¡Hasta La Victoria!: Murals and Resistance in Santiago, Chile

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Introduction: murals in Santiago

Like many other cities, contemporary Santiago boasts spraycan graffiti on its walls (Palmer 2008). But away from the main thoroughfares and the tourist trails of downtown Santiago, there is another and older tradition of painting on walls. In poblaciónes like La Victoria and Villa Francia, there are politically charged murals which speak of the past dictatorship, the present transition to democracy and the connection between the two. In addition, aspirations for a future Chile of greater social and economic justice run through many of the murals. That similar murals existed in the heady days of Salvador Allende's presidency is well-known outside Chile. Less obvious is the continuation of the tradition almost four decades later. The purpose of this article is to chart the rise, fall and re-emergence of Chilean political murals and to examine the themes of current murals.

Globally there are two possible trajectories in the emergence of murals as a form of political culture: top down and bottom up. Authoritarian leaders often display large portraits of themselves, often in mural form, as a means of propaganda. But those who seek to create propaganda do not inevitably choose mural painting as their vehicle. The Bolsheviks, for example, rejected mural painting (along with oil painting and sculpture) as 'functionally inefficient media for propaganda purposes', relegated to being 'in one place at one time, seen by a very limited number of people' (Berger 1969, quoted in

Stermer 1970: xxvii). In similar vein the Cuban revolutionaries rejected murals as 'too realistic, heavy and rhetorical in style and too expensive and permanent in medium...' (Kunzle 1975: 100). It would be tempting to conclude that revolutionary nation-building needs grander forms of propaganda (such as film in the Russian case, and film and posters in the Cuban). Yet the Mexicans in the early 20th century and later the Sandinistas in Nicaragua embraced the mural form. Jose Clemente Orozco, one of 'los tres grandes', the three great Mexican muralists, put his finger on the reason for this choice: the mural 'cannot be made a matter of private gain; it cannot be hidden away for the benefit of a certain privileged few. It is for the people' (quoted in Franco 1970: 175).

When 'the people' are trapped in a situation of permanent oppression and repression, the mural can come into its own, not as a form of top-down propaganda but of bottom-up solidarity. Thus, for the Basques, murals provide 'an easily accessible communication medium open to grass roots organisations and individuals to challenge the dominant control that dictatorships have over the media and the expression of ideas' (Chaffee 1988: 547). When centralised governments wish to mobilise large numbers of citizens, then mural painting is less likely to be the medium of choice. But when communities of resistance seek to express their identity and mobilise their inhabitants, murals are an obvious choice.

Although struggles for justice, equality and human rights are fought at the societal and global levels, it is at the level of the local community that the battle for state legitimacy is waged daily. 'Justice', 'freedom', 'equality' may at one level be abstract concepts, but at

the level of the community they can be part of the lived experience of everyday life. Injustice now has a face, the death of a local priest, and equality is a real struggle for working class, women and indigenous people. Murals are thus not simply 'folk art', but an essential element of the mobilisation and politicisation of the community. They become simultaneously expressions and creators of solidarity. They speak a live and relevant message to and for the communities in which they are painted. They air grievances, past and present, and articulate visions for the future; they celebrate the achievements and criticise the shortcomings of the community; they come out of a strong sense of identity and at the same time serve to mobilise solidarity. They are a vital part of the soul of these communities which enables them to continue to function and grow despite the odds of inequality, neoliberalism, marginalisation and repression.

The Emergence of Political Mural Painting in Chile

The origin of the political murals of contemporary Chile dates to the late 1950s and early 1960s. As the Left organised and grew more popular in the 1960s, it found itself denied access to mainstream media outlets and turned to writing messages on the walls. Usually painted hastily under cover of darkness, the messages appeared on main thoroughfares where they could be guaranteed the greatest visibility. A watershed in the development of mural painting was an anti-imperialist march from Valparaíso to Santiago, a distance of approximately 100 kilometres, in September 1969 in protest at US military actions in Vietnam. Along the route, Communist Party members painted slogans and this led directly to the formation of the Ramona Parra Brigades (Brigadas Ramona Parra, BRP),

squads of young Communists committed to mural painting and other propaganda work (Espinoza 2006: 78-81). They were named after a young woman, assassinated in 1946 during a demonstration in support of the Confederation of Workers of Chile. At the same time the Christian Democrats also organised muralists in the Brigada Elmo Catalán (BEC), named after a Chilean journalist who had joined Che Guevara in Bolivia and, like Che, had been killed there (Espinoza 2006: 81-85).

In 1964 Socialist Party presidential candidate Salvador Allende mounted a challenge to the entrenched conservative ruling elite and the murals attempted to mobilise support for his campaign. BRP and BEC muralists joined forces. For the most part, the murals of this period consisted entirely of text in huge letters which could be read from a distance or while passing by at speed. Most of the slogans related solely to developments and aspirations in Chile itself, rather than, for example, attacks on US imperialism: 'Luchar, trabajar, estudiar para la patria y la revolución' ('To struggle, work, study for the fatherland and the revolution'), 'Los niños nacen para ser felices' ('Children are born to be happy').

