Preserving Memory:
The Past and the Human Rights Movement in Chile

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In this paper, I am interested in exploring the ways in which the Chilean human rights movement (HRM) since 1990 approaches the past. I am particularly interested in focusing on the ways in which the construction of collective memory has become a major area of concern, and an important battleground, for human rights activists.

To the degree that a human rights movement exists at all in Chile today it is, in large part, dedicated to “addressing” or “confronting” the “past”. This paper seeks to address four questions: What does it mean to “confront the past”? How do human rights activists do this, exactly? Why did this focus emerge as a dominant concern? And why does it matter?

To get at these four questions, this paper primarily draws on my involvement in a three year project, funded by the Ford Foundation’s Santiago Office, to examine human rights archives in the Southern Cone. During this project, I became aware that a concerted and robust effort to create “memory repositories” in the form of human rights archives was, in itself, a conscious form of activist truth-telling. By creating counter-hegemonic sources of documented truth, the HRM sought to influence the future telling of history and to influence the shape and content of “collective memory”.

Additionally, this paper draws on a blossoming literature which might be called “Legacies of Authoritarianism”.1 This literature provides some useful material to conceptualize the development of the HRM in Chile since 1990. Finally, a small but interesting literature within social movement theory has addressed the ways in which all social movements inevitably decline over time2. This literature, although it has tended to focus on the United States, has much to teach us about the ways in which the Chilean HRM has declined since 1990.

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The Human Rights Movement (HRM) in Chile, 2000

By virtually all accounts, the HRM in Chile today is practically moribund, compared to its famously vibrant period in the 1970s and 1980s, although recent developments in the Pinochet case have led to increased vitality and visibility. From an organizational point of view, the eight or nine largest human rights organizations (HROs) in Chile—not to mention dozens of smaller groups, including neighborhood and regional HROs—are weak, underfunded, minimally staffed, garner low levels of popular enthusiasm, and are practically invisible as agenda-setters or influential voices in Chilean society (except, perhaps, on the specific issue of Pinochet’s detention in London and recent return to Chile).

On one level, this is hardly a surprise at all. Social movements—almost by definition—decline over time. Moreover, it may be more useful to see the Chilean HRM beginning in 1973 not as a human rights movement, per se, but as an anti-authoritarian movement; it might then be expected almost automatically to vanish after its primary goal—the elimination of authoritarianism—was achieved in 1990. There are also other explanations for why the Chilean HRM has faded in glory and influence, such as Garth and Dezalay’s argument that international support and allegiances (especially, but not only, through funding) were key to the HRM’s vibrancy, and when these partnerships dissolved, the HRM was left without necessary resources.

Although the HRM in Chile is weak, however, it has not ceased to exist entirely. At least six of the major and historically most important HROs still exist in some form, and each of these is still active. These include the Vicaria de la Solidaridad, which has transformed itself into a human rights archive; the Chilean Commission of Human Rights (CCHR); the Corporación de Promoción y Defensa de los Derechos del Pueblo (CODEPU); the Fundación Para la Protección de la Infancia Dañada por los Estados de Emergencia (PIDEE); the Agrupación de Familiares de Detenidos-Desaparecidos (AFDD); and the Fundacion de Ayuda Social de los Iglesias Cristianas (FASIC).

These groups are involved in numerous activities, including human rights education, international networking, and developing activities around access to justice, and social and economic rights. But an important part of the work of these organizations has to do with “addressing the past” and fighting impunity based on past human rights abuses.

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3 This is clear from numerous interviews and first hand observation, and also raised in, for example, Garth and Dezalay (1999).
4 See Orellana and Hutchison, 1990. Keck and Sikkink’s (1998) examination of the human rights advocacy networks is also instructive (see pp. 79-121).
5 See Freeman and Johnson, 1999.
7 There are at least two other organizations which are worth mentioning, although one—Servicio Paz y Justicia (SERPAJ-Chile)—has virtually disappeared altogether and the other—the Association of Relatives of Politically Executed Persons (AFEP)—is very small and specialized.
What does it mean to “confront the past”? or
The Past as Past and the Past as Present

The past is an important part of the human rights movement in at least two ways: first, the human rights movement is concerned with reclaiming the past as a kind of shared public space (“the past as past”). That is, it is concerned with fighting against dominant, state-constructed narratives of historical truth and replacing these with narratives which include, or even center on, the experiences of victims of repression. This is the focus of this paper, and I return to this below with a discussion of archives.

