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## **“Adelante, con todas las Fuerzas de la Historia”: An Exploration of the Chilean Student Movement for Education Reform within its National and International Contexts**

Maisha Fabliha Shahid

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**“Adelante, con todas las Fuerzas de la Historia”:**

**An Exploration of the Chilean**

**Student Movement for Education Reform**

**within its National and International Contexts**

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at  
Syracuse University

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and Renée Crown University Honors

May 2014

Honors Capstone Project in International Relations

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Date: 6 May 2014

## Abstract

In the past several decades, Chile has been regarded an “economic miracle” and praised for its transition from a brutal dictatorship that lasted nearly two decades to the current democracy. While the state has made much progress, it remains highly unequal in terms of opportunities and services available to the middle and lower classes. This structural inequality is most visible within education. Dictatorship-era policies and long-standing economic and political structures have commoditized education and established an educational system that essentially excludes large sections of the population from receiving quality education.

It is thus not surprising that a potent, influential student movement has emerged in Chile, and that among its primary demands are: free, quality education for all and political and economic reforms to the existing system that has allowed inequality to thrive. This study examines that student movement, placing it within the context of Chilean history, politics, economics, and society. It explores the factors that have led to the uprising: political and economic remnants from Augusto Pinochet’s dictatorship and structural inequality in Chilean society. The study also explores the reasons that the movement arose when it did: an uprising in 2006, a recent shift to conservative government, and generational differences that compel these students to mobilize.

In addition this work navigates the sociology and characteristics of the movement: its makeup, the tools used to gather support, the methods utilized for demonstration, etc. These are explored based on their ties to Chile’s unique past, as the memory of the dictatorship informs the actions of the student movement today. Along with secondary research, this study utilizes profiles of two student participants of the movement constructed through interviews in order to achieve a more nuanced, personal study of the social movement. In addition, the use of theoretical research of youth movements leads to the conclusion that while this student movement has characteristics that make it uniquely Chilean, it is part of a larger trend that has emerged recently. This trend involves youth-led political movements that have erupted globally and have demanded structural changes in neoliberal politics and society. Often led by student-citizens, they call for social rights and equality and are driven by a greater international awareness and access to technological tools that aid with mobilization. They deal with issues specific to different places – as with the Chilean student movement – but reflect a general dissatisfaction with states’ focus on economics in place of social rights. These young people’s expectations of their states has increased and they share a generational tendency to actively seek reforms.

## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>i.</b>
<b>Executive Summary.....</b>	<b>iii.</b>
<b>Acknowledgements.....</b>	<b>vi.</b>
<b>Advice to Future Honors Students.....</b>	<b>vii.</b>
<b>Preface.....</b>	<b>viii.</b>
<b>Section I: The Chilean Context.....</b>	<b>1</b>
The Dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet .....	1
Chile: The ‘Economic Miracle’ .....	7
Structural Inequalities in Chilean Society.....	9
Inequalities Manifested in Education.....	11
<b>Section II: The History &amp; Sociology of the Movement.....</b>	<b>15</b>
Why Now?: Timing.....	15
A Brief Timeline of the Movement.....	25
Who are the Participants?.....	29
The Movement’s Organizational Structure & Tools of Mobilization.....	32
The Use of Space & Methods of Demonstration.....	36
<b>Section III: Profiles: Two Student Perspectives.....</b>	<b>45</b>
Melissa Sepúlveda.....	45
Fernanda Campos.....	50
<b>Section IV: The International Context.....</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>Works Cited.....</b>	<b>71</b>

## **Executive Summary**

This study was borne of my experience studying for several months in Santiago, Chile, where I quickly realized that a university student-led movement for education reform was at the heart of current national politics. Closer examination of the movement, conversations with participants, and extensive research on the subject enlightened me to the fact that this movement – while based in the issue of access to quality education for all Chileans – aims to reform Chile’s political and social systems entirely. Intrigued by the momentum of the political force and impressed by the sheer magnitude and influence of its participants, I decided to explore the movement more thoroughly, in terms of its historical context, its sociology and characteristics, and its connection – if any – to recent youth political and social movements in general.

In this study I not only draw from existing studies of the movement as well as examinations of its historical context, I also utilize primary research on participants I conducted via in-person conversation, Skype interviews and email correspondence. This aspect of my study is not meant to serve as representative findings of the movement as a whole, but it rather provides more personal accounts and insight into the movement as it has been experienced by individual participants. My goal in this work is to provide a thorough examination of the Chilean student movement and to offer proper context for its emergence, while delving deeper into the perspectives of some of its participants and connecting it to other recent youth movements.

In order to properly explore the subject, this study initially examines the education movement within the context of Chilean history, society, and politics: firstly, what are the socioeconomic conditions that have led to inequality in education and what circumstances caused the emergence of this movement? Also, in what ways do societal and political remnants of the Chilean dictatorship that ended in 1990 inform and influence the movement in terms of imagery, political space, historical memory, etc.? What role have student movements played in Chile in the past, and what effects has student mobilization had on its society? I then examine the nature of the movement, studying its makeup, tools of organization and mobilization, use of physical space, and methods of demonstration. I also utilize the information gleaned from personal interviews, creating two student profiles. I use this information along with my secondary research of the movement to explore the nature of the movement, the ways it has sustained its presence and influence, and the impact it has had on Chilean society.

My profiles on two student-participants provide first-hand accounts of two distinct experiences of the movement: one is from the perspective of a leader and spokesperson of the movement, and the other offers the point-of-view of a student who attends marches and is generally politically-aware. Through these profiles I am able to gather accounts of the movement which, though they reflect my secondary research, provide a much more nuanced examination of the varied experiences of student-participants.

This exploration of the Chilean context of the movement, the nature of the political efforts, and personal perspectives of student-activists gives me a

thorough understanding of the movement and allows me to look at youth political efforts from a wider perspective. I ask the question: in what ways is this student movement uniquely Chilean, and in what ways is it a part of a larger trend of youth mobilization that has occurred in recent years? By utilizing theoretical literature on youth (and particularly student) movements, I place the Chilean education movement in an international context. Therefore my study not only provides insight on an intriguing political effort led by university students in Chile, but it also connects it to other such movements that have emerged internationally. In this sense this study has a wider significance than just the exploration of a singular sociopolitical movement.

As we experience a time period in which mass uprisings are not uncommon and are often led or primarily composed of young people, it is worth studying any apparent trends. Therefore I utilize my research on the Chilean student movement and examine any connections present between it and other uprisings that have taken place in the last five years. I briefly explore commonalities as well as differences, examining the role neoliberalism has played in these uprisings, and any generational factors that are present. I discuss what information such characteristics can provide in regards to the role of student-activists and their changing role on the global stage.

## **Acknowledgements**

First and foremost I must express gratitude for Professor Azra Hromadzic, without whose academic and personal guidance this work could not have been completed. Her patience, scholarly advice, and support of my project regardless of my often unorthodox methods have been invaluable and very much appreciated.

I also owe many thanks to Professor John Burdick, whose guidance allowed me to approach this study from distinct angles, and whose advice helped me think more deeply about the topics covered in this work.

I must acknowledge Fernanda Campos, whose insight and repeated willingness to dedicate her time to share her experiences with me were instrumental in the realization of this project.

I also thank Melissa Sepúlveda, whose input proved to be a valuable addition to this project, and the FECh staff, whose prompt communications helped me greatly.

I thank Mauricio Paredes who – though he was not directly involved with this project – helped me gain a deep understanding of Chilean society and history.

And finally, I thank my friends whose patience, understanding, and motivation throughout the process of completing this work were incredibly important.



## **Advice to Future Honors Students**

To any future Honors students planning to complete a Capstone, I give the following advice, which I have arrived at after much trial and error:

- Spend your time really thinking about the things you are interested in and passionate about, and choose a topic that will intrigue you even (and especially) after a year of studying it.
- It can help to approach the project as several small studies or questions that need to be answered rather than getting overwhelmed by the scope of the entire thing.
- Start early and make the process gradual, even if you get just a little bit done per week.
- Your advisor will be an invaluable resource you should take advantage of even if – and especially when – you feel stuck, frustrated, and stressed.
- The process will be difficult, but the sense of accomplishment after it all is wonderful.

## Preface

On a late autumn day in Santiago, Chile I found myself in the center of the city with a camera. There must have been a chilly breeze but I could not feel it due to the heat emanating from the burning bus stops. The air was thick with tear gas. Street dogs approached the water cannons out of curiosity while people did their best to avoid the forceful streams. Armored vehicles rode up and down the streets and riot police faced a crowd of protesters, some of whom hurled rocks and insults in their direction. The nearby metro stations and all the roads in the area were closed off; the only way out of the city center was by foot. I did my best to take photos of the scene while attempting to stay away from the tear gas and any airborne rocks. Though this was an unfamiliar experience for me, in Santiago this is not an uncommon sight.

I spent five months in Santiago in 2013 and during that time there was at least one large demonstration every two weeks. Some of these protests would exceed several hundred thousand participants, mostly students. Organized by university student leaders, these demonstrations comprise a movement for education reform in Chile that not only calls for changes in education policies, but a restructuring of the political system that would permit Chilean students to have equal access to quality education.<sup>1</sup> The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in 2011 named Chile the most “socio-economically segregated country regarding education opportunities” of its member states, which

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<sup>1</sup> Movilizate Chile (2011, August 08). *Acuerdo social por la reforma del sistema educacional chileno*. Retrieved from <http://www.movilizatechile.cl/2011/08/acuerdo-social-por-la-reforma-del-sistema-educacional-chileno/>

include all highly-developed nations.<sup>2</sup> In Chile not only is the socioeconomic structure set up in a way that severely limits poorer students' access to quality primary, secondary, and tertiary schools, but it also places a huge burden on families to finance their children's education. Chileans are forced to finance more of their children's university tuitions than the families of any other developed country.<sup>3</sup>

It is no surprise, then, that a mass youth movement has erupted in Chile to change these current realities. For several years now the movement for education reform has been at the center of Chilean politics and the state has been forced to react. Though the students' demonstrations have resulted in some changes, the movement has a long way to go before its demands are achieved. Still, the crusade has been notable in its mobilization of a large population of young people, and while in Chile I quickly became impressed by how potent a political force the movement is.

Highly organized, the movement is represented by the umbrella organization CONFECH (Confederation of Chilean Student Federations), which brings together the various student federations at Chilean universities, and FECh (Student Federation of the University of Chile), the most influential such federation. Decisions are made democratically through participation of student leaders and demonstrations are organized through referendums.<sup>4</sup> During my semester in Santiago such referendums would be held nearly every week to decide

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<sup>2</sup> "Chile Has the Most Socio-economic Segregated Education System of OECD Members", *MercoPress*. September 14, 2011

<sup>3</sup> OECD (2011), *Education at a Glance 2011: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2011-en>

<sup>4</sup> "Quiénes Somos", *CONFECH* Wordpress.

whether students would go on strike. Protests would (and continue to) shut down areas of the city, and the government would react, at times using aggressive measures to control demonstrators. One thing that became clear to me during my time in Chile is that this is not a fad or ephemeral rebellion begun by bored university students; this is an organized political and social movement that demands structural changes in Chilean government and society. And it vows to continue until significant reforms are made to existing policies and inequalities entrenched in Chilean society. The movement has taken center stage in Chilean politics and has attracted the attention of people throughout the length of Chile, with most people in support of the movement's objectives.<sup>5</sup> Even if the international attention given to this uprising (especially outside of Latin America) has been limited, within Chile the issue is at the forefront of the national political discourse.

News programs on *CNN Chile* and *TVN* (Chile's state-run network) frequently cover the movement, and popular newspapers such as *El Mercurio* and *La Segunda* update the Chilean people about demonstrations and referendums. The movement is a prominent part of Chilean politics – and especially in the capital – its society. Before I arrived in Santiago I had read about the education movement only after researching recent Chilean social movements; it had not otherwise crossed my radar. After witnessing firsthand the fervor with which young Chileans take part in demonstrations and the momentum of the movement, I realized that this widespread mobilization is something that should be given

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<sup>5</sup> Anderson, G. (2011) Chilean Students Show the Way. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/gary-anderson/chilean-students-show-the-way\\_b\\_941002.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/gary-anderson/chilean-students-show-the-way_b_941002.html)

more attention and more deeply examined. A thorough exploration of this phenomenon will not only give more insight on Chilean society and politics, but will also serve to provide a better understanding of similar youth – namely student – movements that have emerged in recent years.

In many ways the Chilean student movement is uniquely Chilean: the historical, social, political, and economic factors that inform it are distinct to this country. In just the past few decades Chile has transformed from a state ruthlessly controlled by a military dictatorship to a fast-growing democratic country. Its industrialization and economic liberalization have resulted in its economic success, making Chile one of the wealthiest nations in Latin America.<sup>6</sup> Though Chile has been deemed an economic “miracle” due to its dramatic improvements in recent times, it is evident that some aspects of Chilean society and government have not achieved the same successes. The current education movement suggests that these advancements have not solved the issue of social and economic inequality, and that this is manifested in the education system. The passion with which students are involved in the movement shows the urgency many Chileans feel in regards to the current state of education. And the prominence of the movement in Chilean politics demonstrates the fact that the movement is a formidable force, and that the people as well as the government accept its validity.

Purely as a student of history, politics, and culture, I wished to delve deeper into this topic to learn more about the current state of Chile and how it is influenced by its fascinating history. Some proclaim that Chile is at the “end of

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<sup>6</sup> De Gregorio, J. (2004) Crecimiento Economico en Chile: Evidencia, Fuentes, y Perspectivas. *Banco Central de Chile*.

the world”, as its unique physical geography and cultural identity have traditionally lent it an air of isolation. In many ways Chileans think of themselves as separate and inherently different from their Latin American neighbors.<sup>7</sup> However, there is no denying that there are shared regional characteristics that shape current politics. Some such characteristics are the history of dictatorships, human rights violations, and structural inequality in Latin America. I was curious to understand how these factors – this historical and sociopolitical context – have set the stage for the current movement. In addition, I sought to explore this movement in relation to other youth movements that have erupted in recent years. Does the Chilean student movement share any significant traits with other recent movements? What can this political effort tell us about student movements in general? What trends, if any, are present across such movements?

