although other books provide more insights and deeper analyses of the challenges, successes, and shortfalls of Chile's transition and democratic consolidation under the Concertación,<sup>12</sup> Huneus provides an excellent account of the role played by Pinochet, both in office and afterward, until he was indicted for corruption in 2004. This book is a must-read for those interested in the Pinochet dictatorship. It is also helpful reading for those interested in understanding contemporary Chilean politics, how Chilean democratic institutions were designed under authoritarian rule, and how the neoliberal economic model was implemented.

Steve J. Stern's two books are part of the trilogy *The Memory Box of Pinochet's Chile* (the third book had not been released as of the writing of this review). A historian with a vast knowledge of Chilean history, Stern focuses on the users and signifiers in Chile, on the meanings and implications of Pinochet's legacy, the memory of his dictatorship, its causes, and its consequences. He provides a useful and rather neutral historical background of the events that led to Pinochet's dictatorship. He also offers a superficial but sufficient description of the political events that transpired during it. Those not familiar with Chile will find a good summary of how deeply transformative this dictatorship was, while experts will find Stern's descriptions overly general but not inaccurate. In a country where "irruptions of memory" shake the political environment,<sup>13</sup> just as earthquakes hit that country's geography, Stern's volumes are a welcome attempt to understand how people deal and struggle with memory.

Acknowledging that theory "is presented here not as an abstract point of departure but as culmination" (*Battling 3*), Stern uses in-depth interviews to explain how the "memory box" is built, maintained, and occasionally opened in Chile. He identifies four frameworks: memory as salvation, as cruel rupture, as persecution and awakening, and as closure (*Remember-*

12. Silvia Borzutzky and Lois H. Oppenheim, eds., *After Pinochet: The Chilean Road to Democracy and the Market* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006); Paul Drake and Ivan Jaksic, eds., *El modelo chileno: Democracia y desarrollo en los 90* (Santiago: LOM Editorial, 1999); Brian Loveman and Elizabeth Lira, *Las ardientes cenizas del olvido: Vía chilena de reconciliación política 1932–1994* (Santiago: LOM Editorial, 2000); Philip D. Oxhorn, *Organizing Civil Society: The Popular Sector and the Struggle for Democracy in Chile* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1995); Kenneth M. Roberts, *Deepening Democracy? The Modern Left and Social Movements in Chile and Peru* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998); Peter Siavelis, *The President and Congress in Post-Authoritarian Chile* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2000); Gregory B. Weeks, *The Military and Politics in Post-Authoritarian Chile* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2003).

13. Alexander Wilde, "Irruption of Memory: Expressive Politics in Chile's Transition to Democracy," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 31 (1999): 473–500.

ing 3). This is a complex process: "Human actors turn social memory and personal memory into a two-way street of influence. On the one hand, an emblematic memory framework imparts broad interpretative meaning and criteria of selection to personal memory. . . . On the other hand, for those who build a memory framework, seek to establish it as essential truth, and appeal for support and awareness, the varied specific stories and experiences of people are also crucial" (*Remembering* 5).

Stern brilliantly describes the ways that Chileans selectively rescue memories to build and support their own interpretations of what happened during the Pinochet years, and what caused the demise of democracy and later its return. Because memory is construed as a two-way process, with events influencing individuals and individuals framing events in their minds, the selection of interviewees can easily tilt and distort the results of research. How can we know that Stern's interviewees are representative of Chile? Which of the four memory frameworks is more widely present in Chile today? Can there be a fifth framework that Stern could have identified had he conducted more interviews? To be sure, Stern indirectly acknowledges these problems, but readers ought to be aware that they remain unsolved.

In addition, there is a problem of selection by dependent variable. Stern interviewed people for whom the 1973 coup and dictatorship were important events. But can we confidently say that such was the case for most Chileans? The turnout rate in the 1970 presidential election was lower than that in the mid-1990s,<sup>14</sup> a period that many scholars in Chile defined as "of political apathy."<sup>15</sup> True, the 1973 coup was a dramatic and violent way to topple a government, but despite widespread human rights violations after the coup, it is probably safe to say that a majority of Chileans were much less traumatized by the unfolding of events than were the people interviewed by Stern. Technically speaking, Stern commits selection by dependent variable, for he seeks to understand the memory box by interviewing people for whom memory was very important. Still, the book makes very important contributions because selection by dependent variable occasionally provides valuable insights into social phenomena. Masterfully, Stern does precisely that in these two volumes.

Stern acknowledges that he seeks to understand how memory affects and is affected by political developments. In discussing "the turbulent process of mass memory," he correctly notes that on the eve of the 1988 plebiscite, "Pinochet . . . had lost the hearts and minds of the Chilean ma-

14. Patricio Navia, "Participación electoral en Chile 1988-2001," *Revista de ciencia política* 24, no. 1 (2004): 81-103.

15. Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo, *Informe de desarrollo humano en Chile: Las paradojas de la modernización* (Santiago: Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo, 1998).

majority, which had come to see in military rule a deeply troubling narrative of human rights violations"; yet "Pinochet had not lost the instruments of 'hard' political control" (*Remembering* 4). In hindsight, these elements of "hard" political control (e.g., authoritarian enclaves in the constitution, his own permanence as commander in chief of the army) were also given an expiration date. As Huneeus shows, Pinochet's political fortunes went downhill after he left office. Complementing explanations that attribute democratic consolidation to agreements among the Concertación elite and the outgoing military regime, Stern would suggest that the basis for successful transition was that Chileans were able to deal successfully with the surprising and contentious issues that would come out of that emotionally filled memory box.

As a superb study of contemporary Chilean history, Stern's two volumes are certain to become classics for all those interested in the social, political, and economic evolution of Chile. Yet Stern's extraordinary accounts of how memory is built, signified, and reconstructed—as a dependent and independent variable, as methodologically rigorous jargon would have it—can also provide a useful and attractive framework for those interested in how memory is, ultimately and within constraints, created and re-created.

Allan Angell's *Democracy after Pinochet* neatly complements the works by Huneeus and Stern. This collection of essays (some already published elsewhere) describes and analyzes the contemporary party system and the evolution of Chilean politics since the end of the Pinochet dictatorship. Although the primary focus is on electoral democracy and political parties, Angell's commendable preoccupation with all matters relating to politics leads him to analyze the role played by Pinochet and his authoritarian legacy in Chile's transition to democracy and democratic consolidation. Angell maps out the evolution of politics with chapters on each of the four presidential elections that have occurred in Chile since the election of Patricio Aylwin in 1989. Although the center-left Concertación has won all of these elections, political dynamics have evolved substantially since the 1988 plebiscite, as the centrist Christian Democratic Party has ceded to the consolidation of the Socialist Party and the Party for Democracy, as Angell brilliantly describes and explains. He also shows how democracy has evolved and consolidated from the traditional top-down approach to political decisions and negotiations to a more bottom-up, public-opinion responsive approach to selecting candidates and promoting policies.

A special chapter on the "Pinochet factor" in contemporary Chilean politics brings into perspective the former dictator's legacy. In arguing that this legacy is fading, Angell suggests that "the trial of Pinochet—even if it never reached the final concluding scale—could have the effect of unlocking the past, of releasing a real debate about what happened and



of moving towards a reconciliation based upon acceptance of responsibilities and not simply upon an agreement to forget" (158). Unlocking the past—Stern's memory box—is not an easy process. Now that Pinochet is gone and democracy is solidly consolidated, Chileans can face up to (and problematize, deconstruct, and challenge) the fact that he was more influential in shaping their country than any other political leader in the twentieth century.