

Stretch Marks of Chile's Rebirth: Pushing the Parameters of Transition

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Since serving in Chile in the early 1960s as a founding generation peace Corps Volunteer, I had returned often, but the prospect of collaborating with my friend Juan Guzman, known now around the world as the judge who dared to prosecute General Pinochet, was an offer I could not refuse. I was also elated by the prospect of sharing with Monterey Institute students in January 2009 my own deep sense of appreciation for and kinship with all things Chilean.

Chile, moreover, is a most fruitful locale for learning about human rights and human wrongs – abuses and protections – not only because of the tyranny and terror the population experienced between the *pinochetazo*, the military's violent seizure of power in 1973, and the beginnings of democratic transition at the end of the 1980s, but also because this awful fate had befallen a country that until that time had been among the most nearly democratic and politically stable of Latin America.

The transition process, halting and arduous, seemed almost complete at last by the middle of this first decade of the twenty-first century. The war wounds inflicted by bombs and artillery on the Moneda, the presidential palace, had been patched up, and the plaza beyond was guarded on both sides by statues of the fallen democratic leaders, Salvador Allende and Eduardo Frei. One of the most notorious of the torture centers, Villa Grimaldi, had been converted into a memorial to its victims, and the Santiago Stadium, where beloved folksinger Victor Jara died at the hands of his torturers, now bears his name. Strikes and demonstrations and cultural events that would have been rare even two or three years earlier have been commonplace since 2005, and expressions and body language suggest that people have begun finally to exhale.

Nevertheless, the process that has come to be known as democratic transition rarely extends rights beyond the social categories who had enjoyed them before the onset of authoritarianism. That means that persecution comes to be re-concentrated on the poor, who had always been vulnerable. In Chile, in particular, sociopolitical participation had been limited and tenuous for slum and shanty-town dwellers, working and would-be working classes, and the indigenous even before the *pinochetazo*. "*Barrios populares*," or working class neighborhoods, like La Victoria, which had suffered the brunt of Pinochet's anger and paranoia, continue to be harassed and preyed upon by the same *carabineros*, or militarized police, who occupied them regularly during the military dictatorship, though now such persecution is in the name of vigilance against terrorism, drug-dealing, and youth gangs.

Meanwhile, Chile's largest indigenous nation, the Mapuche, face new claims on and desecration of their lands by foreign lumber and mining companies. New assaults on Mapuche rights and culture, responding to Mapuche attempts to protect their communities and livelihoods, are now misrepresented and intensified through reckless

government use of anti-terrorism legislation. The upshot, as elaborated in the essays that follow, is a situation in which many indigenous communities are continuously surrounded by *carabinero* encampments, and residents feel that they are in virtual detention on what remains of their now despoiled lands.

That is not to say, however, that the peoples still excluded from the liberation of transition are simply settling for victimization. Far from it. City walls here and there that in the early sixties bore graffiti telling “Yanquis” to go home and in the late seventies wore a bone-chilling whitewash – as silent as the people who darted nervously past – now dazzle with triumphalist murals. La Victoria, notwithstanding the *carabineros* on watch, has become a stroll-through art museum, depicting in professionally-executed murals the recent history of a people who have suffered and have overcome. And a locally generated broadcast and documentary production studio, Senal 3, is reaching out to assist the Mapuche in communicating their plight and their aspirations to a larger world.

Murals in Mapuche country, from Temuco south to the stunningly beautiful region of lakes and volcanoes, also tell of a heroic struggle, though reaching farther back in time to successful resistance against conquest first by Inca, then by Spanish, imperial forces. That spirit has been reinvigorated by the example of what can be accomplished in Chile even by a single courageous and committed individual like Judge Juan Guzman, as well as by what indigenous peoples around the world can achieve when they pull together. Inspired particularly by the UN declaration on the rights of the indigenous adopted by the General Assembly in 2007, Mapuche leaders have launched a new program to educate their communities about the individual and collective rights to which they are entitled under international law and to motivate them to explore strategies for ensuring that those rights will be respected.

Through our collaborative seminar-practicum in January 2009, Monterey Institute students had the great privilege of participating in the launching, at the headquarters of the Consejo de Todas las Tierras (Council of All the Nations) in Temuco, of the Escuela de Autogobierno, or School for Self-Determination. Moreover, walking among the working people of Chile, whether urban or rural, with Judge Guzman, was in itself a rare privilege – rather like, one supposes, walking around India with Mahatma Gandhi.