In a time when young, well-organized demonstrators can topple governments and reform longstanding political structures, it is crucial to explore the Chilean education movement because not only can it give insight into Chile and its future, but it can also inform us about youth movements around the world. I explore this theme of the emergence of a new type of student-citizen in an era when a growing focus on citizens’ rights and playing a more active role in politics have coupled with increased access to information and technological tools beneficial for mobilization.

In order to explore the topics mentioned – from Chile-specific themes to the broader global context of recent youth movements – I divide my qualitative study into sections that allow for the examination of historical context, present

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<sup>7</sup> Larrain, J. *Identidad Chilena*. (1 ed., p. 158). Santiago de Chile: LOM.

themes, and how these can give us insight into the future of student politics and mobilization. In my first section “The Chilean Context”, I situate the current student movement in its historical and sociopolitical context. This involves a brief explanation of the 1973-1990 dictatorship that continues to profoundly impact Chilean politics and society, as well as the economic context which has provided the backdrop of this movement’s demands. I also explore the ways in which this economic system has resulted in social inequality, and how this is most starkly manifested in Chile’s education system. Once the context for the student movement is established, I begin my exploration of the history and sociology of the movement itself.

In this second section, “The History and Sociology of the Movement”, I delve into the recent history of this movement, which brings me to an organized student uprising that emerged in 2006 – the *Penguin Revolution*. I then discuss the political climate in 2011 which partly contributed to the current movement. I also explore the idea of a generational difference as well as a history of student involvement in Chilean politics, which have both fostered mobilization. The remainder of this section is devoted to exploring not only the characteristics of this movement in terms of its makeup, methods of demonstration, and tools of mobilization, but also placing these in the context of Chile. What are the connections that the characteristics and functions of this movement have to Chile’s history, society, and politics?

Additionally, in order to more thoroughly examine the aforementioned topics and achieve a more nuanced, personal study of the movement, I employ

individual stories of movement participants. What have their experiences within the movement been? What are their personal perspectives on the issues at hand? I will explore their motivations as student participants in the movement, their views on the current state of Chile, as well as their thoughts on global connections in regards to student movements. I will provide profiles of two students who are involved in the movement – albeit in very distinct capacities. While these profiles will not provide representative data of all the Chilean student-citizen, they will assist in achieving a more thorough understanding of the perspectives and experiences of students who partake in this political effort. I will first profile Melissa Sepúlveda, President of the Student Federation of the University of Chile – the largest and most influential student organization in the country – utilizing information gathered through email correspondence. I will then profile Fernanda Campos, whom I met while taking classes at the Catholic University of Chile, and highlight her experiences and perspectives as a student participant in the movement.

After having examined the nature of the movement both by utilizing secondary research and information gathered from participant interviews, I will briefly explore which of these characteristics are distinctly Chilean, and which are more general trends found in social and political movements. I then discuss in the final section “The Chilean Movement Within its International Context and Conclusions” what these patterns can tell the global community about the evolution of popular politics in this age of heightened communication and technological abilities. I argue that while there are certain characteristics of the



Chilean student movement that are specific to the country due to historical, social, political, and economic contexts, this uprising and its 2006 predecessor are part of a global trend of youth (particularly student) mobilization. In recent years there have been numerous instances of political and social movements led by and composed of mainly young, university-aged people. This emergence of a new generation of student-citizens is a reflection of the current era of educated, well-informed young people with access to seemingly unlimited information for whom traditional methods of political participation have ceased to be sufficient. With increased capacities of mobilization due to technology and wider awareness of social and human rights, these young people have taken matters into their own hands and decided to actively demand political and economic reforms from their states.

Before I explore these ideas further, however, the foundational context for Chile's education movement must be set. Therefore I now turn to the fascinating context of post-dictatorial Chile.

## Section I. The Chilean Context

### i. The Dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet

In order to fully understand the state of Chile today, one must undoubtedly know about one of the most dramatic periods of the nation's history: the military dictatorship that lasted from 1973 to 1990. While the Chile the world knows today seems to be far removed from Augusto Pinochet's regime due to the country's recent progress, Chileans are in fact very much still influenced by the occurrences of that era. The brutal period in Chile's history is fresh on the minds of its people – unsurprising, as many of the regime's victims as well as orchestrators are alive today. The long-term effects of the dictatorship undeniably shape the politics and society of present-day Chile. In order to understand the student education movement, therefore, it is essential to understand the dictatorship.

The critical period began on September 11, 1973, when Augusto Pinochet – who had been appointed as the Commander in Chief of the Army just days before by President Salvador Allende – led a coup d'état against the man who had entrusted him with the position.<sup>8</sup> Allende was a democratically-elected Socialist president, and he vowed to follow “la vía chilena al socialismo”, or the “Chilean way to Socialism”. During his three years as Chile's leader Allende oversaw the nationalization of several major industries, the redistribution of land, and the expansion of access to healthcare and education.<sup>9</sup> The elites within the traditionally-conservative Chilean military as well as observers in Washington,

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<sup>8</sup> Sigmund, P. (1977). *The overthrow of allende and the politics of chile, 1964-1976*. pp. 231-247. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.

<sup>9</sup> Caceres, C. F. *La via chilena a la economia de mercado*.

D.C. looked unfavorably upon the president's reforms, and began to collaborate to bring Allende down.<sup>10</sup>

During Allende's first year as president, Chile did well economically, with inflation and unemployment decreasing, wages increasing, and a general redistribution of wealth that favored the poorer sectors of Chile's population. Chile also experienced industrial growth and a rise in GDP.<sup>11</sup> Behind closed doors, however, the White House in collaboration with the CIA and select allies in Chile were orchestrating a plan to make the economy "scream" and thereby decrease Allende's popularity.<sup>12</sup> Soon many poor Chileans found themselves without enough food as the economy faced a severe downturn. In the last year of his presidency, Allende faced a surmounting opposition, with strikes plaguing the country, lower classes protesting the lack of necessities, and the wealthier, more conservative factions calling for an end to the administration.<sup>13</sup>

On September 11, 1973 the ongoing covert efforts between the CIA and high-ranking Chilean military officials culminated in an ambush of the presidential palace. A battle was waged on the grounds of the palace, and Allende himself took up arms against the aggressors, along with his security detail. Chileans watched breathlessly as history was made that morning. Allende committed suicide in his residence rather than surrender to Augusto Pinochet, who took control of the country. He thus began what was supposed to be an

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<sup>10</sup> Kornbluh, P. (2003). *The pinochet file: A declassified dossier on atrocity and accountability*. pp. 3-8. The New Press.

<sup>11</sup> Caceres, C. F. pp. 79-83

<sup>12</sup> Kornbluh, P. p. 17

<sup>13</sup> Caceres, C. F. pp. 79-83

interim government while an election was organized, but which became a seventeen year-long brutal dictatorship.<sup>14</sup>

Pinochet's Chile was a complete rejection of the Chile Salvador Allende had attempted to build. He embarked on a mission of privatization and embraced laissez-faire economic policies, which were devised by a group of American and American-educated Chilean economists working for Pinochet.<sup>15</sup> These "Chicago Boys" – named thus because most had been trained at the University of Chicago – steered the country toward a free market economy, and Chile was turned into "one of the world's most extreme experiments in neoliberalism."<sup>16</sup> In order to conduct such an experiment, Pinochet and the Chicago Boys:

implemented tight monetary policies to tackle inflation, deregulated the economy, virtually abolished tariffs and other forms of trade barriers, and shifted the economy toward an export-based model. But what truly made these neoliberal policies stand out was their implementation in areas of social spending that had generally been considered the state's responsibility.<sup>17</sup>

Though these policies opened Chile to the global market and resulted in considerable gains for the national economy, they – namely the decrease in welfare services and privatization of education – caused the widening of inequality in Chile. The wealthy became wealthier, but the poor suffered. During

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<sup>14</sup> Sigmund, P. pp. 306 -309

<sup>15</sup> Valdes, J. G. (1995). *Pinochet's economists: The Chicago school of economics in Chile*. pp. 4-5. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>16</sup> Diaz, R. Socioeconomic Inequality in Chile. *Harvard International Review*. 22 December 2010. Retrieved from: <http://hir.harvard.edu/pressing-change/socioeconomic-inequality-in-chile-0?page=0,0>

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

the course of the dictatorship, income distribution between the various socioeconomic classes was highly unequal. Most Chileans did not have access to higher education without making considerable, often impossible, sacrifices.<sup>18</sup>

The starkest legacy of Pinochet's military dictatorship, however, was the human rights violations that were all too commonplace. For nearly two decades the Chilean people lived with intense instability, violence, and state repression. Living in fear of the government became the norm. At least 4,000 (but probably many more) people were killed and usually "disappeared", and tens of thousands were unlawfully detained and tortured.<sup>19</sup> Any opposition to the regime was ruthlessly suppressed, and Chile became a police state where media was heavily censored and even education was strictly regulated as areas of study that were deemed to have the potential to incite rebellion were banned from universities. Also suppressed were any attempts at organized opposition to the regime, especially during the first several years of the dictatorship.

It was not until the early 1980s that any effective opposition to the regime was able to organize, and even then this was mainly economically-driven. Motivated by a "dramatic economic crisis that threw one-quarter of the labor force out of work", the early and mid-1980s saw a wave of street demonstrations challenging Pinochet and his tight grasp on the nation.<sup>20</sup> This, however, did not bring an end to his rule. In 1988 a plebiscite organized by Pinochet would be the

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<sup>18</sup> Harberger, A. C. (1982). The Chilean economy in the 1970s: Crisis, stabilization, liberalization, reform. *Carnegie-Rochester Conference Series on Public Policy*, 17, pp. 115-152.

<sup>19</sup> Ensalaco, M. *Chile under Pinochet: Recovering the truth*. University of Pennsylvania Press.

<sup>20</sup> Wilde, A. (1999). Irruptions of Memory: Expressive politics in Chile's transition to democracy. *Journal of Latin American Studies*. Volume 31, Issue 02, May 1999 pp 473-500. Cambridge University Press.

deciding factor in ending the dictatorship at long-last. The constitution designed by Pinochet in 1980 called for a referendum in 1988, and though he hoped to extend his control for several more years, the Chilean people decided they wanted democracy.<sup>21</sup> With the international community overwhelmingly voicing criticisms of the regime and its abuses (even the United States government – after engineering Allende’s fall from power and Pinochet’s rise to the presidency – placed heavy economic sanctions on Chile), Pinochet realized most of his power was fading.<sup>22</sup>

Thus in 1990 Pinochet left office. Though Chile would now begin its transition to a long-awaited democracy, by no means did Pinochet’s exit mean an end to his policies. In fact, in order to ensure that his influence would outlast his period of power, Pinochet devised a plan to enact several laws and amendments to the constitution on the eve of the loss of his presidential title. Before relinquishing his title, he assured that his control of the army would continue by remaining its head until 1997 and also named himself a Senator for life. In addition, Pinochet left office having legally solidified the role the military and police would have in Chile: his law about their role stated that the army and *carabineros* or police were charged with the responsibility of maintaining order of the republic, and that they were permitted to take whatever action necessary to avoid or control class

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<sup>21</sup>Constable, P., & Valenzuela, A. (1993). *A Nation of Enemies: Chile under Pinochet*. p. 138. W. W. Norton & Company.

<sup>22</sup>Hawkins, D. Domestic Responses to International Pressure: Human rights in authoritarian Chile. *European Journal of International Relations* December 1997 vol. 3 no. 4 403-434

conflicts. Through reforms in electoral laws, Pinochet also ensured it would be difficult in the future for Congress to overturn such policies.<sup>23</sup>

These *Leyes de Amarre* were so named because of the strict limitations they forced upon future governments, and the stranglehold they allowed Pinochet and his cronies to have on future legislation. One such law was instated the day before he left office and was named the *Ley Orgánica Constitucional de Enseñanza (LOCE)*. This law – the *Organic Constitutional Act of Teaching* – profoundly changed the role and function of education in Chile. It took the educational system he had privatized and removed even more responsibility for funding schools from the central government, transferring it to local and municipal governments as well as private entities. Just as Pinochet had introduced neoliberal policies during his dictatorship, he left power ensuring that education too would be based on competition and freedom of choice, with the state playing a subsidiary role in its provision.<sup>24</sup>

Because of this dramatic shift in policy, the education system in Chile was drastically altered. I will examine this phenomenon more in depth later in this section. Both the economic and political policies put in place by Pinochet – his last-minute legislation as well as his decades-long plans – continued to have resounding effects on Chile after 1990. The neoliberal economic plan the Chicago Boys engineered is a notable example. Not only did it profoundly affect the

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<sup>23</sup>Valenzuela, J. (1997). La Constitución de 1980 y el Inicio de la Redemocratización en Chile. Retrieved from: <https://kellogg.nd.edu/publications/workingpapers/WPS/242.pdf>

<sup>24</sup>Cabalin, C. (2012). Neoliberal Education and Student Movements in Chile: Inequalities and malaise. *Policy Futures in Education*. Volume 10, No. 2, 2012. Retrieved from: [http://www.academia.edu/1836169/Neoliberal\\_education\\_and\\_student\\_movements\\_in\\_Chile\\_Inequalities\\_and\\_malaise](http://www.academia.edu/1836169/Neoliberal_education_and_student_movements_in_Chile_Inequalities_and_malaise)

economy of Chile during the dictatorship, but it also continued doing so after his exit, and still plays an integral role. I now turn to the economic context within which the student movement exists, discussing the circumstances under Pinochet as well as their progression after democracy was reclaimed.