The muralists worked quickly for fear of attacks by the police or the Right. A painting squad could consist of a dozen or more 'guerrilla muralists' (Kunzle 1973) who would descend on a wall and produce a mural in a remarkably short time. Each member of the squad had a task: the trazador (planner) designed the mural, the fondeador painted the background and fileteador the outlines; finally the rellenador filled in the colours while

guardias kept watch (Palmer 2008:10; Barnett: 1984: 212; Kunzle 1978: 362-3). Kunzle (1973: 48) graphically describes the process:

> The wall is an assembly line, with the workers working along it to fix the letters and parts of letters in place, their bodies overlapping each other when necessary; they are the moving parts, their creation remains fixed. Modern industrial production normally reverses the situation: the worker is immobilized, the object he 'creates' … is the mobile element, which soon disappears from his sight and from his experience. The mural painters work according to a division of labor akin to that of the medieval craft, with an altogether modern emphasis on speed.

Murals under Allende: a Flowering of Cultural Expression

Allende was elected President of Chile in 1970 at the head of coalition of Left-wing groups and parties, Unidad Popular (Popular Unity). His programme sought to wrest control of large sections of Chile's natural resources and wealth from foreign firms, mostly based in the United States, to redistribute land within Chile, and to lessen inequality within the country across a range of matters, from income to housing and education. His victory represented both elation and dismay in politically polarised Chile. The Left, the working class and the peasantry were for the most part behind policies which sought to clip the wings of foreign capital, improve housing, etc. The wealthy classes however, saw Allende's 'Chilean path to socialism' as a threat.

Allende faced opposition from the Christian Democrats who controlled the Congress and from the wealthy and Right throughout the country. He also faced a sustained campaign by a mass media controlled by the opposition.[1] In this situation, mural painting continued to be significant. The transformation of society had to be fought for at all levels. 'The continuation and the ultimate success of this process are sensed to depend upon cultural as well as economic transformation' (Kunzle 1973: 42).

The flowering of cultural expression in support of Allende's ideals took the form of posters, comic books and murals (Kunzle 1978; Trumper 2005; Abett de la Torre Díaz and Acuña 2004). The BRP expanded in both size and vitality. By 1973 there were an estimated 150 BRP brigades active throughout the country (Kunzle 1978: 363). No longer relegated to being clandestine, they drew in countless non-painters to participate in producing murals under the rubric of 'art for everyone' (Vicuña 1974: 37). At the other end of the spectrum established artists such as Guillermo Castro (Santibañez 1985) and Roberto Matta joined with the BRP to paint murals, Matta returning from his adopted home in Paris for the purpose (Kunzle 1973: 42-3; Kunzle 1978: 166).

Within two days of Allende's victory, the BRP began to add images to their murals which had previously consisted of slogans. At first, the symbolism was quite abstract, but quickly the muralists went for more simple and easily recognisable images: '… doves, flowers, hands, fists, faces, flags, stars, an ear of corn, a factory chimney, a hammer, a sickle…' – all of which were 'suggestive of peace, work, and collective strength' (Kunzle

[1] Two years after Allende's victory, 'pro-government dailies sold 312,000 copies per issue, anti-government dailies 541,000' (Kunzle 1973: 44).

1978: 363). Moreover, the muralists' use of large expanses of bold primary colours as well as to distinct black outlines around each letter or symbol, born out of their previous experience of painting speedily to avoid harassment by armed government forces, continued with the new pictorial murals. In addition, they continued to wear the workers' hard hats they had worn previously. Whereas before they were for protection during a possible attack, they now stood as a symbol of the muralists' common purpose with the working class.

The BRP's most ambitious mural, painted along the River Mapocho in central Santiago in 1972 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the foundation of the Chilean Communist Party, was a quarter of a mile long (for a photograph, see Barnitz 2001: 288). The influences on their art were many: posters from Cuba and Europe, the Mexican muralists such as Diego Rivera and more directly, David Siqueiros, pre-Colombian art, and North American pop art. The end result was not anywhere nearly as complex or ornate as the murals of Rivera and Siqueiros, but the BRP murals were no less striking and memorable, with a style which was instantly recognisable. Moreover, the BRP muralists had managed to realise Siqueiros' elusive ambition to paint murals which could be understood by a viewer passing by in a car at speed (Kunzle 1973: 51).

The Dictatorship and Subversive Culture

On 11 September 1973, the bold experiment in transforming Chilean society ended with a military coup led by the Commander-in-Chief of the army, General Augusto Pinochet.

Allende died in the attack on the presidential palace. Pinochet's military government initiated a reign of terror. Over 3,200 people were killed or disappeared (Rettig Report 1993), somewhere in the region of 80,000 were imprisoned without trial, 30,000 of whom were tortured in 1200 torture centres throughout the country (Valech Report 2005). Over 1000 people remain disappeared as of 2010.[2]

Not content simply to overturn the socialist and redistributionist policies of his predecessor, Pinochet allowed Chile to be used as a laboratory for the neoliberal theories of the Chicago School of Economics and its leading light, Milton Friedman. A vociferous proponent of unfettered market systems, Friedman along with his colleagues had trained a number of economists who became central to Pinochet's transformation of Chilean economy and society (Valdes 1995). Arguably these technocrats became more crucial to social change in Chile than the military, not least because the military gave the technocrats a free hand and presented them as the solution to Chile's problems. As Silva (1991: 386) argues: 'In stressing the need to "technify" the entire society, the military government intended to convince the population of the inability of "politics" (and, hence, of democracy) to solve the problems of the country'. Together the military and technocrats transformed Chile: leftist and trade union leaders were killed or disappeared, political parties of the Left were banned, trade union activity was banned, Congress was closed down, the mass media were censored, tariff barriers were dismantled, leading to the destruction of domestic manufacturing, most state social services were privatised, as were state-owned industries, and estates which had been expropriated by indigenous Mapuche activists were returned to their former owners (Haughney 2006: 51).