The human rights movement is also concerned with the past as a conscious strategy in an effort to democratize the present (“the past as present”). This is best summed up in the idea of a battle against impunity. The basic notion here is that democratization requires confronting the past and that an examination of the past is a useful strategy for deepening democracy.

In both cases (and obviously these overlap), it is widely accepted by the human rights community in Chile that the Chilean Truth and Reconciliation Commission of 1990 was “not enough” in terms of addressing the past. Human rights activists call for both 1) expanding the truth and 2) more than truth (i.e. “justice”). Perhaps more than anything else, they call for remembering. Why put so much energy into remembering the past? In Chile, human rights activists usually give the following reasons:

1. **The moral imperative.** Human rights activists argue that there is a moral imperative to remember, to validate and acknowledge victims as victims. They suggest that this is the first step towards healing the nation and towards justice, which can only be based on truth.

2. **The past is impossible to ignore.** Another argument is that the past is impossible to ignore or forget—it will always surface—so it is better to allow it to surface in constructive and healing ways. The other alternative is what might be called “eruptions” of memory, in which anger and frustration seethes beneath the surface of political life and then erupts at various moments. The American author William Faulkner put it well: “the past is not dead and gone; it isn’t even past”.

3. **Strengthening democracy.** Activists also argue that democracy cannot be built on a foundation of lies, and that an assertive, organized and concerted effort to remember the past can lead to a stronger democracy. Truth heals individuals (citizens) and the collectivity as a whole (the citizenry), the building blocks of

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8 Although practically no one in Chile contests the number 3000—the approximate number of officially documented cases of death or disappearance—HR activists often point out that, first, the number could be larger and, second, that the number does not include torture victims or other victims who were not killed.


democracy. Additionally, activists argue that the pursuit of justice for past crimes will help strengthen democratic institutions, such as the judiciary. Testing and pushing these institutions by seeking to process human rights claims through them, it is argued, can lead to their strengthening and maturity.

4. **Accountability.** Democratization can be enhanced by creating mechanisms of accountability (the opposite of impunity). This is done by bringing past offenders of human rights abuses to trial or by finding ways to hold them accountable for their crimes.

5. **Building a democratic culture:** Here an argument is made that only by highlighting the sad and horrible truths about the past can we hope to build a democratic *culture* in the future. The fundamental operating assumption is basically educational: if HR activists can help educate the population in past evils they can help create a cultural shift to a more humane set of shared values.

6. **Nunca Mas.** Finally, there is an argument that remembering creates *deterrence*: only remembering is more likely to prevent these things from happening again in the future. Chilean human rights activist Sola Sierra puts it this way: "Remembering helps the people of a country avoid committing the same crimes, calling things by their name; a criminal is a criminal... The worst thing that could happen in Chile... would be for forgetting to do away with this problem".

These six justifications (whether for reclaiming the past as historical memory/public space, or for using the past as a strategic tool within the HRM) infuse the human rights movement in Chile (as well as, in slightly different ways, in Argentina and Uruguay). These six justifications further translate into three basic lines of activity which occupy the bulk of the day-to-day work and long-term planning of the HROs discussed in this paper. The first two of these are:

**Prosecuting Offenders.** On the most obvious level, addressing the past means retroactive justice. Publicly accusing and prosecuting the perpetrators of human rights abuses is among the top priorities for the HRM as a whole in Chile, and this strategy as met with some success. Especially since the detainment of Pinochet in London, a number of military figures have been detained or arrested. The logic behind this strategy is fairly obvious: it includes retribution; basic concepts of justice; punishment for evil deeds; an opportunity to victims to publicly tell their stories and be acknowledged; and a chance for society to take a moral stand through its public institutions. Further, the prosecution of