## ii. Chile: The ‘Economic Miracle’

Regardless of the horrific human rights abuses of Pinochet’s government and the many negative social and political effects of his policies, to this day there is a sector of the Chilean population that continues to staunchly defend Pinochet.<sup>25</sup> This is almost entirely due to the increase in Chile’s wealth during the period of the dictatorship; those who support Pinochet’s regime argue that the sacrifices made were justified as they improved Chile’s economy and advanced its role on the international stage. During Salvador Allende’s presidency the country was headed toward socialism, with significant government involvement in industry. This direction, however, was one that the United States – its primary concern being the threat of communism and the potential spread of the Soviet Union’s influence – was not willing to accept. With the CIA’s intervention and assistance, therefore, a handful of top Chilean military officials planned the overthrow of Allende and the installation of a leader who would propel Chile to new economic heights by way of capitalism.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Long, G. (2013). Chile Still Split Over Gen. Augusto Pinochet Legacy. *BBC News Santiago*. 9 September 2013. Retrieved from: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-24014501>

<sup>26</sup> Kornbluh p. 82



Lower taxes, decreased regulation of businesses, and fewer obstacles to entrepreneurial endeavors resulted in more economic activity, competition, and quality products for export.<sup>27</sup> The economic policies utilized by Pinochet were largely devised by the Chicago Boys whose American ties and neoliberal ideology steered the country away from Allende's vision for Chile. These policies combined with the existence of a large, educated middle class: "decades of investment in public education [pre-Pinochet] left the country with a 'critical mass' of highly educated and trained professionals...members of this group possessed the skills and capacity to run an internationally-oriented business."<sup>28</sup> When strictly considering economics, Chile – though it experienced periods of recession – fared well as a player in the global market during Pinochet's regime. However, an overall increase in the nation's wealth did not equate to a generally better-off Chilean people, even when only considering economics. This theme will be explored in the following sub-section.

After the dictatorship's end in 1990, Chile continued its upward economic trend. The neoliberal policies of Pinochet were continued by the subsequent democratic administrations, with certain modifications made to protect social needs.<sup>29</sup> The 1990s saw a high-performing Chilean economy, and this coupled with the peaceful transition to post-dictatorship democracy impressed the world community. In fact, the era between 1985 and 1997 has been referred to as Chile's "Golden Period", as GDP growth averaged 7.1% annually and per

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<sup>27</sup> Schurman, R. (1996). Chile's New Entrepreneurs and the 'Economic Miracle': The invisible hand or a hand from the state? *Studies in Comparative International Development*. Vol. 31, Issue 2, p. 83.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* p. 94

<sup>29</sup> Diaz, R.

capita income doubled.<sup>30</sup> Since the return of democracy, poverty and unemployment levels have both decreased.<sup>31</sup> There is no questioning that the Chilean national market and populace have experienced economic gains since the mid-1980s, often at a level uncommon to states facing the political baggage Chile has due to its transition to democracy. Nevertheless, the ‘economic miracle’ of Chile did not translate into benefits for all sectors of the population. As I will now discuss, the rapid expansion of the Chilean economy left much of its people in the dust.

### iii. Structural Inequalities in Chilean Society

Chile is “one of the most economically stratified countries in the world.” According to economist Joseph Stiglitz, one percent of the country’s people possesses one-third of its wealth.<sup>32</sup> The OECD has found that the gap between the wealthiest ten percent and poorest ten percent of Chileans is the widest among all OECD member states.<sup>33</sup> Even when Chile experiences a period of growth – such as its golden economic period between 1985 and 1997 – different segments of the population experience benefits at varied magnitudes. One of the main factors that has caused a perennial inequality in Chilean society is the gap between incomes. Historically the structure of Chile’s economy and society have made it so that a very small percentage of the population experiences income increases on par with

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<sup>30</sup> Gallego, F. & Loayza, N. (2002). The Golden Period for Growth in Chile: Explanations and forecasts. *Economic Growth: Sources, Trends, and Cycles*. Santiago de Chile.

<sup>31</sup> De Gregorio (2004)

<sup>32</sup> Newman, L. (2013). The Other Side of Chile’s ‘Economic Miracle’. *Al Jazeera*. 16 November 2013. Retrieved from: <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2013/11/other-side-chile-economic-miracle-201311159282210130.html>

<sup>33</sup> OECD (2014), *Society at a Glance 2014: OECD Social Indicators*. OECD Publishing. Retrieved from: [http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/soc\\_glance-2014-en](http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/soc_glance-2014-en)

rising costs of goods and services.<sup>34</sup> Since the mid-1980s the incomes of 90% of Chileans has increased by 15% but has increased by 150% for the wealthiest 1%.<sup>35</sup> The Gini Index – which measures income distribution within a population – shows the income disparity prevalent in Chile: the Gini coefficient for Chile is among the highest in the world.<sup>36</sup>

Therefore, even though Chile has undergone dramatic advancements in terms of economics over the past few decades, income disparities and long-entrenched social and political structures that reinforce socioeconomic inequality have kept much of the population from enjoying their benefits. “In spite of the rapid expansion of civil and political rights...the presence of resolute and efficient institutions, and prolonged economic growth, socioeconomic inequality still abounds.”<sup>37</sup> Within this socioeconomic context, not only have middle and lower class Chileans suffered unequal wage and salary increases because of an economic system that favors the wealthy, but they have also been all but excluded from quality services. The most crucial such service is education. “The quality of services still varies by socioeconomic status.”<sup>38</sup> As my analysis of the Chilean education system will show later in this study, the government’s low investment in public education harms middle class and poorer students because of the lack of resources and quality teaching at the schools they attend. These disadvantages from the start leave them ill-equipped for future education, which restricts them to

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<sup>34</sup> Garreton, M. & Garreton, R. (2010). La Democracia Incompleta en Chile: La realidad tras los rankings internacionales. *Revista de Ciencia Política*. Vol. 30, No. 1, pp. 115-148.

<sup>35</sup> Newman, L.

<sup>36</sup> OECD (2014)

<sup>37</sup> Diaz, R.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

limited job opportunities. Unable to escape this cycle of their social stratum resulting in inadequate opportunities and vice versa, the tradition of inequality in Chile is perpetuated.

#### **iv. Inequalities Manifested in Education**

The structural inequality present in Chile is most clearly seen in the education system. As mentioned, under Pinochet even the education system was privatized and modeled after neoliberal policies. This reversed the Allende-era perspective of quality education being a universal right that should therefore be government-supported. In its place Pinochet established a system that would treat education as a commodity. As stated earlier, the enacting of LOCE decentralized the Chilean education system. It eliminated the Education Ministry's ability to administer public schools (though permitted it to create curricula and oversee student performance) and deepened the divides between three types of schools: private, subsidized private, and municipal. This ensured that the national government would play a mere regulatory role in education, with the lion's share of control being held by public and private corporations. "The new system was based in free markets, private management, and profit-oriented education."<sup>39</sup>

Private schools would be entirely run by non-public entities; subsidized private schools would be funded partly by the state and partly by parents' fees; and municipalities in Chile would be responsible for running and funding

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<sup>39</sup> Alarcón Ferrari, C. (2007) The Student Movement in Chile During 2006 and Beyond: Reclaiming the right to education in a worldwide symbol of free market, neo-liberalism and capitalist hegemony. Proceedings of the 5th Critical Management Studies Conference, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK.

municipal schools. This latter category of schools – the municipal institutions – became highly unequal, as wealthy municipalities were able to (and still can) afford to fund their schools effectively, while poorer municipalities were (and are) forced to fund their schools with their often extremely limited resources.<sup>40</sup> As the government invested less in the education of its citizens and poorer municipalities were unable to properly maintain their curricula and facilities, the quality of public education worsened.

The neoliberal policies – based in the ideal of competition to increase quality – were now phasing out public schools, as those parents who could afford to, began sending their children to private or private subsidized secondary schools. A voucher system was initiated to aid families with sending their children to private institutions, leaving public schools to deteriorate in quality. In 1981, 78% of Chilean secondary students attended public schools, 15.1% attended subsidized private schools, and 6.9 percent attended private schools. In 2004, these figures had become: 49.4% enrolled in the public education system, 41.5% enrolled in subsidized private schools, and 7.7% enrolled in private schools.<sup>41</sup> Therefore by the time the 2006 precursor to the current movement arose, a significant change had already occurred: public education had rapidly declined in quality due to little state investment, and more students than ever were being privately-educated.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Matear, A. (2007). Equity in Education in Chile: The tensions between policy and practice. *International Journal of Educational Development*. Volume 27, Issue 1, pp. 101-113.

<sup>41</sup> La Crisis Educativa en Chile: Propuesta al debate ciudadano. *Bloque Social*. Santiago, Chile. 2006.

<sup>42</sup> Chovanec, D. & Benitez, A. (2008). The Penguin Revolution in Chile: Exploring intergenerational learning in social movements. *Journal of Contemporary Issues in Education*. Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 39-57

It is evident that LOCE's implementation – and therefore, the state – has prioritized providing quality education to those who can afford it rather than to all of Chile's citizens. "This model has conserved the privileges of dominant classes, increased segregation and caused inequality between a small elite and the majority of the population."<sup>43</sup> Under this system, education is a product whose quality depends on the amount the 'consumers' can pay for it. And it is evident that the state, through its implementation of such a system, is encouraging a society starkly divided by class, one in which the right to quality education and all the opportunities it affords are reserved for the dominant classes. This kind of state clearly determines the value of students based on their socioeconomic status, and chooses to invest in their education accordingly. This is illustrated plainly in the fact that the state spends ten times as much per student in high-income neighborhoods than it does for each lower-income student.<sup>44</sup>

Additionally, because private schools are permitted to select its students according to their own criteria, poorer students are often excluded to maintain prestige and educational standards. Due to less funding and more limited resources and opportunities most municipal school students have lower academic achievement than their counterparts in private schools, and are consequently underprepared for university.<sup>45</sup> Not only are students segregated by class due to discriminatory selection processes and exclusionary practices,<sup>46</sup> but they are also

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<sup>43</sup> Cabalin, C.

<sup>44</sup> Garreton, M.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Bellei, C., Valenzuela, J. P. & de los Rios, D. Segregacion Escolar en Chile. *Fin de Ciclo: Cambios en la gobernanza del sistema educativo*. Santiago: Universidad Catolica-UNESCO

inadequately prepared for higher education and future careers. In March 2006 a study called the *System of Measurement of Education Quality* showed clear evidence that the quality of education provided to students depended on their socioeconomic levels.<sup>47</sup> When lower-income students reach university age, therefore, they (and their parents) not only face the tremendous pressure of funding college, but they also find themselves at a disadvantage academically.

This structural disadvantage is evidenced by studies that have shown that 45% of secondary school students from the lowest quintile of Chilean society do not finish their secondary education. Only 4% of their peers from the top quintile of society leave school before finishing their secondary education. This means that the wealthiest Chilean students are twelve times as likely to finish high school because of structural inequalities present within the education system and the society in general. And when these students reach university age, 81% of the students from the wealthiest quintile pursue higher studies while only 13% of the lowest quintile do the same.<sup>48</sup> The level and quality of education received by Chilean students are directly proportional to the socioeconomic status of their families. The disparity in educational achievement transfers to the professional world as well, as salaries increase proportionally according to level of educational attainment.<sup>49</sup> It is evident that the current educational system in Chile perpetuates the socioeconomic inequalities that are historically present in the country. It

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<sup>47</sup> Silva Pinochet, B. La Revolucion Pinguina y el Cambio Cultural en Chile. Retrieved from: [http://www.archivochile.com/carril\\_c/cc2012/cc2012-062.pdf](http://www.archivochile.com/carril_c/cc2012/cc2012-062.pdf)

<sup>48</sup> Larranaga, O. Que Puede Esperarse de la Política en Chile? *Serie Documentos de Trabajo de Facultad Economía y Negocios de Universidad de Chile*. 2007. Retrieved from: <http://www.econ.uchile.cl/uploads/publicacion/54fa1185-0e98-41da-88cf-7f3bc83af6b6.pdf>

<sup>49</sup> Larranaga, O. & Valenzuela, J. (2011) Estabilidad en la Desigualdad: Chile 1990-2003. *Estudios de Economía*. Volume 38, No. 1, pp. 295-329.

deepens these inequalities and segregates students based on class. This leaves lower-income students with low-quality education and fewer opportunities, which in turn severely limits their job opportunities and therefore their social mobility. This cycle of inequality explains why Chilean students have so forcefully and passionately been demanding reforms to the sociopolitical structure that allows it to persist.

## **Section II. The History & Sociology of the Movement**

### **i. Why Now?: Timing**

#### *a. Revolución Pingüina*

If Latin America – and particularly Chile – is known to have a long tradition of economic and social inequality and if societal inequalities have manifested themselves in the educational system since the dictatorship, then what is it about the current period that brought about an organized student political movement? What about 2011 produced enough agitation and momentum to not only incite but sustain an education movement demanding equal access to quality education and calling for structural changes in the Chilean state and society? The timing is no coincidence. In order to understand the origins of the current movement, we must understand an earlier uprising that laid the foundation for today's fervor of political activity and proved to be one of the factors in its timing.

The *Revolución Pingüina* – which scholars point to as having sown the seeds for the current university movement – erupted in 2006, sixteen years after the termination of the dictatorship. Between 1990 and the eruption of the pingüino



effort there had been no organized, wide-spread political movement in Chile. This highlighted the significance of the mobilization.<sup>50</sup> The first generation of Chileans to be born after Pinochet's rule was in the throes of adolescence, and was becoming displeased with the state of affairs. Led primarily by students under the age of eighteen (though supported by educators as well as university students), the movement was impactful, impressive, but ultimately short-lived.