[2] http://www.desaparecidos.org/chile/eng.html

Opposition to the regime was forced underground, although from time to time it broke through to the surface. Armed resistance was led by the MIR (Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria, Revolutionary Left Movement) formed in 1965. They staged several unsuccessful attempts to assassinate Pinochet, and their General Secretary, Miguel Enríquez, was killed by DINA, the Chilean secret police, in 1974. There was also popular resistance to the regime and a wave of popular uprisings in 1983 led to an increase in repression by the military Junta.

One of the effects of the dictatorship was the suppression of the lively cultural scene which had flowered briefly. Victor Jara, the most popular political folk singer, was killed in the sports stadium. Many other cultural workers, including muralists, suffered torture, death, disappearance or exile. But cultural resistance remained, albeit mainly underground. Jokes became a popular form of resistance to the dictatorship (Dorfman 1978). At the same time arpilleras, stitched by women working in groups, painted vivid pictures of repression, unemployment and housing shortages, as well as celebrating the continuing communal solidarity of the poorest in Chilean society (Agosin 1987).

Many muralists fled the dictatorship and continued to paint their anti-Junta murals in exile in Europe and North America. Other prominent muralists, such as Alejandro ‘Mono’ Gonzalez, an early BRP member, stayed, as did many other painters.

The murals of the previous few years were systematically destroyed (Cockcroft 1974). In addition, a decree by the Junta in March 1976 required that all cultural activities, public and private, had to be vetted in advance by the National Youth Secretariat. (Dorfman 1978). In that situation painting murals was more dangerous than it had ever been. There were fewer murals, and most of them were painted indoors. But by the mid-1980s some muralists began to paint murals on paper to hang on external walls – papelógrafos (Palmer 2008: 11). Needless to say, these makeshift murals did not last long. At the same time, as part of their resistance to the dictatorship, people in working class poblaciones began to paint directly on walls again.

Transition and Democracy

As the military dictatorship weakened its hold in the late 1980s, a coalition of Centre and Left parties, in which the Communist Party chose not to participate, came together under the umbrella name of Concertación and won the general election in 1990. The Concertación formed the governments of Chile from 1990 until 2010. The new democratic government was left with a legacy from the dictatorship which in some ways it sought to confront. For example, a truth commission was established to examine political violence resulting in death or disappearance (Rettig Report 1993). But there was one legacy which, far from being confronted, was actually embraced by the new administration: the neoliberal model itself.

Pinochet, Friedman and others praised the 'economic miracle' of Chile's transformed economy under the dictatorship, a claim which does not hold up under scrutiny (Chomsky 1993: 189-191). But one lasting effect of the Pinochet era was the legacy of faith in neoliberalism. Early in the new democratic regime Silva (1991: 387) had concluded with prescience: '… although the era of the Chicago boys is over, the technocratisation of politics associated with them has become a permanent new feature in Chilean politics'. The Concertación moved from being critics to being celebrants of neoliberalism (Haughney 2006: 3). This was to have profound consequences on Chilean society overall in terms of issues of equality and social justice. The return of democracy did not mean that the transformation of Chile took up where it had been stalled by the coup. Nationalisation and redistribution of land and wealth were not at the forefront of the Concertación's programme. Instead, the emphasis was on wealth creation and the neoliberal faith that a rising tide would succeed in raising all ships. The needs of the poorest in Chilean society, the working class, rural workers and indigenous people, have not been a priority. Any commitment to social justice appeared more as a counterweight to continuing impunity rather than a robust attack on social inequality. At the same time the recomposition of democratic parties and the demobilisation of the grassroots have contributed to the decline of Chile's traditionally strong civil society sector and consequent levels of political apathy, particularly among young people (Cameron 1998: 15; Haughney 2006: 2; Silva 2004).

In addition, the new democratic state also had a repressive side. The worst of the state violence was gone, and in this sense Chile did better than other Latin American societies

transforming from military rule. At the same time, repressive legislation from the dictatorship remained on the books and was used periodically, and police brutality continued.

With the transition to democracy there was relative freedom to paint again. The themes muralists painted reflected the enthusiasm for the return to democracy as well as hope for social justice in the future. In the face of the decline of civil society overall, people in working class communities like La Victoria and Villa Francia showed, not least in their murals, that resistance was still possible.

La Victoria

La Victoria is one of a number of poblaciones in Santiago which residents refer to as a 'toma', from the Spanish 'tomar, to take'. On October 30 1957, after 15 years of agitation to convince the local authorities to provide them with decent housing, a number of poor people cut the chains at the entrance to 37 hectares of publicly owned land and claimed it as their own (Riquelme 2004: 6). This initial act of self-help, mutual support and quest for social justice set the tone for the future of the area as the people began to build their own houses and lay out their streets. In time, the area became a tight, united and supportive neighbourhood, its spirit caught in a quotation from Salvador Allende included in a mural painted in the area: 'Ser joven y no ser revolucionario es una contradicción hasta biologica' '(To be young and not a revolutionary is a biological contradiction'). As such, La Victoria's reputation was further tested with the dictatorship

of the 1970s and 1980s. As in many other working class areas of Santiago residents participated in a major challenge to the Junta between 1983 and 1986. They engaged in resistance, and some in armed struggle under the umbrella of the clandestine Frente Patriótico Manuel Rodriguez, a splinter group from the Communist Party, which had a stronghold in La Victoria. Along with barricades and trenches, murals were an integral part of this resistance.

