

**The Politics of Memory in Chile. From Pinochet to Bachelet.** Edited by Cath Collins, Katherine Hite and Alfredo Joignant. Boulder, Colorado : First Forum Press, 2013. Pp. 279. USD\$69.95 cloth.

The Chilean dictatorship ended more than twenty years ago, yet it still has a great deal of influence on contemporary matters. *The Politics of Memory in Chile. From Pinochet to Bachelet* edited by Cath Collins, Katherine Hite and Alfredo Joignant addresses the influence of the past on the present. From a political science perspective, the contributors of *The Politics of Memory in Chile* shed light on the Chilean transition into democracy and on the way this has been shaped by differing politics of memory. This book offers much needed insight on how memory influences both political and public spheres. Using the notion of the ‘politics of memory’, the authors analyze the Chilean past and go beyond Pinochet era to explore its precursors and aftermath. It offers an alternative to the common discourse surrounding human rights during this time, permitting a more nuanced access to representations, appropriations and instrumentalizations of the past.

“The Politics of Memory in Chile” focuses on the importance of representations of the past in Chile’s present. The eight chapters of the book explore specific dimensions of Chilean memory. Chapter topics include an analysis of the courts prosecutions of human rights violations; historical perspectives on the uses of torture; and analysis of Pinochet’s funeral and how it was perceived within the population. One chapter provides a quantitative study of Pinochet’s legacy and the memory of his regime based on a series of polls. Other chapters examine the constant movement of interpretations of the past and its significance within the present, describe the conflicted commemoration of political violence, and its victims, as well as the processes within power relations. In all, the authors give a general overview of the situation in Chile regarding politics of memory of past human rights violations and their aftermath. For this review however, we will concentrate on two chapters. First of all, we will examine Alexander Wilde’s section as it gives a good historical presentation of the evolution of memory and its politics in Chile. Then, we will focus on Elizabeth Lira and Brian Loveman chapter because it is an original approach to the subject of torture as a government tool of control over its population.

Wilde’s “A Season of Memory: Human Rights in Chile’s Long Transition” explores the reasons why memory became a political “hot potato”. In the first part of his analysis, he establishes two seasons of memory which he describes as the way people are distinctively aware of their past experiences in various times. During these “seasons”, different policies were adopted to overcome the influence of the Allende and Pinochet eras on the Chilean present. The enacted policies were dependent on the mobilisation of resources by key actors. The first season (1990-1998) is characterized by irruptions of memory which brought moral and symbolic issues into public life. The second season (1998-2010) started after the resignation of Pinochet from his position as commander of the army to become a senator for life. Following this, Chile experienced a series of political events that shook its foundations: the detention of Pinochet in London (1998), his extradition to Chile (2000), the *Mesa de dialogo* (2000), and the Valech Commission (2003-2004). During these seasons of memory, associations were persistent in their requests for a resolution of past human rights violations. After the detention of the General, those requests gained more and more support from the population. Pressuring the State, the social memory of the regime led consecutive governments to adopt different policies to address the past, resulting in three commissions and the construction of a landscape of memory. However, as

Wilde notes in his conclusion, there is a risk of creating only a landscape out of memory. As also noted by Jean (2013: 100-102), the lack of human rights school programs (as requested by the association of families of the detained-disappeared) has led to a detachment from issues surrounding the country's memory. At the same time, multiple representations of the past existing in Chile make it difficult to predict what the next influence on public policy in the name of historical memory might be.

The fourth chapter, "Torture as Public Policy, 1810-2010", written by Elizabeth Lira and Brian Loveman, introduces another dimension of Chilean memory. Together, they present the use of torture in Chile as a tool used against political adversaries and supposedly "enemies of the State". The main topic of this chapter is that the use of torture as a political instrument has evolved through time. This approach differs from other authors who circumscribe torture to the Pinochet era. Reading Lira and Loveman, we understand that, from colonial times until now, torture is seen by the Chilean government as a way to silence opposition. It was also used to identify other "enemies" and was seen as a guarantee for preserving order and security within the country (101). The authors also suggest that Allende, often seen as the guarantor for human rights, did almost nothing to change these measures and torture was still used during the period *Unidad Popular* was in power. Considering the usual interpretation of the Pinochet era as a particularly violent rupture with past practices, how can we describe it in light of this longer history? While we must recognize that torture became both more common and systematic during the Pinochet regime, Lira and Loveman force the reader to confront continuity in the use of torture to the present day (105). Since that period, various efforts have been made in order to stop or prevent this type of politics in Chile. In 2003, The National Commission on Political Imprisonment and Torture was launched by President Ricardo Lagos to address the human rights violations committed during the rule of the military junta; violations that had been ignored during the previous commission (Rettig, 1991). As the authors note, while the commission's final report gave access to public resources and pecuniary compensations for the victims and their families, the president's final statement still circumscribed torture and its uses to the Pinochet era, denying its existence during other eras. Finally, as the last subtitle of this chapter lead us to reflect, "Torture no more" we can conclude that there are still cases of torture in contemporary Chile and that there is still little done in order to prevent it and prosecute those who have perpetuated it. "Torture as a public policy" is a strong political issue, but as the authors point out in their conclusion, it also creates new national movements who gather people around the will to protect victims, and denounce these human rights violations.

In conclusion, this book provides powerful insights into the question of memory and the politics it engages. By presenting multiple dimensions of this issue, such as differing representations of the past and their influences, prosecution of human rights violations, the use of torture and conflicted commemoration, this volume pictures well the aftermath of the dictatorship in contemporary Chile. My only critique would be that, even if Collins and Hite's chapter addresses questions of collective action, most of the authors examined the subject only on the angle of policy and of the State. As Traverso explains it, a comprehensive analysis must consider social movements and associations working within the civil society (2011: 256), which this book almost ignores.

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## **Bibliography**

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