Termed the “Penguin Revolution” because of the black and white school uniforms worn by secondary students (they resembled penguins), this movement demanded reform in secondary education. These high school students called for the elimination of university admission test fees, but demands were rooted in a deeper historical context: they appealed for the abolition of the Pinochet-era LOCE policies and a quality education for all Chileans.<sup>51</sup> These students called for an end to the neoliberal policies and unequal social structure discussed previously.

When new university admission test fees were announced in early 2006 – yet another change in policy that would exclude sectors of the population from being able to afford a quality education – young students reacted forcefully and decidedly. On April 24, 2006, the pingüino movement officially began with the *Asamblea Coordinadora Estudiantes Secundarios (ACES)* – the Coordinating Assembly of Secondary Students – as organizer. The uprising “rapidly grew into a nationwide movement demanding quality education for all Chileans, irrespective of class, ability or spending power. Since Pinochet stood down sixteen years ago,

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<sup>50</sup> Silva Pinochet, B.

<sup>51</sup> Chovanec, D. & Benitez, A.

no other mass movement [had] so successfully challenged the legitimacy of the neo-liberal state the General left behind him.”<sup>52</sup>

The movement gained momentum especially after then-president Michelle Bachelet failed to address reform of the educational system in her annual address. Demonstrations occurred on the streets, and many schools were “en toma” or occupied, by students. With support from many teachers, university students, and some private school students, soon the number of mobilized secondary and university students reached between 600,000 and one million. Most schools were on strike.<sup>53</sup> Realizing the potency of the political effort, the government entered “negotiations” with student leaders, but its largely one-sided offers did not satisfy the young Chileans.<sup>54</sup> Strikes and demonstrations increased in scale, as the sixteen and seventeen-year old leaders of the movement disseminated details of protests through text messages, blogs, and internet forums. Scenes on the streets of Santiago became more dramatic as aggression from carabineros marred the largely peaceful demonstrations. Bachelet attempted to make more concessions to remedy the situation, offering improvements in facilities and infrastructure as well as slight modifications to LOCE. Though the more radical factions of the movement rejected these offers, some sectors of the student protesters accepted them as a victory, and the pingüino movement lost much of its momentum.<sup>55</sup>

This movement resulted in certain changes for Chile’s education system via the *Ley General de Educación* (General Law of Education), which was finally

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<sup>52</sup> Vogler, J. (2006) Chile: The rise of the penguin revolution. 21 June 2006. Retrieved from: <http://upsidedownworld.org/main/content/view/330/34>

<sup>53</sup> Chovanec, D. & Benitez, B.

<sup>54</sup> Silva Pinochet, B.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

signed into legislation after over two years of compromising between conservative and more liberal factions in Congress. These changes included: limits placed on private schools' ability to select students discriminately based on economics as well as higher academic standards for public schools to be recognized by the government.<sup>56</sup> Though the changes were not as sweeping as those the pingüinos had initially demanded, this movement proved impactful in the attention it garnered nationally as well as its demonstration that mass mobilization – even of young students – could effect change in Chilean governmental policies. This first movement since the end of the dictatorship, though it was short-lived, was significant not only in that it sent a clear message to the state that young people had demands for structural reforms, but also in that it showed the Chilean people the more active role student-citizens could play in the political sphere.

*b. The Election of Sebastian Piñera*

While it is true that the Revolución Pingüina set the foundation for the current student movement, why did the university movement begin when it did? According to what Melissa Sepúlveda – current President of the FECh and the most influential student voice currently involved in the movement – mentioned to me, one of the main reasons for the eruption of the student movement in 2011 was the election of Sebastian Piñera as president. From the end of the dictatorship in 1990 until the election of Piñera, Chile had been governed by the *Concertación*, a

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<sup>56</sup> Establece la Ley General de Educacion. Ley Num. 20.730. *Biblioteca del Congreso Nacional de Chile*. Retrieved from: [http://www.mineduc.cl/usuarios/convivencia\\_escolar/doc/201103050142570.Ley\\_N\\_20370\\_Ley\\_General\\_de\\_Educacion.pdf](http://www.mineduc.cl/usuarios/convivencia_escolar/doc/201103050142570.Ley_N_20370_Ley_General_de_Educacion.pdf)

group of left-of-center political parties that had joined together to lead the transition from dictatorship to democracy.<sup>57</sup> Aware of the fragile nature of Chile's democracy in 1990 and afraid of the possibility of entering another period of political repression, the Concertación took over responsibilities for rebuilding Chile. Each of the presidents between 1990 and 2010 were candidates put forth by the Concertación, and when Piñera – a figure from the right – was elected, the political climate changed suddenly.

Though the Concertación had by and large continued many of the policies from the Pinochet era, their time at the helm of the Chilean government was, for many, a period of necessary transition from the dictatorship. When the conservative sector of the government regained control in 2010, many Chileans feared the potential consequences. As Melissa explained to me, “The Concertación deepened the neoliberal policies of the dictatorship, but under a tutelary democracy. This was felt and denounced by the Chilean left, but it was not enough to awaken a social movement. It was the arrival of the right – through Sebastian Piñera and his wave of privatizations – that made evident the neoliberal economic policy and caused students to rise up against it.”

Piñera – Chile's first billionaire leader – is a businessman with strong ties to the private sector and a strong proponent of neoliberal economics. Additionally, the man he appointed as Education Minister, Joaquín Lavín, not only owns a private university, but was also one of Pinochet's Chicago Boys. It

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<sup>57</sup> Mardones Zuñiga, R. Descentralización y Transición en Chile. *Revista de Ciencia Política*. Vol. 26, No. 1, pp. 3-24. 2006. Retrieved from: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4067/S0718-090X20060010100001>

was very clear that this administration's policies would be closely tied to that of Pinochet's government, and for many of the country's people – especially its young and educated citizens – this prospect was too dangerous to ignore.<sup>58</sup> Thus it was no coincidence that the education movement arose when it did. The previous secondary student uprising had set the stage, and the election of Piñera provided the political catalyst needed for university students to mobilize. Another factor – a generational one – is equally important to examine, however.

*c. The Post-Pinochet Generation*

By 2011, most of the participants of the *Revolución Pingüina* were university students. The precedent set by the 2006 uprising and the political drama caused by the loss of control of the *Concertación* were not the only reasons for the timing of the current movement. There was another factor at play – a generational difference. The many individuals who comprise this movement are primarily in their early twenties. They were born either at the end of Pinochet's regime – by which time he had lost much of the authoritative influence and repressive tactics he had once enjoyed and employed – or after democracy had been returned to Chile. They, unlike their parents, did not grow up in a Chile where rebelling against the government or speaking out against social norms could very possibly result in torture or death. They were not raised during a time when even hairstyles and clothing were regulated by the military government. They, therefore, did not have ingrained in them the same fear of authority figures and especially of the state as their parents did. If anything, they were raised with

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<sup>58</sup> Cabalin, C.

quiet remembrances and anecdotes from the dictatorship era from their families. They were removed from the climate of the era, but were aware of the horrors of the time. In 2006 during the pingüino revolt a sign on an occupied high school building read: “We are the generation that was born without fear.”<sup>59</sup>

As these young people were coming of age, they not only began to recognize the injustices present in Chile, but they were raised during a period of increased democratic opportunity, when civic institutions were strengthening and the people’s ability to participate in government and politics – which had been stripped away by the dictatorship – was returning. With increased confidence that political activity could influence the direction of the state and armed with information and a rebellious mentality that had been dangerous for their parents under Pinochet, these university students did not hesitate in reacting with indignation and calls for structural reform.<sup>60</sup> When I asked my friend Fernanda Campos – a 19-year old student participant whom I met while in Chile – why she thinks the movement arose when it did, she remarked, “Before our generation it was the generation of the sons and daughters of the dictatorship. They grew up being told not to get involved in politics... We were the ones who felt like we had the power to do things. With all the media – we saw what the world had and thought, ‘why can’t we do these things?’ We felt powerful, we saw the world changing, and we felt we could do it too.”

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<sup>59</sup> Somma, N. (2012). The Chilean Student Movement of 2011-2012: Challenging the marketization of education. *Interface*. Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 296-309 Retrieved from: <http://www.interfacejournal.net/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Interface-4-2-Somma.pdf>

<sup>60</sup> Salinas, D. & Fraser, P. (2012). Educational Opportunity and Contentious Politics: The 2011 Chilean Student Movement. *Berkeley Review of Education*. Volume 3, Issue 1, pp. 17-47. 2012. Retrieved from: <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/60g9j416#page-1>

Education policy scholars Daniel Salinas and Pablo Fraser have written regarding the factors that caused the education movement:

In addition to...recent changes in the government administration's political affiliation, the process of democratization over the last decade provided a context of long-term political transformation, which created new opportunities for social movements in Chile...Student action announced the arrival of a new generation, acquainted with the long-term opportunities opened after two decades of democratization and the new human and organizational resources available as a result of the social and economic development of the country in the last decades.<sup>61</sup>

It was not merely the presence of segregationist, unequal educational policies and the fear of conservative reclamation of the government that mobilized university students, but also the fact that their generation possesses democratic freedoms and access to resources their parents did not enjoy. But even with these circumstances, a university student movement for education reform would not have been as influential and widely-supported as it is without the long tradition of student political mobilization in Chile.

d. *A Tradition of Student Mobilization in Chile*

Though the current education movement is the most important and influential political movement that has occurred since the dictatorship, student mobilization and involvement in national politics are certainly no stranger to Chile. University student federations have been at the forefront of participatory

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<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

politics since their inception. As Latin American scholar Frank Bonilla wrote as early as 1960, “Student organizations seem to have a permanent and institutionalized place in Latin American society.”<sup>62</sup> This statement remains accurate today, including in Chile. FECh, the most powerful student organization, is an example of the significance of student participation in politics in the history of Chile.

At the time of its inception in 1906 with the support of the Radical Party, FECh aimed not only to serve as a representative voice for the political and social needs of its students, but to also mobilize in favor of the working class and Chile’s dispossessed population – those who had traditionally been excluded from the realm of higher education. Throughout its century-long history, FECh (and the student federations that came after it) has involved itself in issues concerning not only students, but all sections of the larger Chilean society. As FECh solidified as a political organization in the 1920s, it established its ideological opposition to imperialism and the bourgeoisie in favor of the working class’ struggle, remaining wary of capitalist endeavors that may harm Chilean society.<sup>63</sup> This continues to be evident today, as the student movement under the leadership of FECh proclaims its opposition to neoliberalism in the educational system and in Chilean society in general.

From its early days, FECh has notably been closely linked to the political and social efforts of the working class. It has therefore mobilized periodically during the last century when the rights of traditionally voiceless Chileans have

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<sup>62</sup> Bonilla, F. (1960). The Chilean Student Federation. *Journal of Inter-American Studies*. Vol. 2, pp. 313-330.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*



been threatened. Student mobilization has had considerable impact on national politics, for example in 1931 when university students' alliance with workers led to the removal of President Carlos Ibáñez del Campo.<sup>64</sup> Since then, and especially in the 1960s, student-activists mobilized regularly, demanding educational reforms that would improve quality and widen access to all sectors of the population, eliminating the elitist nature of higher education.

“Students have been a force for progress within the university; their dedication to democratic ideals, their readiness to protect injustice, and their resistance to political repression have helped keep Chile politically moderate,” according to Bonilla. More so than in the United States, Latin America has a history of student involvement in national politics, with university federations wielding great influence in the political realm. As a spokesman for a student federation stated more than fifty years ago, “In our judgment it is not possible to speak about university reform without assuming some fundamental transformation in the nation... We do not look at the problems of the university as isolated from national problems.”<sup>65</sup> This history of student-activists' influential role in Chilean politics and society makes it easy to see why students in 2011 decided to not only confront the issue of educational inequality, but also structural inequalities present in the larger society. Recognizing the injustices present in their society, university students thought it only natural to seek changes through mass mobilization, drawing from a long history of student participation in politics.

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

Having established the factors that contributed to the student uprising occurring in 2011, I now move on to movement itself, focusing on the events of the last three years as well as the nature of the political effort.

## ii. A Brief Timeline of the Movement

In early 2011, one year after Sebastian Piñera's election, his administration announced an increase in government funding for private universities as well as reallocations within scholarship programs. Given the political and historical context already discussed, CONFECH – the umbrella organization representing all student federations in Chile – decided to begin protests in April. On April 28 the first national protest of the 2011 uprising took place; against the privatization of education, it demanded an educational system that would be accessible for all Chileans. Throughout the month of May large street demonstrations, strikes, and university occupations continued, with several hundred thousand students mobilized. Quickly the faces of the movement became Camila Vallejo and Giorgio Jackson, then-presidents of the University of Chile and the Catholic University's student federations, respectively. The rapidly-growing movement officially allied itself with *Central Unitaria de Trabajadores*, a workers' union also demanding access to quality education for all.<sup>66</sup>

Demonstrations began to spread throughout the country, with planned days of protests being observed in all of Chile's large cities. The association of primary and secondary school teachers also officially joined the movement

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<sup>66</sup> "Cronología del movimiento por la educación pública en Chile". *Internacional de la Educación para América Latina*.