The uprising of the 1980s coincided with the revival of the BRP, which focused its activities on peripheral areas like La Victoria rather than the main thoroughfares of the city (Riquelme 2004: 3). At the same time, other local mural brigades were formed, composed of a range of residents: young and old, male and female, all for the most part self-taught (Riquelme 2004: 3).

This tradition has continued. Walking through the relatively small población today one can detect many symbols of the community's political identity. There is Calle Carlos Marx, Calle Unidad Popular, Calle Ramona Parra, as well as another street named after Los Martires de Chicago, the striking workers massacred by police in Chicago in 1886, an act which led to the formation of May Day. In a little square named Plaza de los Caídos, Plaza of the Fallen, there is a simple memorial to local residents who died during the dictatorship, the dates of the deaths clustered around the years 1973 to 1976 and 1983 to 1986, the years of the most acute repression and resistance. In 2008 the area elected

Claudia Nuñez as its mayor, one of only a few female Chilean mayors and the only one from the Communist Party.[3]

There have been many mural brigades active in La Victoria in recent years: the BRP, Kolectivo Muralista la Garrapata, Colectivo Arte para La Victoria, Brigada de las Autón♀mas, AKRE, Grupo Semilla de Andre and Unidades Muralistas Camilo Torres. In the women-only Brigada de las Autón♀mas there is no distinct division of labour, while in other brigades such as AKRE, there is a set-up which repeats the arrangements pioneered by BRP, with trazadores, fondeadores and filletadores, etc. (Riquelme 2004: 4).

Beyond La Victoria, in the rest of Santiago, there are other brigades at work, including Fuerza Autonomía, Latinos Crew, Brigada Muralista Erick Rodriguez, Taller Pintura Popular, Muralista Luis Olea, Colectivo Cuba Vencera and Brigadista Rodriguista Cecilia Magni. Some of the contemporary mural brigades are highly localised. Others are more widespread in their activity and some of these have links with political parties, such as the Communist Party (BRP) and Izquierda Cristiana – Christian Left (Unidades Muralistas Camilo Torres). There is thus a hive of mural activity in the city; La Victoria is far from being the only area of mural painting, although it is perhaps one of the most prolific relative to its size. La Victoria can thus be taken as a microcosm of Santiago's political mural scene. Thus as we now consider the content and themes of the murals, we will anchor the consideration in La Victoria, with references to other mural locations in

[3] The Communist Party's most recognisable figure of modern times was also a woman, Gladys Marín, who died in 2005. She is frequently portrayed in murals, including one in La Victoria.

the city where appropriate: Villa Francia, La Reina, Macúl, La Legua, San Miguel, Los Nogales, Lo Hermida and El Bosque.

The Murals of La Victoria: Content and Themes

There are four main themes evident in the murals of La Victoria: resistance, memorials, women, and the Mapuche.

Resistance

In contemporary La Victoria the largest single number of murals relate to the founding of the toma itself. This is not surprising given that 2007 marked the 50th anniversary of the initial seizure of land which led to the establishment of the toma. Thus a mural by Muralistas de Acción Rebelde shows scenes of daily life in the area, including women serving food and a mural being painted (see figure 1). Proceedings are overseen by the ghost of Che Guevara.

Figure 1 about here.

Another mural depicts a workman and an indigenous woman along with a symbol of the area's active opposition to the dictatorship, burning tyres. The continuing resistance in the area is indicated by a reference to the local radio station, Radio 1◦ de Mayo. The accompanying slogan reads: 'Si el espacio no existe, se crea. Si la libertad se nos prohibe,

se conquista' ('If the space does not exist, it will be created. If freedom is denied to us, we will win').

Other poblaciones have similar murals which mark the anniversaries of the beginnings of the community: Los Nogales, 61 years; Villa Francia, 31 years; Lo Hermida, 36 years. As in La Victoria, these murals do not represent simply an exercise in nostalgia. Rather they are a celebration of the resistance which led to the establishment of the community in the first instance and which sustained the community in the face of opposition and repression in the years since. How resistance and community solidarity combine is shown graphically in one mural in La Victoria, painted by Unidades Muralistas Camilo Torres. Some people lie on the ground after having been beaten by a uniformed soldier with a swastika emblazoned on his helmet, while a bird of prey snatches another person in its talons. But they are confronted by a crowd led by a woman swathed in the Chilean flag. Among those resisting is an indigenous person. Meanwhile, a woman gives birth, helped by a young woman and comforted by a man; the child is a symbol of hope for the future. The people resisting are all smiling and fresh-faced while the soldier grimaces and the eagle glares (see figure 2).

Figure 2 about here.

The metaphor of birth occurs in other murals. For example, one in La Reina depicts a woman lying on her side with the baby in her womb clearly visible. She is surrounded by flowers, while behind her a large sun glows over mountains in the colours of the Chilean

flag. ‘Esta naciendo el nueva poblador’, says the accompanying slogan (‘She is giving birth to the new member of the población’). Alongside are other slogans which refer to the past and the ideals and promises of the Popular Unity period: ‘Vivienda, trabajo, salud, educación’ (‘Housing, work, health, education’).