11 See Carlos Santiago Nino (1996) for an explanation of this concept historically, globally, and in Argentina.
12 Including, for example, retired Gen. Humberto Gordon, a former head of the CNI secret police; Brigadier Gen. Arturo Alvarez Scoglia, former director of the Army Intelligence Directorate (DINE); Sergio Arellano Stark, indicted for his responsibility in the so-called Caravan of Death case involving the aggravated kidnapping of 19 political prisoners in October 1973; and Humberto Leiva Gutierrez and Hugo Salas Wenzel, both charged as authors of the deaths in 1987 of 12 members of the Manuel Rodriguez Patriotic Front (FPMR) in the case known as Operation Albania.
perpetrators —through the *judicial system*—is seen as strengthening (potentially vulnerable or corrupted) political institutions and protecting democracy.

*Sites, Ceremonies and Commemorative Space.* Writing about Argentina, Marguerite Feitlowitz explains the importance, especially among victims of human rights abuses but also, arguably, for the soul of the nation as a whole and collective healing, of efforts “to recuperate places that were stolen, rededicate public spaces, and convert death centers into places that resonate with life” after the end of authoritarian rule. In addition to “taking back” places like torture centers, in Chile this has also meant smaller expressions of memory, such as the creation of roadside shrines (*animitas*) to the fallen and commemorative plaques. Since the end of authoritarianism Chile (as well as in Argentina and Uruguay), commemorative activities resulting in “expressions of memory” have been a major thrust within the HRM. A few examples include the Memorial del Detenido Desaparecido y del Ejecutado Político, located in the Santiago General Cemetery, which is an imposing and visually impressive commemorative space to those killed or disappeared during the authoritarian period and the Parque por la Paz, (Peace Park), a commemorative public space for reflection aimed at remembering human rights violations and victims during the authoritarian period, located at the site of an important detention and torture center, Villa Grimaldi (also known as Cuartel Terranova) in the Peñalolén neighborhood of Santiago, (in Argentina) on-going projects to build a Memory Museum; (in Uruguay) the multi-meaning Jewish Holocaust Monument.

**Archiving as Human Rights Strategy**

The third main activity, related to monuments and commemorative activities, is a recent push by human rights groups in these countries to collect documents … to *archive.* It

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13 For Chile, the places uses as torture and detention centers during military rule are listed in the Rettig report. An excellent adaptation of the information from the Rettig report, plus some additional “sites of memory”, can be found at the Derechos Chile Web Site (www.derechoschile.cl).

14 For example, there is an *animita* on the side of the highway in Quilicura near the national airport to the *degollados*, a group of five men who had their throats slit in 1985; and one near the bullet-pocked wall of a cemetery (Parque del Recuerdo) in the northern part of Santiago.

15 For example, there are small commemorative plaques at the Colegio de Profesores de Chile (2394 Moneda), the Colegio de Medicos (Esmaraldo 678); and the Clinica San Juan Sotero del Rio (Matcuna and Huerfanos). Other examples of these kinds of expressive gestures include a small memorial park in La Reina (near Tobalaba and J. Rivera). Similar efforts were made in various regions, such as in the cities of Concepción, Temuco and Antofagasta (interview with Gonzalo Muñoz, AFDD, 6 July 1998).

16 More information on Villa Grimaldi can be found in both the Rettig report and at the Derechos Chile website: http://www.derechoschile.com

17 This activity received an added boost in the region when the Ford Foundation convened an international workshop to discuss archiving human rights documents. My involvement in organizing this workshop makes it difficult for me to evaluate it neutrally, but I have recently done a follow-up report, 6 months later. One impact of this workshop concerns the convocational power of the Ford Foundation to highlight an area of interest, draw attention to it, and encourage activity. Everyone I interviewed told me that the preservation of human rights documents is now on the agenda in a way that it was not before. One activist went so far as to suggest a paradigm shift in thinking about documents within human rights organizations. Another suggested that the workshop served as an consolidating moment: consolidating a theme which had existed before but could now be considered an important *line of activity* within the human rights movement in Latin America.
has become increasingly apparent to many people that human rights organizations which functioned during the military years amassed huge collections of documentary materials which themselves represent a kind of national patrimony telling the story of a particular period. Human rights groups have thus been frantically collecting their documents, trying to organize them and preserve them (such as on microfilm).\(^\text{18}\) This effort to preserve documentary materials is a key human rights strategy in Chile, as it is seen as a \emph{counter-hegemonic source of telling history}. Archives, seen in this sense, are not simply repositories of paper, but become active elements in the reconstruction of a national narrative. Their existence—and the energy put into them by human rights organizations—is further evidence that one of the major battlegrounds of the human rights struggle in the 1990s has been the struggle over the “master narrative” of what happened a few decades earlier. Archives play an important role in this.\(^\text{19}\)