(secondary students also joined, with 600 schools already occupied) and before long it was evident that this new wave of protests demanded attention and held much influence.<sup>67</sup> Realizing the growing potential of this movement, the Ministry of Education made a proposal that included: the revitalization of university education through more financial investment and more direct monetary support of public institutions. Demanding a structural change rather than a “band-aid plan” that would have a limited, short-term impact on education, the leadership of the movement denied the offer. By July the mobilization of university students, teachers, high school students, and workers had only grown. With anti-government pressure increasing and calls for significant changes within the Ministry of Education, in July Piñera removed Lavín as Minister. This was regarded as a significant victory for the students, whose organized mobilization had caused a shakeup in government.<sup>68</sup>

By August the student movement was at its most powerful: the government had offered yet another reform proposal which – though the language implied certain structural changes in the educational system – was rejected by the movement on the basis that it still regarded education as a commodity rather than a right.<sup>69</sup> More schools and universities were being occupied by the day, and street demonstrations were growing in size; several strikes toward the end of the month involved upwards of 500,000 people, with one involving close to one

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<sup>67</sup> Pousadela, I. (2013). Protest and Proposal, Participation and Representation: The Chilean student movement, 2011-2012. *Development in Practice*. Volume 23, No. 5-6, pp. 685-700. Retrieved from: [http://www.academia.edu/5893120/\\_Protest\\_and\\_proposal\\_participation\\_and\\_representation\\_the\\_Chilean\\_student\\_movement\\_2011-12\\_](http://www.academia.edu/5893120/_Protest_and_proposal_participation_and_representation_the_Chilean_student_movement_2011-12_)

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> Jobin-Leeds, G. (2011). History of the Current Chilean Student Movement. *Education Week*. 2 December 2011. Retrieved from: [http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/democracy\\_and\\_education/2011/12/history\\_of\\_the\\_current\\_chilean\\_student\\_movement.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/democracy_and_education/2011/12/history_of_the_current_chilean_student_movement.html)

million people demonstrating in the streets.<sup>70</sup> By this point, thousands had been arrested during demonstrations and the government had already begun using aggressive tactics against protesters, and vandalism by participants began to be an issue especially in the large demonstrations. The day after a teenager was killed by a stray bullet from a passing police car, President Piñera sat down with a group of movement leaders, teachers, and deans. He proposed beginning negotiations, and the movement leaders rejected this, claiming the terms of negotiation were unfavorable to them.<sup>71</sup>

Upon August's end, the most feverish period of the student movement was over. This period between May and August has been called *The Chilean Winter*, in reference to the Arab Spring that had caught the world's attention earlier in the year.<sup>72</sup> At this time approximately 85% of the Chilean people supported the student movement, the highest approval rate it has had since its eruption. Over the next several months tougher laws were enacted to penalize anyone who started an occupation or incited a riot. The usage of water cannons and tear gas to control demonstrations became more common and more aggressive. As the start of a new semester neared, universities held referendums to determine whether they would continue striking or allow classes to resume while maintaining schedules that allowed for demonstrations. While some universities continued their strikes, most decided that since the movement would require long-term commitment, it was best to simultaneously keep up with their education and sustain the movement. By

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<sup>70</sup> Pousadela, I.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> Long, G. (2011). Chile's Student Protests Show Little Sign of Abating. *BBC News*. 24 October 2011. Retrieved from: [www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-15431829](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-15431829)

September President Pinera's approve rate was at 22%. A plebiscite in October showed that 87% of Chileans favored free education for all and an end to profit in education.<sup>73</sup>

The rest of 2011 consisted of more occupations, marches, strikes, and stationary protests. Though the initial frenzy of the uprising decreased to an extent after 2011, by no means did the momentum of the movement die out. Between the end of 2011 and the time I was in Chile (February-July 2013), periodic marches and occupations showed Chileans and especially the government that unlike the pingüino revolt, this movement had long-term promise. Negotiations continued with the government and though as of the date of this writing no offers have satisfied the demands of the students, the legitimacy of the movement has been established. The unpopularity of the president was to a large extent attributable to the movement, and its constant presence in the media – whether negative or positive – has solidified the students' efforts as worthy of attention. Having given a general timeline of the movement's uprising, I will move on now to a more thorough examination of the characteristics of the movement itself.

### **iii. Who are the Participants?**

At the beginning stage of this current movement, the majority of participants taking to the streets and occupying their universities were students attending relatively prestigious institutions – generally middle class students who were no longer willing to accept the inequalities present in Chilean society. They

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<sup>73</sup> Vera, S. (2011). Cronología del Conflicto: El movimiento estudiantil en Chile, 2011. Retrieved from: <http://revistes.ub.edu/index.php/ACS/article/viewFile/6251/7997>

were not part of the exclusive sector of society, but they had access to higher education. Educated, politically and socially aware, and determined, these students began their endeavor to reform policies in Chile in order to change the entrenched inequalities present in society. As these students began to gather support and extend their reach, students from smaller, less prestigious, private universities joined the movement. During this wave, secondary students – primarily from public schools but to a lesser degree private school students as well – joined, as did students from technical schools.<sup>74</sup>

It was not just students who became an integral component of this movement, however. Following the leadership of university students, unionized workers also joined forces.<sup>75</sup> This alliance has proven to be vital. As I have mentioned, throughout the history of Chile the collaboration and cooperation of university students and workers has been crucial in the realm of national politics. It has toppled governments. This partnership involves diverse sectors of the population, which lends credibility to the movement and strengthens its forces during negotiations with the government. Among these unionized workers are secondary school teachers, who provide a reliable source of support for the objective of quality, universal education. Also among the ranks of participants are unionized mine workers. As the leading nation in copper exports, Chile relies heavily on its miners, and their participant in the education movement has proved extremely beneficial. While miners have their own set of requests from the state, they share the students' dissatisfaction with the inequalities promoted by

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<sup>74</sup> Somma, N.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

neoliberal policies, which have also manifested themselves in the mining industry.<sup>76</sup>

Another group of participants in this movement has been environmental activists. Given Chile's unique geography and wealth of natural resources, there are many concerns about the environmental future of the country. This group's efforts have been largely ignored by most Chileans, however, especially those in the capital. This is the case because Santiago is far removed from the extreme North and South of the country, where the majority of endangered areas are. Therefore, by allying themselves with the student movement, environmental activists have gained exposure in a way they otherwise could not have. They share the students' disapproval of neoliberal policies, as these have hindered the conservation of Chile's natural resources.<sup>77</sup> They therefore demand reforms to the political and economic systems that have been implemented at too high a social cost.

Along with these groups, however, another, more controversial group has joined the ranks of participants more recently. Called the *encapuchados* or "hooded ones", these are normally young men whose faces are covered by hoods, bandanas, and sometimes masks. Though they are not part of any official group, they are usually from lower-income neighborhoods and have coopted marches for their own, at times violent, ends. Some of the *encapuchados* refer to themselves as anarchists, leaving anarchist graffiti on walls, setting bus stops on fire, throwing

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<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

glass and rocks at carabineros, and generally inciting scenes of chaos.<sup>78</sup> While their tactics are often destructive, they do raise valid questions about the state's treatment of their communities – usually the poorest sector of Chile. Though not an official part of this movement, encapuchados have demanded attention through their often scene-stealing actions and have compelled movement leaders to respond. The movement has attempted to distance itself from this group – due to the national reputation of the encapuchados, claiming they are not part of their ranks. This distancing has been an effort to retain the legitimacy of the movement, which leaders fear would be lost if support were shown for the group, which is generally looked upon unfavorably by the masses. Meanwhile the government has used the encapuchados as examples of the student movement's radical nature, associating their extreme, sometimes violent methods with the demands of the student movement.<sup>79</sup>

It is evident that while this is primarily a university student movement and that it deals with education, there are various (at times problematic) sectors involved. Younger students, educators, and groups uninvolved with the education sphere have contributed to its momentum and successes. Encapuchados, on the other hand, have harmed the reputation of the movement. Regardless, the sentiment that reform is necessary in Chile has permeated through the various parts of Chilean society. Not only young people, but parents and even grandparents have contributed to the movement over the last two years.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Long, G. (2013). Unmasking Chile's Hooded Protest Movement. *BBC News*. 21 May 2013. Retrieved from: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-22565124>

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> Somma, N.



Injustices in education affect all parts of a population, and this is visible in the sheer diversity present at demonstrations. While this is primarily a middle and working class student movement, it has mobilized many segments of the population and expanded the focus from education to the inequality in Chilean society at large.

#### **iv. The Movement's Organizational Structure & Tools of Mobilization**

With so many diverse groups comprising the movement, there is no question that its leadership and organization must be efficient and effective in order to impact politics and the society at large. While input from the various factions within the movement is taken into consideration, it is the heart of the efforts – the university students – which provides the overall leadership. As mentioned, CONFECH officially represents all university students in Chile and therefore is responsible for communications with the government. It is FECh and FEUC (the student federation of the Catholic University) which play leadership roles in all the movement's actions, thereby acting as its voices. What has made the organization and leadership of this movement successful enough for it to have lasted several years are the level of democracy present in decision-making and the utilization of horizontal leadership.<sup>81</sup>

Because much of what these student organizations challenge are undemocratic practices, there is special emphasis on the democratic structuring of the movement's leadership. Leaders like Melissa Sepúlveda consider themselves

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<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

to be more akin to spokespeople rather than top decision-makers. As I will share more in depth later in this study, Melissa explained to me in our exchanges that her greatest responsibility is ensuring that the wishes of the students she represents are carried out, and that all decisions that are made are in the best interest of the Chilean people. This focus on representative democracy strengthens the effectiveness of the movement and contributes to the high level of support the movement receives from Chileans.<sup>82</sup>

In regards to how decisions are made within this movement in a representative, democratic manner, it is the use of horizontal – or shared – leadership. This involves the wide distribution of leadership functions and therefore avoids an overtly hierarchical structure.<sup>83</sup> Instead of making decisions on mobilization efforts and political actions in a top-down manner, the various universities, campuses, and even departments are all involved. Each department within each participating university has its designated leaders who are responsible for collecting input and feedback from students, and concerns or proposals are discussed in meetings among leaders. Instead of passing decisions down a chain of command, ideas and initiatives are collectively discussed and brought forth from the grassroots level.<sup>84</sup>

Campus referendums and student representative meetings are commonplace and are tools used by the movement to organize and mobilize. Nearly every week on my way to class at one of the campuses of the University of

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<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> Bolden, R. (2011), Distributed Leadership in Organizations: A Review of Theory and Research. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 13: 251–269.

<sup>84</sup> Somma, N.

Chile, I saw ballot boxes set up. Students would pass by and submit their votes of ‘yes’ or ‘no’ regarding whether they should strike or continue with classes that week. Periodic meetings also permit the university student leaders to update one another on the goings-on of their respective departments, campuses, and universities and reach decisions accordingly. I sat in on a FECh meeting and watched as student representatives from the various University of Chile academic departments shared the progress they had made in their respective departments. They updated their peers on the concerns of their constituents and the ideas that had come forth since the previous meeting. I listened, impressed, to the discussions that were both urgent and impassioned but also punctuated with humor. Such tools of organization allow the movement to not only function efficiently, but to also satisfy the majority of students who participate.

Once decisions are reached, planned actions are disseminated largely through the use of technological tools. Twitter is a highly-utilized platform for “both organization and information diffusion.”<sup>85</sup> I personally follow the following Twitter accounts related to the student movement: FECh’s, FEUC’s, the page of the University of Santiago’s student federation, a page that shares information and updates about issues surrounding the movement, one which disseminates information for movement activities and events, CONFECH’s page, and Melissa Sepúlveda’s page. Each day these accounts keep me up-to-date on the goings-on of the movement, as well as relevant commentary, debates, statements from

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<sup>85</sup> Barahona, M., Garcia, C., Gloor, P., & Parraguez, P. (2012). Tracking the 2011 Student-Led Movement in Chile Through Social Media Use. Retrieved from: <http://arxiv.org/ftp/arxiv/papers/1204/1204.3939.pdf>

government officials, etc. According to a study of social media usage in this movement, “the Twitter usage has been very effective, especially at the moment of coordinating the marches and other kinds of manifestations.”<sup>86</sup> The use of Twitter and other platforms such as Facebook allow for participants and all interested parties to remain informed about the movement’s activities and serves as a vital tool of communication and mobilization.

At a time when access to the internet via computers and smart phones is so widespread, these technological tools of organization and mobilization prove to be highly effective. Given that Chile has the “fourth-highest usage of Twitter per person in the world” and that 80% of Chileans under the age of thirty use Facebook, organization and mobilization are easily done using technology.<sup>87</sup> These platforms along with smart phone applications and text messages ensure that the student participants are constantly up-to-date and can react and adjust quickly if any changes arise in planned actions.<sup>88</sup> Thus the use of technology has become the primary method of communicating with and mobilizing students and other groups of participants. “This collective student-based movement has, in fact, infected both the political and media systems by mobilizing resources, information and people across the public sphere, combining the digital and physical world.”<sup>89</sup>

## **v. The Use of Space & Methods of Demonstration**

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<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> Progress and its Discontents: Chile. *The Economist*. 14 April 2012.

<sup>88</sup> Rheingold, H. (2002). *The Smart Mobs: The next social revolution transforming cultures and communities in the age of instant access*. Cambridge: Perseus Book Group.

<sup>89</sup> Barahona, M., et al.

a. *Las Calles Como Un Escenario Para la Democracia: The Streets as a Stage for Democracy*

In examining the student movement, one of the crucial aspects to consider are the spaces in which the movement occurs. Both through my extensive research on this movement as well as the reality I witnessed whilst in Chile, the importance of public space within the context of this political effort became exceedingly clear. “Public space” is defined as space that is accessible and generally open to the public, and within the study of social movements has become a vital tool of collective action and political activity.<sup>90</sup> Streets – notably in urban areas – are a public space that is instrumental in participatory political action. Chile has a long history of mobilization on the streets. As mentioned, in times of political contention and economic difficulty during Allende’s administration, there were mass demonstrations – with much of Chile’s poorer class represented – on the streets. The streets were a space for making demands of the government.