While education is referred to in a number of murals, it is clear that what is being envisaged is not the passive model normally associated with formal education. Thus, in Lo Hermida one mural displays a masked man sitting writing at a school desk while a policeman with a baton stands nearby. Another man beside the policeman points to the student while the slogan above his head reads: ‘Sin lucha ni acción no hay educación’ (‘Without struggle or action there is no education’). Struggle is the constant demand and it cannot be confined to formal settings. Another nearby mural spells this out: a fist, the international symbol of resistance, holds a pencil while the accompanying text reads: ‘En la calle y sin permiso yo me educo y organizo’ (‘In the street and without permission I educate myself and organize’).

This form of self-awareness requires resistance to all sorts of formal institutions in society. One singled out in many murals is the mass media because of its misrepresentation of popular resistance. In Villa Francia, one mural states: ‘Vecinos y vecinas, la tele nos miente. El pueblo que lucha no es delincuente’ (‘Neighbours, the television lies to us. The people who struggle are not delinquent’). And in La Victoria a mural shows how resistance is not just a matter of words but also of action; referring to a local community television station, it admonishes people, ‘No vea television. Hágala. 10

años difundiendo verdad, cultura y memoria' ('Don't watch television. Do it yourself. 10 years spreading truth, culture and memory').

For all that they may refer to the past and its thwarted aspirations, murals of resistance are not simply nostalgic. Rather they reiterate the old ideals for a new era and look forward to the accomplishment of those ideals. Resistance murals are ultimately about the future, with words like 'building' and 'constructing' occurring repeatedly. Or, as one BRP mural in La Legua puts it: 'Somos cultura en movimiento' ('We are a culture in motion').

Memorials

At the same time, the past is not to be forgotten. Thus, throughout La Victoria there are murals commemorating the dead. Most prominent is Padre Andre Jarlán, a French priest killed when he was hit by a bullet from a soldier's gun during disturbances in the area in September 1984. He has been 'turned into a symbol of all the innocent people who have fallen during the military dictatorship' (Riquelme (2004: 10). The parish house where he died has become a monument, covered outside and in with paintings, symbols and slogans that tell the history of the población and of the non-violent resistance movement which thrived there. A mass is held every year to commemorate his death and pride of place at the ceremony is given to Pierre Dubois, a worker priest who was instrumental in community organising and resistance in the area throughout the 1980s. One mural (see figure 3), painted by Muralistas Acción Rebelde, portrays Jarlán and has the

accompanying slogan: 'Nuestra lucha es cambiar esta realidad y no acomodarnos a ella' ('Our struggle is to change this reality and not to accommodate to it').

Figure 3 about here.

An estimated fifty priests and other clergy were arrested in the aftermath of the coup, and six priests were killed during the dictatorship, accused by the Junta of being Marxists. One of these, Gerardo Poblete, was tortured in Iquique in 1974 and died as a result.[4] He is depicted in a mural in San Miguel.

Many young combatants died fighting state forces during the dictatorship and often they are memorialised in murals. One area which abounds with such murals is Villa Francia. Each gable wall of the run-down four-storey apartment blocks sports a mural, some of them badly faded. From these murals larger-than-life portraits of young people look down. Among them is Alberto Silva, a fifteen year old, killed in 1983; 'Vuelve Alberto. Vuelve a sonreir, a respirar, a combatir' ('Come back, Alberto, to smile, to breathe, to fight'). Another depicts Miguel Leal, carrying a rifle and wrapped in a Chilean flag; he died in September 1986. A third mural refers to Araceli Romo and Pablo Vergara, two young local residents and members of the MIR, who were assassinated by state forces in 1988 (see figure 4).

Figure 4 about here.

[4] 'Human Rights in Chile: the Legacy', http://www.chipsites.com/derechos/dictadura_victimas_3_eng.html

Among the most famous victims of the dictatorship were Salvador Allende and Victor Jara, and their portraits occur frequently in murals. 2008 marked the hundredth anniversary of Allende's birth as well as the 35th anniversary of his death. One mural in La Legua uses a typical iconography of a cross-section of Chileans smiling and carrying tools and flags. There is an indigenous man, urban workers wearing hard hats, a rural worker in a straw hat, a young man carrying a Chilean flag – all of them led by a woman with green hair (see figure 5).[5]

Figure 5 about here.

Another depiction of Allende in San Miguel harks back to the reforms which he made and which were overturned by the dictatorship: 'Leche para todos los niños. El cobre para Chile' ('Milk for all children. Copper for Chile'). Allende nationalised Chile's copper production, and one of his most popular campaign promises and policies was that each child would receive half a litre of milk daily.

Equally numerous are the depictions of Victor Jara. In La Victoria, one mural portrays Victor Jara and Violeta Parra, who began the revolutionary transformation of Chilean folk music – 'nueva canción' – which Victor Jara continued. The accompanying slogan reads: 'Levántate hijo de rebeldía. Te sigueron veinte más veinte' ('Stand up child of the rebellion. They followed you twentyfold').[6]

[5] The green hair is significant, symbolising women as grounded in the earth and connected to life itself. 'Rosa the beautiful', one of the heroines of Isabel Allende's *The House of the Spirits*, has green hair.
[6] The last line is a reference to a song by Victor Jara called 'El Aparecido' (the Appeared), subtitled 'To Ernesto Che Guevara. 'Son of rebellion, twenty follow him, and twenty more'.