Throughout its history, the HRM has sought to \emph{document} and \emph{publicize} human rights abuses. In fact, documentation has been at the core of the global human rights movement since at least 1961, when a group of lawyers, journalists, writers, and others formed the \emph{Appeal for Amnesty}, which told the stories of six "prisoners of conscience" from different countries and of different political and religious backgrounds, all jailed for peacefully expressing their political or religious beliefs, and called on governments everywhere to free such prisoners (the \emph{Appeal} later led to the creation of Amnesty International).

Archiving is, in essence, an extension of documenting human rights atrocities. In the most basic sense, archiving means choosing the most relevant and important of a wide range of documents which might be preserved. The list begins most obviously with legal documents (such as habeas corpus briefs or writs filed on behalf of “disappeared” persons), but also includes testimonials of victims, family members and witnesses to atrocities; contemporary accounts in published sources (including both newspapers and movement publications); and countless types of other materials including pamphlets, posters, position papers, mimeos, video and audiotapes, and meeting agendas or notes taken by members of human rights groups.

Whether stated as such or not, the HRM’s current emphasis on archiving the past is based on an interesting set of assumptions about history and the construction of social memory. First, the creation of an “official story”, a state-generated narrative about the past, is seen as a part of a larger “project”—if not an outright conscious strategy—by dominant or hegemonic forces to interpret the past in ways which benefit certain groups in society. What we might call “hegemonic ‘truth’” thus becomes the enemy of human rights advocates because the pursuit of such “truth” is seen as a “complex and purposefully

\(^{18}\) See Liz Hutchison, 1999, \emph{Rapporteur’s Report: Preserving Historical Memory: Documents and Human Rights Archives in the Southern Cone} (Santiago: Ford Foundation Office of the Andes and the Southern Cone)

\(^{19}\) See Bickford (1999) and Bickford (2000)
selective process of historical recollection” which is a “bid for hegemony” by powerful groups in society.\textsuperscript{20}

In this sense, from the perspective of the HRM, the primary and most frightening alternative to its demand for “remembering” is not “forgetting” but instead it is the acceptance (or victory) of the official narrative. In fact, an argument that is often posed as a debate between remembering and forgetting is really frequently an argument about choosing among multiple different interpretations of Chile’s past. Were the people who were “disappeared” communist trouble-makers and subversives who threatened the foundations of the republic? Or were they idealistic innocents fighting for a better society who were subjected to unjustifiably harsh repression? Or were they leftist insurgents who were on the brink of building true socialism? Or were they all of these? Or none?

\textbf{Why did the past emerge as such a key concern?}

Although there are reasons, discussed below, that the HRM would have been likely to focus on the past, as it has done, it was not inevitable. Given the multiple and diverse challenges associated with deepening Chilean democracy, the human rights movement might have taken an entirely different direction after 1990. For example, it might have focused on strengthening basic liberties or expanding freedoms such as freedom of expression under polyarchic rule; challenging police brutality; seeking to improve economic, social and cultural rights; fighting against gender, racial or class discrimination; or battling for enhanced consumer rights in a neoliberal economy. But very few of these activities have emerged as important concerns of any of the major human rights organizations in Chile. To understand why the past has remained a more central concern than any of these other areas, it is necessary to look at the formation of the movement.