Public space, however, can be a “space of representation but also of conflict”, according to the University of Chile’s *Center of Studies in Citizen Security*.<sup>91</sup> During the worst era of the dictatorship, public space acquired such a connotation. It lost its essence as an “open space for and of the active citizenry.”<sup>92</sup> The ability of people to assemble and protest on the streets during the 1970s under

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<sup>90</sup> Neal, Z. (2009). Seeking Common Ground: three perspectives on public space. *Urban Design and Planning*. pp. 1-8

<sup>91</sup> Dammert, L., Karmy, R., & Manzano, L. Ciudadania, Espacio Publico, y Temor en Chile. *Centro de Estudios en Seguridad Ciudadania de la Universidad de Chile*. Retrieved from: [http://www.cesc.uchile.cl/publicaciones/se\\_10\\_ciudadania.pdf](http://www.cesc.uchile.cl/publicaciones/se_10_ciudadania.pdf)

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

Pinochet was all but impossible. Chileans who were “suspected” of anti-government sentiments or of being Allende sympathizers were snatched from the streets in broad daylight. The street became a dangerous space, one where citizens were grabbed and loaded onto unmarked vans and taken to makeshift torture centers, often never to be seen again. As this was happening to citizens who were merely walking on the streets on the way to work or university, it was evident that any attempts at political assembly or protest were at the risk of death. It was also a common occurrence for corpses of anti-government agitators to be left on the streets as ‘examples’, as was done with Victor Jara, beloved folk singer and vocal opponent of Pinochet.<sup>93</sup> Thus during the first decade of Pinochet’s Chile, public space, notably streets, lost their democratic and collective nature, and became associated with repression, violence, and authoritarianism.

In the early and mid-1980s however, as domestic economic downturn weakened Pinochet’s hold and international outcries against the regime invigorated the opposition, opportunities emerged to reclaim the streets as a tool of democratic activity. Because the still-repressive state greatly limited the effectiveness of tools such as the ballot and civil society institutions – and also heavily censored media opposition – Chileans knew that taking to the streets was their most powerful option.<sup>94</sup> They took their chance by implementing national days of protest during which diverse sectors of the population – laborers, students, middle class dissidents – marched on the streets. Though the catalyst of these

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<sup>93</sup> Paredes, M. (Course: *Dictatorships, Human Rights, and Historical Memory in Chile and the Southern Cone*)

<sup>94</sup> De la Maza, G. (2003). *Sociedad Civil y Democracia en Chile*. Retrieved from: [http://www.socialismo-chileno.org/apsjb/2003/Paper\\_03.pdf](http://www.socialismo-chileno.org/apsjb/2003/Paper_03.pdf)

protests was the economic downturn that negatively affected the majority of Chileans, the demonstrations were of a political nature, with participants demanding not only economic reform, but also Pinochet's resignation. These regularly planned and organized demonstrations did not succeed in changing government policies or removing Pinochet, but they revealed to the regime – and to the international community – that a new political climate had been initiated in Chile, one which allowed for more political action and oppositional activity.

Though the tradition of the utilization of public space – namely the street – had existed in Chile long before the dictatorship, the mid-1980s solidified this tool as an effective way to influence the state and amass support from various sectors of society when other measures became impractical or fruitless. The street was reclaimed as a place of “identification [between citizens], of contact between people, of urban activity, and...of communal expression”.<sup>95</sup> It is then not surprising within this historical context that in 2006 and especially in 2011 – when a generation of post-dictatorship youth were coming of age and understanding the inequalities present in Chilean society and there existed a national anxiety about the election of a conservative to the presidency – that the streets were the obvious choice for engaging in political activity.

FECh President Melissa Sepulveda described to me her thoughts on the effectiveness of demonstrating on the streets: “The marches are successful as they show to the government and the people the amount of people willing to take to the streets to demand their rights...the marches – the occupation of the streets and public spaces and buildings – they are a historical tradition in the Chilean

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<sup>95</sup> Dammert, L., et al

people's social struggles." During my time in Chile this quickly became evident to me as every week or two the main streets of Santiago would be taken over by hundreds of thousands of mostly young demonstrators. These streets – particularly the largest thoroughfare in Santiago, La Alameda – are strategically-chosen to not only allow for the most space for assembly, but to also attract the most attention. Like Melissa mentioned, these students aim to attract the attention of both the government as well as the rest of the populace. Additionally, the fact that the mass of demonstrators usually marches from one point to another – at times from several starting points reaching a single terminus – rather than naming a stationery meeting point, ensures that as much attention and visibility as possible are garnered.

*b. Collective Action on Campus: The Use of University Space*

The education movement's organizers and participants utilize semi-public and private space as well as public space. The university campus is also a vital tool that is used to engage in political activity and collective action. The main form of political action done on campuses are *tomas* or occupations. These will involve groups of students or a specific department (or sometimes an entire student body) going on strike from attending classes and occupying university space. Occupations can last days, weeks, or even months.

Though there are limitations on the level of assembly allowed on campuses, these locations are vital for gathering support and preparing for marches. During my time in Chile both campuses at which I had classes – one



belonging to the University of Chile and the other to the Catholic University of Chile – were hubs of political activity. From referendums being held in academic buildings to students making banners for marches in the open space between buildings, it was evident that these campuses were important aspects of the movement. Many walls on these campuses were covered in messages and artwork that called for free, quality education and an end to university profits. Campuses are also utilized for debates, student leadership meetings, lecturers discussing issues relevant to the movement, etc.

c. *Las Plazas: A Center of Political Activity*

The streets and university campuses, however, are not the only stages for demonstration in this movement. Another of the primary spaces utilized by the university students demanding educational and structural reforms in Chile is a cornerstone of Latin American cities: the plaza. Found throughout *el mundo hispanohablante* – the Spanish-speaking world – the plaza traditionally functions as the cultural, civic, and social heart of an urban area, and often serves as a bridge between neighborhoods of vastly different socioeconomic strata. Usually encircled by a large church; the seat of local administration; and sometimes, a court, the plaza has historically been at the heart of a city, around which neighborhoods arise and communities are built.<sup>96</sup> Even today, people in this region and specifically in Chile visit their nearest plaza to meet friends, attend mass, pass their lunch break, or merely people-watch. As Santiago is an expansive

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<sup>96</sup> Rosenthal, A. (2000). Spectacle, Fear, and Protest: A guide to the history of urban public space in Latin America. *Social Science History*. Volume 24, Number 1, pp. 33-73. Retrieved from: [http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/social\\_science\\_history/v024/24.1rosenthal.html](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/social_science_history/v024/24.1rosenthal.html)

city, each neighborhood has at least one central plaza, with the most well-known being Plaza Baquedano – known to Santiaguinos as Plaza Italia – and Plaza de Armas, the “zero mile” point of Santiago.

These plazas are not only cultural and social centers, but also hubs of mass gatherings and political activity. Plazas are the meeting places for people to celebrate an important athletic victory or protest a governmental policy. This has been evidenced in the region by the long-time usage of plazas for political action, notably the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires, which has been the scene of countless political demonstrations and uprisings. Plazas have served this purpose in Santiago as well, with the aforementioned two plazas being the main locations for large protests against the government. Many of the demonstrations that took place during Allende’s administration due to economic hardships occurred there, and in the 1980s they were the scene of protests against economic policies and Pinochet’s regime.<sup>97</sup> The current education movement utilizes these spaces in their collective actions against the existing political and societal structures of Chile as well.

The two central plazas normally serve as starting points for large demonstrations, with the masses of student protesters and their political allies converging on the location and beginning their march outward along main streets. Additionally, smaller protests such as cacerolazos usually take place entirely in these plazas. These stationery demonstrations occur in plazas firstly because they attract the most attention and visibility, just like the street marches, and also

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<sup>97</sup> Paredes, M.

because they evoke historical memories of previous Chilean uprisings, thereby providing a connection between these sociopolitical movements.

Cacerolazos are one of the characteristics of this movement that make it uniquely Chilean. These are public protests in which people bang pots and pans to make noise and display their disapproval or anger. They originated in Chile in 1971 during Salvador Allende's administration as economic conditions worsened and food shortages meant many poor Chileans did not have sufficient nourishment. Symbolizing their "empty pots" and their anger, protesters – notably, they were mostly female protesters – took to the streets and created as much noise as possible. These protests were convenient as people could participate just in front of their homes or in preordained central meeting places. Groups of protesters would usually decide on a specific time for the demonstration, seeking to attract the most attention and publicity as possible.<sup>98</sup>

Since the early 1970s, cacerolazos have spread to other countries across Latin America, including Uruguay, Argentina, and Venezuela, and more recently, to places such as Canada and Spain.<sup>99</sup> There are scant records of these protests during Pinochet's dictatorship due to the overwhelming censorship of the media present during the period. However, there is proof of some cacerolazos especially during the early 1980s. These anti-regime demonstrations occurred on pre-planned days of protest that were organized through flyers and word of mouth. On

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<sup>98</sup> Pousadela, Ines. Student Protest, Social Mobilization, and Political Representation in Chile. *Civil Society at a Crossroads*. Retrieved from: [http://paperroom.ipsa.org/papers/paper\\_11698.pdf](http://paperroom.ipsa.org/papers/paper_11698.pdf)

<sup>99</sup> Schneider, L. (2012). Argentina: Vuelve el cacerolazos como protest social. *Global Voices*. 1 June 2012. Retrieved from: <http://es.globalvoicesonline.org/2012/06/01/argentina-vuelve-el-cacerolazo-como-protesta-social/>

these “jornadas de protesta nacional”, groups of protesters would gather – usually in plazas – and make as much noise as possible, demanding the attention and the response of the state.<sup>100</sup>

Today the student movement utilizes the history of these protests in plazas. In this way the protest methods and places utilized at crucial moments in Chilean history are reused and recreated to mobilize students and Chileans in general in the present day. Toward the end of my time in Chile, there was a particularly violent and unexpected crackdown of a student occupation at one of the campuses of the University of Chile. A group of students were occupying the location peacefully when carabineros entered the building – without authorization from the university – and began to forcefully remove students. They threw tear gas in the enclosed space as students struggled to exit among the chaos, and by the end of the incident almost two dozen had been detained. The president of the university shortly released a statement on his condemnation of the carabineros’ forced entry and their breaking of “a tradition of respect to the institution.”<sup>101</sup> Students also responded with an outcry of indignation and the leadership of the movement called for cacerolazos to take place.

That evening across Santiago university students and other supporters of the movement took to plazas with pots and pans, making as much noise as possible. Displaying their anger through their choice of protest method, the participants of this movement reminded Chileans of the injustices rampant during the dictatorship, many of which are still present today. Just as Chileans in the

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<sup>100</sup> Pousadela, I.

<sup>101</sup> Rector de la U. de Chile: “Es inaceptable lo que ha hecho carabineros en la casa central” *El Mostrador*. 13 June 2013.

mid-1980s would bang pots and pans in Santiago's plazas to protest the injustices of the time, so too do the student-citizens of today. It is clear to see that not only are there remnants of dictatorship-era violations of social rights still present in Chile today, but that the methods of fighting against them also persist.

### **Section III: Profiles –Two Student Perspectives**

#### **i. Melissa Sepúlveda**

Melissa Sepúlveda is a 23-year old student at the University of Chile studying Medicine. She is originally from Concepción, the third largest urban area in the country situated roughly 300 miles from Santiago. In 2010 she left her family behind and moved to the capital to attend university. Though Melissa and I have never met, we have corresponded through email regarding her role in and perspectives on the student movement. She is currently the single most influential leader of and voice for the movement as President of the Student Federation of the University of Chile. Elected in 2013, Melissa is the third female leader in the history of FECh and a militant in the *Frente de Estudiantes Libertarios*, the leftist Libertarian Students Front. A self-defined feminist and anarchist Melissa is an intriguing figure and an integral component of the education movement.

Melissa explained to me that when she started attending the University of Chile, she became politically involved with a political organization within the Department of Medicine. This group worked on issues related to education and its link to health. During her involvement with this organization, the “university and its students were still feeling the defeat suffered by the student movement in 2006

at the hands of the government.” Melissa’s involvement with the group introduced her to students who were militants in the Libertarian Students Front. Discussions with them about the political structure of Chile, personal reflections on education policies, and the fact that Chile was experiencing a crucial moment in regards to political and social reform led her to join the Front. Once a member, she rose within the ranks and by 2013 had decided to utilize her experience with the Front and her now solidified beliefs on the politics at hand by running for the FECh presidency. Her election makes her the first anarchist president of the FECh since the 1920s.<sup>102</sup>

Curious to know about her perspectives on the student movement of which she is now the voice, I began by asking her what its official demands are. With the presence of so many student federations, the government has claimed that the student movement has no clear, agreed-upon demands. I therefore wanted to know the specific demands from the source most fit to vocalize them. She listed the following: “education that is free, public, secular, non-sexist, intercultural, and of quality at all levels; an end to profiteering from education at all levels; the demunicipalization of primary and secondary education; the elimination of constitutional organic laws that impede the organization of students on university campuses; an end to university selection tests; and state-run professional institutes and centers of technical training.”

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<sup>102</sup> Ahumada, R. (2014). Como Melissa Sepulveda dejo de ser una nina evangelica y se convirti6 en la presidenta anarquista de la fech. *The Clinic*. 27 February 2014. Retrieved from: <http://www.theclinic.cl/2014/02/27/como-melissa-sepulveda-dejo-de-ser-una-nina-evangelica-y-se-convirtio-en-la-presidenta-anarquista-de-la-fech/>

Though the official demands of the movement all regard education, I asked Melissa if she believes the movement is strictly about educational reform or if it deals with larger issues within Chilean politics and society. She explained to me that the current movement is a continuation of a conflict between students and the state that has existed for many years in Chile, and that historically students have led social movements in the country. She told me that while the current political efforts' primary aim is to achieve free, quality education at all levels; transform the view of education as a commodity to a right; and help construct a new educational structure for Chileans, it has become about much more than just education.

The movement has begun a process of questioning by the Chilean people on various issues. She claims that other sectors in addition to education have become commoditized during the last decades, and that this movement has opened doors to challenging these issues as well. "This situation, typical of the neoliberal economic system established by the Pinochet dictatorship, has led to a synergy between the student movement and other sectors...Other segments of the population have also taken to the streets to demand changes to the profound injustices they face. This has established in Chile a social movement that demands rights through organization and mobilization."