At the university a mural simply portrays Jara smoking a cigarette, with the accompanying text: 'Quel canto tiene sentido/ Cuando palpita en las venas/ Del que moríra cantando/ Las verdades verdaderas' '(The song only has meaning/ When it flows through the very veins/ Of one who will die singing/ Of real truths').[7] In other murals, he is depicted with his guitar, alone or surrounded by children. Most moving of all is the display in the centre of Santiago, in the pedestrian street in front of the sports stadium where he was taken after the coup. It has now been renamed in his honour: Estadio Victor Jara. Outside are murals of him, Violeta Parra, Salvador Allende, Pablo Neruda (one of Chile's two Nobel poet laureates)[8] and Che Guevara. Nearby is the simple statement: 'Vamos con Victor' ('We are going with Victor').

Throughout Santiago there are murals commemorating other dead heroes such as Miguel Enríquez, General Secretary of the MIR (in Lo Hermida), and other MIR activists (in Villa Francia), as well as Mapuche activists. One mural, in a liberation theology centre, Urracas de Emaus, depicts a pantheon of recent and more historical Chilean heroes, including Jara, Parra, Neruda, Allende, Mistral and Enríquez (see figure 6).

Figure 6 about here.

And of course, there are the less famous dead, those who were disappeared during the dictatorship. One mural at the University simply portrays a number of ghostly protestors,

[7] The lines are from Victor Jara's song 'Manifiesto'.
[8] The other, Gabriela Mistral, is also depicted in murals from time to time.

each carrying a placard which simply and poignantly reads: '¿Donde estan?' ('Where are they?')

In the end, the point of all these memorials is not revenge, but justice. The message of the murals is that the ideals for which the protestors and combatants, songwriters and activists, toma residents and intellectuals strove will remain alive as long as the dead are remembered and acknowledged. And along with this is the desire that there should not be impunity in relation to those who tortured and killed them. One Izquierda Cristiana mural in Macúl makes this point powerfully; a young man pulls back a curtain marked 'impunidad', to reveal a man being beaten by a modern-day policeman and a Spanish conquistador acting under the orders of a suited civilian seated at a table. The young man's companion points a finger accusingly at the torturers.

Women

Some murals about women celebrate women's role in resistance in various poblaciones. Women have been central in the solidarity of the community since the beginning, so it is not surprising that their accomplishments and experiences have been represented and celebrated. Thus, in La Victoria, in a mural painted by Colectivo Arte para La Victoria, a woman carrying two buckets of paint observes the mural within a mural which she has painted. 'Dedicado a las mujeres de la toma. 50 años' ('Dedicated to the women of the toma. 50 years').

In those murals specifically on feminist themes, the most common focus is opposition to violence against women. One such mural in La Victoria is accompanied by the text: 'Imagina mujeres nuevas. Odio desde ya tanto dolor causado. Odio desde ya una sociedad indiferente. ¿Cuantas muertas más? Si ya van más de 30.' ('Imagine new women. I already hate so much pain caused. I already hate an indifferent society. How many more deaths? There are already more than 30.'). In this mural a woman is depicted as a tree (see figure 7).

Figure 7 about here.

The same metaphor occurs in another mural in La Victoria, painted by Colectivo Arte para La Victoria. Each of the leaves hanging from the branches of the tree, which are simultaneously the woman's arms, contain a demand or aspiration: 'El arbol y la mujer crea la vida' ('The tree and the woman create life'); 'No golpes contra la mujer' ('Don't strike women'); 'Tengo derecho a soñar' ('I have the right to dream'); 'Recuerda: tu madre, tus hijas, son mujeres' ('Remember: your mother, your daughters, are women'); '¡Mujeres! No transmitan cultura machista a tus hijos' ('Women! Do not transmit macho culture to your sons'). Similar sentiments to the last of these statements are to be found elsewhere; for example, in Lo Hermida the text accompanying one mural reads: '¡No hay más parecido a un machista de derecho que un machista de izquierda!' ('There is nothing more like machismo of the Right than machismo of the Left').

Alongside this, another mural in Lo Hermida articulates the demands of right-to-chose groups in Chile. 'Mujeres, tu cuerpo, tu decides' ('Women, your body, you decide'). This demand refers not only to the absence of legal abortion in Chile, [9] but also the decision by Chile's Constitutional Tribunal in 2008 to ban the morning-after pill from free distribution in the public health system. (The pill is still available to those who can afford to pay.)

Mapuche

The Mapuche, Aymará, Atacameño, Quechua, Rapa Nui, Colla, Kawashkar and Yagán peoples represent about 4.6 percent of the total population of present-day Chile (Agostini et al. 2008: 6). The largest of these groups is the Mapuche who currently comprise 95 percent of all the indigenous people in Chile. Traditionally they have lived in the southern parts of present-day Chile and Argentina. The Mapuche were not defeated by the conquistadores and in 1641, the Spanish conceded the Treaty of Quilin which granted the Mapuche autonomy in Araucanía, a territory of 10 million hectares.

In 1818 Chile formally declared independence from the Spanish and began a sustained attempt to incorporate the Mapuche into the new state. In 1883 both the Chilean and Argentine armies defeated the Mapuche in separate military campaigns. The Chilean state confined the defeated Mapuche to reservations in a fraction of their former land where they came under increasing pressure from the state to embrace private ownership and

[9] Abortion is outlawed in Chile, even if carried out for therapeutic purposes or to save the life of the woman. Lengthy jail sentences of up to 125 years can be imposed on women who have an abortion.

ultimately assimilation. Although rarely united in their opposition, many resisted this assimilation. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, spurred on by the land reforms of the Christian Democrat government, that resistance reached a new level of militancy with Mapuche activists seizing the estates of absentee landlords. The Allende government enacted a new indigenous law in 1972 (Newbold 2004: 177), in which the state acknowledged many traditional Mapuche grievances, and proposed increasing the size of land holdings and confirming communal ownership. However, the law was not fully enacted before the coup of 1973.