Chile experienced massive human rights violations during the 1970s and 1980s—resulting in the death or disappearance of thousands, not to mention numerous cases of torture.\textsuperscript{21} And it was largely in reaction to these violations that a strong human rights movement emerged. Although the HRM may have had certain antecedents (e.g. labor organizations) before the advent of “bureaucratic authoritarianism” in the 1970s, it was clearly pushed to an entirely new level during—and because of—military rule. In this sense, we can say that the dictatorship contributed directly to the creation (ironically) of a strong HRM—although this was clearly not a desirable result from the perspective of

\textsuperscript{20} These are the words of Raphael Samuel who in his (1994) book \textit{Theaters of Memory} (London: Verso) is actually discussing British museums and the “heritage” movement. The words—and Samuel’s ideas in this book—seem appropriate for the current discussion.

\textsuperscript{21} The minimum scope of these human rights abuses are clearly documented in the major publication on the subject: the Chilean Truth and Reconciliation Report (or Rettig Commission Report). Additionally, Human Rights Watch/Americas, Amnesty International, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States (OAS), various United Nations agencies, the International Commission of Jurists, the United States State Department, and Freedom House, among others, have all documented these violations.
military rulers. Nonetheless, the human rights movement can be considered a legacy of authoritarianism.\footnote{I am grateful to Alex Wilde for first bringing this idea to my attention, during numerous discussions in Chile in 1998, although he may or may not agree with the direction(s) in which I take this core notion.}

The definition of a “legacy” of authoritarianism is not entirely clear. In general, this term has been defined according to an assumption of path-dependency: that is, the idea that a set of institutions or a behavioral pattern changed or became firmly entrenched as a direct result of a specific regime (authoritarian rule, in this case). This assumption assumes that history was “diverted” at an identifiable moment or period in time and that it took a different “path” because of authoritarian rule.\footnote{For a discussion of path dependency and “critical junctures”, see Ruth Berins Collier and David Collier, \textit{Shaping the Political Arena : Critical Junctures, the Labor Movement, and Regime Dynamics in Latin America}.} For example, we might say that the neoliberal economic model in much of the Southern Cone was a direct result of authoritarian rule; or we might suggest that a cultural hesitancy to speak out publicly on political issues in Chile is a result of 17 years of dictatorship. The term “legacy”, at least as it is used in the phrase “legacies of authoritarianism”, tends to connote a “negative” result.

The fact that the HRM in Chile can be seen as a (positive) legacy of authoritarianism is significant because it means that the particular ways in which the movement was constituted—and that the ways in which it has attempted to reconstitute itself in a post-authoritarian context—are greatly influenced by its origins under military rule. This creates enormous problems and challenges for the movement as a whole.

The Pinochet dictatorship beginning in 1973 presented the nascent and emerging HRM with a clear target. The human rights struggle was largely built around resisting, de-legitimatising, rejecting, denying, struggling against, or saying no to authoritarian rule. This meant that certain other approaches were, by necessity, marginalized by the pressing requirement to end state terror. The emphasis of the movement on “la batalla en contra del terror”\footnote{Fruhling, quoted in Orellana and Hutchison, p. 99.} thus had effects along three axes:

\textit{Issue Focus.}

The existence of a clear enemy meant that the HRM was less likely to branch out into multiple issue areas, especially those which could not be attributed to military rule. HROs did, in fact, have many different priorities, but the overarching goal of ending dictatorship was so strong that other issue areas often seemed irrelevant, impractical, or low priority. In this sense, the struggle for “civil liberties” for example, or for “social and economic rights”, can be more accurately seen as the “struggle to end dictatorship so that civil rights can be improved” or the “struggle to rid ourselves of dictatorship so that we can work towards a more equitable society”. The Socialist and Communist parties did not necessarily help diversify this focus, as they frequently called for revolution, first, and human rights, second. Thus the HRM during most of the 1970s and 1980s was, arguably, less a human rights movement as much as it was a counter-authoritarian (or counter-hegemonic) movement which used the
vocabulary of human rights. As one activist put it: “we were fighting against the dictatorship, pure and simple. ‘Human rights’ gave us a rich and useful framework—and one with which, of course, we fully agreed—but we were not fighting as much for human rights as we were for the end of Pinochet”.  