As I have mentioned before, Melissa believes that the marches and other methods of public demonstration are effective as they achieve the goal of mobilizing masses of people at once, showing the government the amount of support the movement has in Chile, and also attracting more Chileans to join their

cause. In regards to the student movement's relations with the government, Melissa informed me that while FECh has not yet had a direct dialogue with the government under her leadership, the student leaders do have a meeting scheduled with the Minister of Education. According to her the government has implied that the student movement's demands are ambiguous and full of gaps, and that the movement's support from various sectors of the population is merely a result of the people being enthralled by flashy slogans. In response the leadership of the movement called on the government to clarify these claims, upon which the Minister of Education agreed to a meeting. After this meeting takes place and the government's level of willingness to comply with demands become known, the movement's next steps will be determined.

Making such decisions – according to Melissa – has been the most difficult part of her leadership of FECh. While CONFECH is heavily involved in the democratic decision-making of the movement through its national assembly, it is FECh which has the primary voice on a national level. “FECh is a key player in deciding what direction to take the student movement...this involves a huge responsibility because each decision has great consequences,” Melissa explained to me. Because of the representative nature FECh has acquired, it is looked to by the Chilean people – and especially its students – as a source of direction about the future of the movement. Therefore Melissa has found that the most taxing part of being its leader is the weight of the decisions that are made. “Each declaration, policy, or method of action must be in service of the Chilean people and its interests.”



The very responsibility that makes Melissa's job difficult also allows FECh and the student movement to make positive changes in Chile, and so I asked her what she believes the greatest victory of the movement has been thus far. She replied,

I think that the main victory of the student movement has been to establish in our society the questioning of commodification. It is no longer just education that is being reclaimed as a right, but also health, housing, etc. The Chilean people – with the momentum of the student movement – has begun to wake from the lethargy, fear, and submission that the dictatorship left in their collective unconscious for almost twenty years. Now they are taking to the streets to condemn the consequences of a profoundly unjust system.

In regards to the dictatorship, I asked Melissa in what way – if any – she believes the memory of it affects the current movement. She believes that today's social injustices all originate from the dictatorship. The neoliberal system and today's constitution were created during that period, and the tradition of violating human rights also stems from the time.

Melissa elaborated that though there are many different views and ideas of what gave rise to the student movement, "without a doubt the factors are remnants from those dark times in our country's history." "But," she explained, "these remnants are not just sentiments of injustice and anger, but also experiences of resistance that occurred during the dictatorship. This past has been actively

reclaimed in Chile, contributing to our national memory and our commitment to transform it.”

I lastly asked Melissa about her opinion on whether the Chilean student movement is in any way connected to other youth movements in the region. She believes that it is. She sees similarities between the Chilean efforts and protests in Brazil as well as a recent student movement in Colombia. “I think that this movement is similar to some youth uprisings that we have seen recently in the sense that they are driven by a generation that demonstrates publicly, that believes it has a voice and an opinion about the direction of its people.” While she does believe there are some characteristic differences between the various movements, she maintains that “these uprisings are happening after many years during which young people were solely consumers. Now, as a generation, they are a voice that is reappearing after many years, and it demands changes.”

## **ii. Fernanda Campos**

Fernanda Campos is a nineteen-year old student of Medicine at Universidad Diego Portales in Santiago. When we met, she was a first-year student at The Catholic University of Chile (La Católica), where I was taking classes about the Spanish language as well as the cultures and societies of Latin America. We both participated in a university program that partners Chilean students with foreign students to facilitate improvement of language skills, and throughout the course of several months we had many informal conversations in

Spanish for my benefit and in English for hers. We quickly realized we had many common interests: our taste in music and films, our passion for travel, and our fascination with the United Kingdom. I began to tell her of my curiosity about the student movement, and asking about her thoughts on the topic.

I was surprised to discover that Fernanda not only had participated in demonstrations, but that she was quite knowledgeable about the politics surrounding the movement. We discussed the difficulties most Chilean families (including hers) have with the finances of higher education in between more lighthearted conversation. She told me that she lived far from campus, and was finding it hard to adjust to university life, especially since La Católica and its students were so different from her high school and her friends from her own community. She repeatedly told me this, almost as if she were attempting to distance herself from the reputation of the university. Highly prestigious, expensive, and exclusive, La Católica is easily the most esteemed institution of higher learning in Chile. It has produced a majority of the statesmen, industry leaders, and renowned figures Chile has seen. Some of the architects of the Pinochet regime were, in fact, products of this university and during the course of the dictatorship this institution proved to be a reliable supporter of the regime.

The University of Chile, which Melissa Sepúlveda attends, is the second most prestigious university in the country and has historically been a political rival of La Católica. While the Catholic University has a long conservative tradition and support of authoritarian regimes, the University of Chile has traditionally leaned to the left in terms of politics. For these reasons La Católica

as an institution opposes the student movement and many of its students – the majority of whom are part of the most exclusive, wealthy sector of the population – do not participate. This explains Fernanda’s repeated assertions about her being “different” from the other students.

Fernanda, unlike Melissa, has always lived in Santiago, and currently lives with her family in an area called Estación Central. Her interests include: music, movies, books, spending time with friends, going to concerts, fashion, and travel. Politics is not one of Fernanda’s main interests but she is really concerned about morals and ethics in society. She first became involved in the student movement because she was dissatisfied with the government and the political system of Chile. “I think that there are great shortcomings in the political and educational systems of my country. I also think that right now the economic situation allows for a solution to the problems we have,” she told me. So she decided to begin participating in the movement toward the end of high school, continuing after she entered university. Most of her high school friends take part in marches and student meetings, just as she does. But her college friends – most of whom attended exclusive and expensive private schools before entering university – are not active within the movement.

“They do not care because they do not have the necessity to worry about [these issues].” This aligns with my research, which has shown that most of the movement’s participants are middle or working class students. Though there are members of Chile’s wealthiest sector that give their support and participate, they largely remain inactive. As she told me, “the people of the upper class do not

participate as much, since the demands do not really concern them. They already have access to private education. Those among them who do participate, however, do it as a method of support and to help build a more just country.”

Fernanda is not just worried about the level of commoditization education in Chile has reached, but about all the different areas of the public sphere that are business-centered. “We [the movement] worry about the future. It is not going in a good direction. The business vision is present in education, health, housing, the environment – no one cares about green issues like contamination, energy...how are we going to sustain our energy demands in the future? There are commercial visions for everything, without looking at the long-term.” In her opinion, there is a general focus on profit and business in all sectors of Chilean society, and not nearly enough attention given to long-term social consequences. In order to advance as a society, Fernanda believes, Chile must first and foremost educate all its citizens well.

According to her the current system of education is very unequal in the level of quality available for different sections of the population. “People with money can pay for really good education which allows them to go to good universities but it is really difficult for poorer people who cannot afford good education. The state should be taking care of public schools, instead of leaving the responsibility for the municipalities.” I asked Fernanda if she believes the government is currently failing to satisfy young Chileans, and she answered, “Yes, it is failing. I think the current politicians do not want to have to be the ones to deal with this problem, or risk their political careers by offering a real,

sweeping solution.” I was curious to know whether she thinks that the Chilean youth’s dissatisfaction stems from a decrease in the government’s provisions, or an increase in the young people’s expectations of the state. She told me that she believes her generation “has more expectations and demands than that of the past, and is much more informed about the rest of the world and the things governments can provide for their people.” The conflict between students and the state has arisen because of these heightened expectations, and the deep connections the state and influential political actors have to the neoliberal system in the country.

For these reasons – according to Fernanda – she and her peers have mobilized and called upon the state to respond to demands for reform. In regards to the methods of mobilization, I asked her what her opinion on the marches is. She believes the marches were useful and effective especially at the start of the uprising, but that it is time to find new ways to get people involved. Many young people now think of the marches as a break from classes or as an opportunity to meet up with friends, and not as the political efforts they are meant to be. According to her, the atmosphere at the marches is similar to that of a carnival or street party, with “energy and emotion in the air, people singing, dancing, and laughing as we demonstrate our solidarity in our discontent with the system...but as more people get involved and disturbances begin, the situation turns tense and fear emerges.” She told me that at the start of marches carabineros usually remain passive, merely maintaining order and overseeing the passage of the march. When

slight disturbances occur, however, “they become violent and intimidating, treating all the students as potential criminals.”

I asked Fernanda why the state employs aggressive tactics during marches but allows the marches to take place in the first place – why use these tactics but not restrict the movement entirely? She believes that to forbid these efforts completely would be deleterious for the state given the relatively recent history of state repression. She however believes recent allegations by the movement that the government itself has been behind a recent increase in vandalism during marches. “These efforts have the aim of delegitimizing the movement and making the students out to be delinquents so that the Chilean people do not support us.” She explained that this is reflected in the media as well, as news reports generally show images of vandalism and people breaking things rather than footage of people marching peacefully and singing. Because of these factors she believes new tools of mobilization should be introduced to supplement marches and street protests.

Though Fernanda agrees with the demands of the movement, she believes a gradual process of reforms is most realistic and should be pursued rather than an immediate demand of reforms. She thinks it would be best if educational reforms were first made in primary and secondary schools, making them free and of quality, with universal access. This would ensure that students would all be well-equipped for university. In her opinion, reform at the university level should only be pursued after the lower levels have been reformed. Even with the differences Fernanda has with some of the movement’s methods, she believes it has brought

positive changes to Chile. Even though the demands of the movement have yet to be met, the government has been forced to discuss the issue of educational quality and access. She told me that during the most recent presidential election (in which Socialist Michelle Bachelet was once again elected after her legally-required term away from office) all candidates addressed the issue of education and the demands of the movement. Debates were held and public discussion occurred, and this would not have been possible without the influence of the student movement.

Not only does the movement positively affect national politics by facilitating discussion, but it also influences the platforms of politicians, as the student uprising becomes politicized and parties attempt to coopt it. “Politicians do attempt to take advantage of this movement, including it within their political discourse in order to gain support, but often promises are made in vain.” This was reflected in my research of the movement, which commits to not make alliances with political parties.

I was also curious to find out Fernanda’s perspective on this movement’s connections to the dictatorship. She believes that just like that period in Chile’s history, the current socioeconomic system places the economic interests of an exclusive section of the population before the rights of the majority of people. While that time was obviously much more dramatic and extreme, she believes that the ideology that permitted the regime then to repress the masses continues to exist, and manifests itself most strongly in education. In reference to the dictatorship, Fernanda believes that her parents’ generation was raised to stay out



of politics and not openly show opposition out of fear of the regime. But her generation does not feel this fear. And with access to diverse media and technological tools, she and her peers feel that they have the ability to make real changes. “We felt powerful, we saw the world changing, and we felt we could do it too.”

According to Fernanda international events do have a bearing on the Chilean student movement. All over the world, she told me, “people were rising for something.” She told me that while Chile’s movement centers on education and is anchored in the history of the dictatorship, other youth uprisings that have happened in recent years are not entirely distinct occurrences, but variations of a shared experience. “Our issue is education; different countries have different issues, but all these movements share a feeling of dissatisfaction, of opposition to something. And the young people in these movements know that the eyes of the world are upon them.”

#### **Section IV: The Chilean Movement within its International Context and Conclusions**

While carrying out my exploration of the Chilean movement for education (and other social) reforms has been rewarding in itself, there is room for further analysis and making international connections to the movement. Throughout the course of my research I have gained much insight on the Chilean context of the movement, and the social, political, and economic factors that caused the

uprising. I have explored: the strong influence the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet and its policies have on the movement; the ways the 'Economic Miracle' disparately affected the Chilean people; the structural inequalities present in Chilean society and perpetuated by government policies; and how these inequalities exist in the education system, maintaining a cycle of socioeconomic disparity in Chile. These conditions and circumstances explain why Chilean students believe it necessary to reform the education system and the political structure of the country in general.

After providing this background, I explored the question of time: why did this movement erupt when it did? I argued that the Penguin Revolution that took place in 2006 set the stage for the current movement, and that the Concertación's loss of power and conservative takeover of the government served as a catalyst for students to act. I also made the claim that there is a fundamental difference between the current generation of early-twenties and teenaged Chileans and their parents, given the vastly different political and social atmospheres whilst growing up. I argued that the participants of the education movement grew up without a fear of their government, unlike their parents who faced the constant threat of state repression and violence. This combined with increased access to information via more open, diverse media sources and the relatively democratic Chile that allows for protest and opposition allowed the movement to arise when it did. In addition, a history of student mobilization set a precedent for this movement and the fact that it demands changes not only within the university, but in Chile overall.

Next – after providing a brief timeline of the current movement – I examined the nature and characteristics of the movement, how they contribute to the effectiveness of the movement, and the ways in which Chilean history inform its actions and functions. I discussed the fact that this movement emerged as a largely middle-class university student effort, and expanded to include working class youth, high school students, teachers, laborers, environmental activists, and parents who all wish to see reforms made to Chileans politics and society. I argued that one of the features of the movement that makes it effective is its focus on internal democracy and horizontal leadership. I also made the claim that technology – mainly in the form of Internet platforms such as Twitter and Facebook and through smart phone applications and text messaging – is an extremely useful and effective tool used by the movement to organize and mobilize.

I then tackled the issue of space: where do the actions of this movement take place, and how does the use of these spaces and the actions performed in these spaces fit into the historical context of the dictatorship? I discussed the idea of public space – notably the streets – in Chilean history, and that while traditionally Chileans have used this space to show their anger and opposition, this was replaced by a connotation of fear and violence during the dictatorship. As Pinochet's regime weakened, however, the use of streets to show opposition was reclaimed by Chileans, and this tradition continues today within the education movement. The marches that take place on the streets travel through large, central streets – the same ones traversed by anti-regime protesters in the 1980s.

Movement activities also take place on university campuses, which are occupied by students on strike and which also serve as hubs of organizational activity and support-gathering. I also discussed the use of the plaza in this movement, which reflects a long history in Chile of gathering and protesting in the many plazas in the country. I highlighted one method of protest – the cacerolazo – which takes place in plazas and dates back to the early 1970s, with a minor resurgence in the 1980s. These protests are heavily informed by Chilean history, and are yet another example of the ways in which the Allende and Pinochet eras connect to the education movement.