After the coup a new indigenous law in 1979 (Haughney 2006: 55-57; Cereso 2004: 109-111) ensured that confiscated estates were given back to the landlords and that any Mapuche resistance was met with repression. Rights to natural resources, including water and subsoil, were conferred to the state and/or transnational corporations. Above all, the law decreed that indigenous people no longer existed as such and therefore were due no special concessions on the basis of ethnicity. Everyone was now Chilean. At the same time, the experience of the dictatorship helped to strengthen identity and resistance and to lay the base for political activism at a later period.

On the return to democracy, one of the first acts of newly-elected Concertación President Aylwin was the creation of a Special Commission for Indigenous Peoples. This was followed in 1993 by a new indigenous law (Cereso 2004: 111-117), which sought to 'protect, promote and develop' Mapuche interests. However, the state did not seriously challenge the widespread ownership of land in indigenous areas by non-indigenous

landlords. In effect, the state granted some concessions in return for Mapuche agreement not to instigate a campaign of land seizures (Zibechi 2008). And when some Mapuche did engage in land seizures, the response was highly repressive. An anti-terrorist law from the time of the dictatorship, the Law of Internal Security of the State, was used against activists. It was still being used during the presidency of Michelle Bachelet, despite an explicit campaign promise to the contrary.

Previous approaches to the Mapuche had involved assimilation plus capitalist exploitation (Haughney 2006: 203); the Concertación did not change that. Neoliberal processes took precedence over aspirations to protect indigenous peoples in Chile. This is evident in the development of logging and hydroelectric schemes by state companies and transnationals, begun during Pinochet's regime and continued under democratic government.

The fact that there is a substantial number of murals in Santiago about a struggle which takes place in the south, hundreds of miles away, may seem at first incongruous. But, although one slogan accompanying a mural about Mapuche political prisoners in El Bosque refers to the isolation of Mapuche struggle – '¿¡¡Quién por nosotros si no nosotros mismos!!' ('Who is for us if not ourselves?') – the fact is that a number of parties and groups on the Left, not least the Communist Party, have embraced the Mapuche cause. Thus one mural in La Victoria refers to the struggle over land and the existence of Mapuche political prisoners. The accompanying text reads: 'El Kultrún está llamando a los hijos de la tierra para recuperar sus territorios que están en manos de las

empresas forestales. ¡Libertad a los presos políticos Mapuche!! Ahora' ('The Kultrún is calling the sons of the earth to recover the territories which are in the hands of the forestry companies. Liberty for political prisoners! Mapuche now!')[10]

Another mural in La Victoria, depicts, among other things, a bank guarded by armed military personnel, and a member of the indigenous Mapuche community holding a stick used in playing the ancient sport of palín, a kind of field hockey. Above them all is the slogan, 'Chilenos y Mapuche: a luchar contra el capitalismo' ('Chileans and Mapuche, to struggle against capitalism').

Mapuche prisoners have gone on hunger strike periodically in protest at the repression of Mapuche activism in general and the use of anti-terrorist laws in particular. One mural in La Legua relates to the case of four activists, Patricia Troncoso, Juan Huenulao, Patricio Marileo and Jaime Marileo, who were imprisoned for ten years in 2001 under anti-terrorist legislation for the burning of 100 hectares of pine plantation in protest in the use of their ancestral land by a transnational forestry company (Zibechi 2008; Bianchi 2006; Haughney 2006: 200). In 2003, Patricia Troncoso sustained a hunger strike for 109 days while being periodically force-fed. She ended the strike when the state agreed to certain concessions in their treatment as prisoners. The mural (see figure 8) depicts Troncoso with the accompanying text: 'Femicidio de estado en Chile. Muerte lenta y silenciosa de una gran mujer, Patricia Tronsoco. "Si mi muerte sirve para la libertad de mis hermanos yo no voy a desistir." Prisionera política Mapuche en huelga de hambre más de 85 días …

[10] 'El kultrún' is a ritual drum used by the Mapuche. Other traditional symbols which appear in such murals are the rehue (Mapuche totem pole), ruka (Mapuche house) and trutruca (a musical instrument).

resistiendo' ('Femicide by the state of Chile. Slow and silent death of a great woman, Patricia Troncoso. "If my death contributes to liberty for my brothers and sisters I am not going to desist." Mapuche political prisoner on hunger strike. More than 85 days … resisting').

Figure 8 about here.

Mapuche activists who have been killed during protests, many of which have been entirely peaceful, are represented in a number of murals. Among them is Alex Lemún, a seventeen-year-old who was hit by a shotgun pellet fired by a police officer during the peaceful occupation of a forestry estate in November 2002 and died in hospital five days later. This mural (see figure 9) is in Lo Hermida.

Figure 9 about here.

Another mural in El Bosque features Lemún along with Rodrigo Cisterna (a 26-year-old forestry worker shot dead during a protest in March 2007), Matias Catrileo (a 22-year-old university student shot dead during the peaceful occupation of a plantation in January 2008), and Jonny Cariqueo (22 years old; arrested and beaten by police during a march in March 2008, he died afterwards of a heart attack).