This means that once the dictatorship was in fact over, the HRM could, on one hand claim victory. On the other hand, ironically, this meant that the HRM’s essential motivating force had been weakened. Like many social movements, such as, arguably, the US civil rights movement, the HRM’s decline was marked by its success in achieving its goal.

Institutionality
With its goals set towards toppling authoritarian rule, and with the disarticulation of civil society well-underway (see below), the HRM was never able to “take a breath” and consider its own institutionality, particularly in terms of funding and local capacity-building. A large influx of resources from liberal governments and foundations, responding to the demand of what was clearly a struggle for justice, painted in stark terms, allowed HROs to build a strong but ephemeral set of institutions. In each country, HROs specialized and carved out niches (such as symbolic protest or legal advocacy), but the dependence of HROs on these resources meant that they were never able to develop alternative sources of viability. When dictatorships fell, so did HR institutions, as international funding dissipated. But it was not just funding that created this problem. HROs—driven by a just mission and the complexities of the context—had often chosen goal-oriented mechanisms to use the funding. The flip side to this was that they had often not been able to put energy into developing broad bases of support; they were at times internally hierarchical and unable to develop stakeholdership in staff members; and they had frequently not been able to communicate among themselves as to the most efficient division of labor among different groups, thus setting a precedent which—although workable at the time, given the context—would cause problems in the future.

Forward-Looking Strategies
Because they were so concerned with the moment, and because it was impossible to envision the details of a democratic future, HROs were not able to develop long-term strategies for how to act after the end of authoritarianism. This is not surprising, but it did turn out to be problematic once democracy arrived. In effect, it meant that HROs found it difficult to adapt. The default strategy after democracy would thus become looking at the past.

A complicating factor here, of course, was the (arguably unavoidable) centrality on the experiences of victims. The victims of human rights abuses were, obviously, at the core of any struggle for human rights in Chile. The experiences of the victims were so dramatic and so evil that they could easily translate into anger and sadness—

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26 See Doug MacAdam, “The Decline of the Civil Rights Movement”, in Freeeman and Johnson
27 This was further complicated by suspicion and ideological divisions.
two powerful emotions which would help animate the struggle in Chile. When the dictatorship ended, however, the centrality on the experiences of victims remained.

Terror and dismemberment of civil society
At the same time as the HRM was emerging and fighting the dictatorship, authoritarian rulers were taking steps to destroy the fabric of a democratic civil society. The result would be that civil sector actors, including HROs, would find it difficult to reconfigure themselves into viable forces after the end of authoritarianism.

One of the primary goals of military rulers was, quite explicitly, to eliminate politics from the scene. The correct task of government was thought to be administration, and politics was thought to be a hindrance to good administration. As such bureaucratic authoritarian rulers sought the efficient, administrative, and de-ideologized state – and they were willing to use the repressive power to achieve it.

Just to name two examples, the university system and organized labor, it is clear that the underlying legal, social and political foundations of a democratic society were severely undermined during the dictatorships in the region. Universities, for instance, were dramatically altered after the military took control. Entire departments were destroyed or repressed; student groups were demobilized; and academic administrators were replaced by military appointments. Organized labor was, of course, violently repressed, as were other civil sector actors and organizations.

In addition to destroying existing civil sector organizations, the military government was also able to reduce political opportunities for future activity by removing access points into the political process which could serve as incentives for civil sector participation. Without institutions to “invite” the participation of interested groups and individuals, civil society was further isolated. Thus the authoritarian regime left a number of institutional legacies which would make it difficult for the HRM to reconstitute itself along interest group lines. Interest groups require access points into governmental processes. With most vestiges of corporatism removed (which, in Chile, had included certain mechanisms for labor to be involved in decision-making) and with no or few pluralist institutions in place, there would be few “opportunity structures” for a newly constituted HRM after 1990.28

The Transition
The literature on transitions to democracy establishes the importance of the mode of transition from authoritarian to democratic rule as a key moment in the recent history of new democracies.29 For the purposes of this essay, what is important is the “pacted”