My exploration of the historical context of the movement in addition to the information I gleaned from my interactions with two students who participate in distinct ways in the education movement provided me with a solid grasp of the nature of the movement and how it relates to recent Chilean history and politics. From this study I have arrived at several conclusions:

1. The education movement is deeply influenced by the memory of Allende and the history of Pinochet-era Chile, and this is evident in the use of space, images, and slogans as well as the methods of protest.
2. While this movement focuses on education reform, it at its heart aims to effect structural changes in Chilean politics and society to decrease inequalities in all sectors and to introduce a more socially-responsible politics to Chile. There is a sense of prioritizing the collective's needs over that of the individual.

3. Though the movement now encompasses diverse sectors of the population, there is a generational aspect to it, especially within its inception and leadership. It was necessary for the political effort to be initiated by early twenties and teenaged Chileans given their lack of fear of the state relative to their parents. In addition the young people's access to diverse media and general international awareness, combined with the fact that they grew up during a period of Chile's history in which democratic institutions were strengthening are integral to their mobilization.
4. The emphasis on internal democracy in the movement is one of the main contributors to its success. Decisions are made democratically and there is a focus on effectively representing the participants. This has prolonged the process, as all movement actions and governmental negotiations are voted on by participants. However this ensures not only participant satisfaction but also that less-than-satisfactory government offers are not accepted and allowed to diminish the momentum of the movement, as was the case with the Penguin Revolution.
5. Technological tools are an integral component of the movement, and are utilized to organize actions as well as mobilize large amounts of people. The widespread use of text messaging, smart phones, Twitter, and Facebook ensures that information is easily disseminated to

hundreds of thousands of people, and also permits relevant discussion and debate.

6. There is a sense of solidarity – though limited in its effect – with young people in other countries who are also organizing and protesting against existing political or economic systems. Though the movement's rise is deeply situated within a uniquely Chilean context, it does draw inspiration from the mobilization of young people in other countries. There exists a notion that though international movements have distinct demands and concerns, there is a shared rise in expectations of the responsibilities of the state as well as a common dissatisfaction with traditional politics.

Reaching these conclusions about the movement through my secondary and primary research has been rewarding in itself as a student of culture, history, and politics. However, the movement has a greater significance in regards to what it can tell us about other recent sociopolitical movements, and thereby the present and future of this generation's role in global political and social progress. The international context of the Chilean education movement is striking - in the course of just five years, the world has witnessed countless uprisings and even political revolutions – from Egypt to Spain and Turkey to Venezuela – in which young people and particularly students have played a significant role. While such uprisings have encompassed an array of issues and each has stemmed from circumstances and contexts unique to their states, my study of the Chilean

movement and of recent movements in general leads me to conclude that there is a general trend worthy of exploring further.

Though it would be naïve to claim that this era of youth uprisings is unprecedented or that *all* recent movements fall under a political umbrella, there exist clear suggestions of shared historical and generational characteristics across several movements. In order to carry out this final portion of my study, therefore, I ask: What do overarching themes found among recent student-led movements inform us about youth political involvement in this era? What do they tell us about traditional political structures and the progression of student politics in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Who are these student-citizens, and what is different about their interaction with the state and their society? What role does technology play in these trends?

In this portion of my study I utilized the conclusions reached in my study of the Chilean movement and also drew heavily from a study of international movements that erupted in 2011, conducted by Dr. Armine Ishkanian of The London School of Economics and Political Science and Dr. Marlies Glasius of the University of Amsterdam. I also utilized Dr. Kees Biekart and Dr. Alan Fowler's study of post-2010 sociopolitical movements and their generational nature, as well as several other works done between 2011 and 2014 which examine overarching themes across recent social movements and the issue of global economic and political changes that are occurring currently. My research has brought me to several conclusions regarding the international context of recent social movements and the role of young people in them. There are multiple

similarities between the Chilean movement and movements that have taken place recently in Spain, the United Kingdom, Greece, and Egypt, among other places. They have either been led by or are primarily composed of people in their twenties; though specific demands differ, there is a general call for the prioritization of democracy, equality, and social justice over capitalistic interests; there are efforts of democracy within the movements through methods such as horizontal leadership; the movements utilize technological tools such as smart phones, Twitter, and Facebook to disseminate information and mobilize; and there exists an increased focus on collective interests rather than that of the individual.

The *Indignados* in Spain, student activists in London, young revolutionaries in Egypt, and anti-austerity protesters in Greece, along with young political activists in former-Soviet nations such as Georgia and Ukraine all have demands from their state that differ based on individual sociopolitical contexts. But all these social movements' core demands originate in an increase in expectations of what the state owes its people, and a focus on social rights of the masses over economic and political interests of the elite. "Driven by anger, indignation, and shattered expectations young people are mobilizing and taking their protests to the streets."<sup>103</sup> My research leads me to believe that one of the main contributors of the emergence of these movements is the fact that the neoliberal bubble has burst.

In the past few decades, neoliberal economic policies have been dominant in many parts of the world, with ideologies of deregulation, privatization, and

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<sup>103</sup> Ishkanian, A., Glasius, M., & Ali, I. (2013). Reclaiming Democracy in the Square?: Interpreting the movements of 2011-2012. *London School of Economics and Political Science*.



competition being favored. There is no doubt that recent years have brought the greatest increase in wealth the world has seen. Between 2000 and 2010, the global economy doubled in size.<sup>104</sup> But this increase in wealth has been unequally experienced. The world's wealth is heavily concentrated within an elite, and regardless of increased global wealth, the international middle class – the largest percentage in history – faces limited educational and economic opportunities.<sup>105</sup> This compounded by the recent global economic crisis which has threatened the livelihood of many as well as increased access to media and information has refocused attention to opportunities for the masses as well as social and human rights.

For these reasons many of the recent social uprisings have been rooted in anti-capitalist, middle and working-class interests. These sociopolitical movements have rejected austerity measures that limit social services, political structures that protect the interests of the few, economic programs that perpetuate socioeconomic inequality, and individualistic notions of success and progress. Instead there are calls for socially-responsible policies that do not perpetuate socioeconomic disparity. Young people, wary of the future of their respective countries and peoples, have begun to organize and mobilize against existing political and economic structures. This is a ‘revolt of a ‘global generation’ [who have] grown up in a neoliberal environment...where neither work nor public services could be taken for granted – a situation that has now worsened because of

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<sup>104</sup> Sasaki, D. (2011) The Youth-Led Revolutions of 1968 and 2011. *Digital Alternatives with a Cause?*

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

the global financial crisis.”<sup>106</sup> Like James Holston predicted in the 1990s, the inequalities of the global neoliberal system would eventually cause a backlash.<sup>107</sup>

It is not surprising that one of the most potent such backlashes is occurring in Chile. As I have previously explained, Chile has been the most extreme example of the neoliberal model in use in recent decades. “Chile, more than any other country, represents the culmination of this neoliberal experiment, and the strikes and protests represent an important message that the rest of the world should take seriously.”<sup>108</sup> The new wave of social movements signals the collapse of the neoliberal economic model<sup>109</sup> and young people are at the heart of demands to reform structures that not only permit but often perpetuate the commoditization of basic services and entrenched inequality within societies.

The crucial role of young people in these movements has been noted as one of the shared characteristics of recent social movements. Young people – especially students – have been at the forefront of the uprisings, but have caused other sectors of the population to also become politically involved.<sup>110</sup> In many recent movements they have served as leaders and organizers, and generally serve to mobilize others.<sup>111</sup> As the generation that grew up completely within the neoliberal system, these young people are the most active in combating it. While

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<sup>106</sup> Glasius, M. & Pleyers, G. (2013). Global Moment of 2011: Democracy, Social Justice and Dignity. *Development and Change*. Volume 44, Number 3, pp. 547-567. Retrieved from: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.libez.proxy2.syr.edu/doi/10.1111/dech.12034/pdf>

<sup>107</sup> Valenzuela, S., Arriagada, A., & Scherman A. (2012). The Social Media Basis of Youth Protest Behavior: The case of Chile. *Journal of Communication*. Retrieved from: <http://www.antimedios.cl/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/JOC-Paper.pdf>

<sup>108</sup> Cabalin, C. (2012)

<sup>109</sup> Mason, P. (2013). Why It’s Still Kicking off Everywhere. *Soundings*. Issue 53, pp.44-55. Retrieved from: <http://search.proquest.com.libezproxy2.syr.edu/docview/1357567735>

<sup>110</sup> Glasius, M. & Pleyers, G. (2013)

<sup>111</sup> Ishkanian, A., Glasius, M., & Ali, I. (2013)

this is true, recent social movements have been characteristically heterogeneous.<sup>112</sup> It appears that generational differences (which are contextual and vary by movement) necessitated that young people initiate the uprisings. But their efforts have introduced public discussion and questioning of existing structures across generations and sectors of populations. Therefore these movements are comprised not only of young people, but with citizens in general who are dissatisfied with the state of affairs.

It is evident that there has also occurred a generational shift in regards to confidence in traditional political involvement; voting in national and local elections is no longer seen as sufficient forms of participation.<sup>113</sup> Non-traditional methods such as community engagement, public demonstration, and direct communication with state leaders have not only been deemed useful, but necessary for reform. This is reflective of the relatively democratic and economically-prosperous time period in which these young people have grown up: in the past several decades the strengthening of political and economic institutions on a global scale has opened up space for more active political participation. The study by Ishkanian and Glasius found “a deep disappointment with representative or electoral democracy and a growing demand for deeper forms of citizen participation...” across recent social movements.<sup>114</sup> Young people were feeling their voices go unheard and unrepresented within traditional politics and so they mobilized so as to be heard.”<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> Valenzuela, S., Arriagada, A., & Scherman A. (2012)

<sup>114</sup> Ishkanian, A., Glasius, M., & Ali, I. (2013)

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

One of the non-traditional methods utilized by these movements is the widespread use of technology to organize and mobilize. Social media platforms are allowing the participants of these movements to “[exercise] their political agency in new and important ways.<sup>116</sup> Sharing information and having discussions through these networks, using platforms such as YouTube to spread images and ideas, using Twitter to follow mobilization efforts in real-time, etc. are all crucial for these movements.<sup>117</sup> These technological tools along with diverse media options also allow for cross-movement sharing. While there is not conclusive evidence that individual movements are directly sharing methods and tools, it is clear that increased access to media and technology has made it easy to remain informed and inspired by similar uprisings.<sup>118</sup> The use of technology has also created more opportunities for horizontal leadership and increased democracy within movements, as information and proposals are much more easily disseminated and discussed.<sup>119</sup>

This focus on the collective within movements is a reflection of the general trend of emphasizing the collective’s needs over exclusionary politics and economics. Notions of social justice, equality, and protection of the traditionally-voiceless have emerged as general themes of recent social movements.<sup>120</sup> Whether an uprising against austerity measures that harm vulnerable segments of the population, a movement demanding equal access to quality education, a

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<sup>116</sup> Berkhout, Remko & Jansen, Fieke. (2012). Introduction: The Changing Face of Citizen Action. *Development*. Vol. 55, No. 2, pp. 154-157. Retrieved from: <http://search.proquest.com.libezproxy2.syr.edu/docview/1018844193>

<sup>117</sup> Glasius, M. & Pleyers, G. (2013)

<sup>118</sup> Biekart, K. & Fowler, A. (2013)

<sup>119</sup> Mason, P. (2013)

<sup>120</sup> Ishkanian, A., Glasius, M., & Ali, I. (2013)

rebellion against a government benefiting only the wealthy, or a political effort demanding reforms to economic policies that engender socioeconomic disparity, these movements share the characteristic of refocusing attention to the masses. They demand that their respective states do more to protect the basic rights of all citizens and approach future policies from a more socially-conscious perspective.<sup>121</sup>

There is a marked departure from the neoliberal ideology of individual responsibility within these movements, and instead an emphasis on collective responsibility. There is a “growing consciousness of citizenship and the need to be responsible *beyond* oneself, to contribute to society and to take ownership of problems.”<sup>122</sup> While the increased importance given to collective responsibility is present, this does not excuse the state of its responsibilities. “On the contrary it [is] about getting the state to fulfill its obligations toward citizens.”<sup>123</sup> Expectations of the state have increased among this generation, which has grown up in a period of unparalleled economic prosperity as well as strengthening democratic institutions. These young people have become disenchanted with the existing capitalist systems that prioritize profit and privatization over social interests and the needs of the masses. Finding that traditional methods of political participation were no longer sufficient, they have begun to utilize new, innovative forms of protest and organization, and in the process have compelled others to mobilize.

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<sup>121</sup> Glasius, M. & Pleyers, G. (2013)

<sup>122</sup> Ishkanian, A., Glasius, M., & Ali, I. (2013)

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

Public debate and discussion have arisen as a result, and information and ideas are spreading faster than ever because of the available technological tools. Though the individual movements are heavily informed by their historical, sociopolitical, and economic contexts, they share characteristics that lead me to believe they are part of a larger, generational trend toward more democracy and equality. They – like the education movement in Chile – have not only adopted specific issues in need of reform, but they have opened up important conversations about inequality, the role of the state, capitalism, and democracy.<sup>124</sup> It is important not only to observe the immediate successes and limitations of these social movements, but to also examine the “long-lasting and substantial impact on the concepts of everyday politics and citizenship.”<sup>125</sup> As journalist Paul Mason has written about the recent movements and their effect on the international stage, “There is a change in consciousness, the intuition that something big is possible, that a great change in the world’s priorities is within people’s grasp.”<sup>126</sup> As we move through the coming years it will be worthwhile to explore these ideas further, and to observe the ways these social movements led by young people – from Chile and across the world – impact our future societies.

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<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> Mason, P. (2013)

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