Conclusion

The murals of La Victoria provide a key example of collective memory at work. They articulate the group's sense of a common past as well as its key values. Such collective memory work is always driven by contemporary concerns. The present determines how the past is interpreted. 'The past is gone, it is already de-termin(at)ed; it cannot be changed... What can change about the past is its *meaning*, which is subject to reinterpretations, anchored in intentions and expectations toward the future' (Jelin 2003: 26). As such, murals connect the past, the present and the future.

The social construction of collective memory is not carried out in a vacuum; it involves constant struggle. Other groups, often more powerful, are working at their interpretations of the past. But the interpretation of the powerful is not guaranteed in advance. Even in the midst of authoritarian repression the hegemony of the official interpretation of the past is never assured. '... there will always be other stories, other memories, and alternative interpretations. These endure in spaces of resistance, in the private sphere, in the "catacombs" of history' (Jelin 2003: xviii). When conflicts end there is a window of opportunity for these subaltern views to occupy a larger social space. But the dialectic is not ended. If anything, the cessation of political conflict can simultaneously mean increased struggle over the meaning of the past.

> There is an active political struggle not only over the meaning of what took place in the past but the meaning of memory itself. The space of memory is thus an arena of political struggle that is frequently conceived in terms of a struggle 'against oblivion': *remember so as not to repeat* (Jelin 2003: xviii).

In a vivid and dramatic display, that is a key function of the murals of La Victoria. It is also why, unlike murals of resistance elsewhere, those in Santiago need to remain on the walls, transition to democracy notwithstanding.

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Figure 1. La Victoria, Santiago. Muralistas de Acción Rebelde mural celebrating fiftieth anniversary of the toma

Figure 2. La Victoria, Santiago. Unidades Muralistas Camilo Torres mural of Chileans fighting repression

Figure 3. La Victoria, Santiago. Memorial mural for Padre André Jarlán, painted by Muralistas Acción Rebelde

Figure 4. Memorial to Araceli Romo and Pablo Vergara, Villa Francia, Santiago

Figure 5. Unidades Muralistas Camilo Torres mural celebrating centenary of birth of Salvador Allende, La Legua, Santiago

Figure 6. Urracas de Emaus, Santiago. BRP mural depicting Chilean heroes

Figure 7. La Victoria. Mural against violence against women.

Figure 8. Mural, La Legua, Santiago, in support of hunger strike of Patricia Troncoso

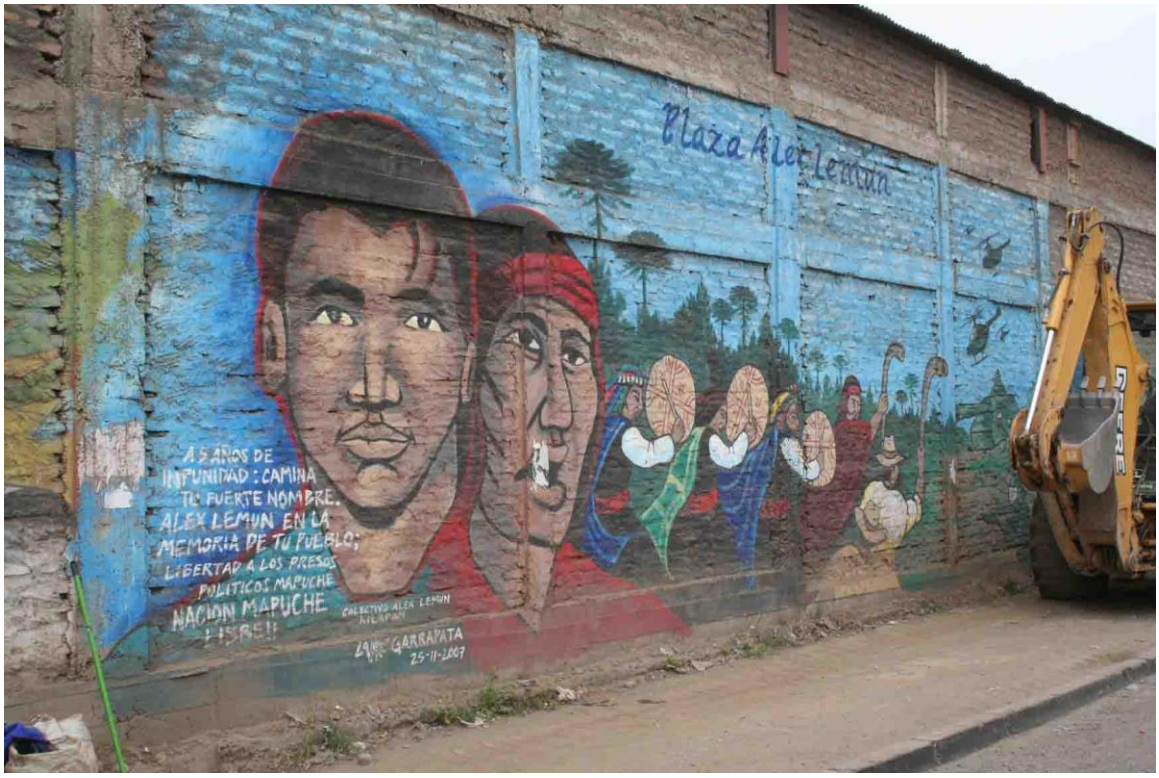

Figure 9. Mural, Lo Hermida, Santiago. Memorial to Alex Lemun