28 For a discussion of opportunity structures and interest groups, see Michael McCann, 1986, Taking Reform Seriously: Perspectives on Public Interest Liberalism (Ithaca, NY: Cornell). For a discussion of post-1990 political institutions in Chile and pluralist openings for political participation in Chile, see Louis Bickford, 1998, Public Participation, Political Institutions, and Democracy in Chile, 1990-1997 (Santiago: FLACSO-Chile, Neuva Serie FLACSO)

29 This literature is obviously voluminous. Some representative texts of this literature include Guillermo O’Donnell, Philippe Schmitter, and Laurence Whitehead (1986); and Terry Lynn Karl and Philippe Schmitter (1991); and Samuel Huntington (1996).
nature of the Chilean transition—specifically, the negotiations between the military and the Concertación leading up to the smooth transition and the handing over of the presidential mantle on March 11, 1990.

Although the Chilean human rights movement and other social movements (such as those generated by the popular sectors) had contributed greatly to the downfall of the military regime, these groups were largely not included in the discussions—which often took place behind closed doors—between representatives of the outgoing and incoming regimes between 1988-1990.

The incoming government of Patricio Aylwin had a strong human rights platform—one based on the twin pillars of “truth” and “reconciliation” which led to the creation of Truth and Reconciliation Commission. But there were at least three effects of the government’s role. First, the government took control of human rights discourse on a national stage. By establishing a Blue-Ribbon commission on truth, the Aylwin government highlighted human rights and memory as a central concern. This created heightened awareness of linkage between a discourse of rights, on the one hand, and a discourse of memory, truth, past atrocities, and history on the other. But the government’s central role in establishing the truth commission and setting the tone of many discussions about the past meant also that HR activists were somewhat displaced. Those who were still committed to the struggle often found themselves interacting with the democratic government—which changes the dynamic of an oppositional force considerably. In interviews, HR activists explain that on the one hand they were thrilled to have the government “on their side” for once but, at the same time:

“having the government’s involvement actually diminished some of our energy, as I think we began to think that the struggle was really over and the government would take care of all our problems. This was stupid of us, of course, but at time we were very excited about our victory against Pinochet. We were proud that our government was so involved in human rights”

**Conclusion**

To sum up: the rise of the HRM was a direct result of severe repression under dictatorship and the HRM was greatly influenced by these origins. It further came to life at a moment when civil society was under attack and severely repressed. At the same time, the HROs themselves became organized according to the logic of NO to

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30 This is one of the key points made by two recent works on human rights and democratic transitions: Alexandra Barahona de Brito (1997); and Alison Brysk (1994).
31 The results of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission have been published in English and Spanish. Also, see Barahona de Brito 1997; Garretón (1994); Heyner (1994); Brett (1992); and Zalaquett.
32 For example, projects such as the Truth Commission, the Memorial Wall and the early stages of the creation of the Villa Grimaldi Peace Park all involved, to a greater or lesser degree, individual members of the government and/or direct participation of the government per se (as in the case of the Truth Commission).
33 Interview, Santiago, December, 1998.
34 Although other factors also have to be considered, such as increasing global acceptance of human rights norms, the role of the Church, and the role of revolutionary movements in articulating grievance.
dictatorship—which made it difficult for them to adapt to the multiple issues they would face under democratic rule. They were never fully able to develop sustainable institutionality which would last beyond the fall of dictators, nor were they well-educated in other elements of the human rights struggle, and had never been able to articulate forward-looking strategies for the next stage under political democracy.

It is an enormous challenge for social movements to adapt to changed circumstances, and the Chilean HRM is no exception. It has withered substantially. What remains is a smaller but still committed group of activists and HROs which are dedicated to a focus on the past (either past as past or past as present): they continue to struggle against authoritarianism, which has always been—and continues to be—at the core of the mission of the HRM.

An important part of the remaining movement is focused on archives—building archives as a source of counter-hegemonic truth. By creating human rights archives, HR activists suggest that they can help construct a narrative of the past which gives adequate emphasis to the pain and suffering of victims of human rights abuses. Archives are thus seen as both an activist tool (i.e. because they contain living documents: documents that are still relevant to the pursuit of justice) but also as a source of ammunition on a broader and more complex battlefield: the battlefield of historical memory.
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