The fall of Chilean democracy in 1973 is about to become fifty years old. I focus on the crisis of words during the government of the Popular Unity (1970-1973) that contributed decisively to the political climate that was abruptly cancelled by the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet (1973-1990), a well-known case of bureaucratic authoritarianism characterized by a high degree of ideological coherence centered on neoliberal reform and the enormous power that Pinochet concentrated in himself. However, the Pinochet dictatorship ended much more than the democratic regime that characterized Chilean political culture since the early nineteenth century. The Chilean military government developed radical structural changes, imposing an economic model based on orthodox market deregulation and the withdrawal of the state from some of its regulatory and most of its developmental functions. These drastic institutional changes included the drafting of a new constitution in 1980 that modified political institutions and decision-making processes, the privatization of the provision of social services and social security, a top-down policy of regional decentralization, and the passing of a new labor legislation that undermined existing unions. Almost no aspect of Chilean society was left unchanged.2

The democratic defeat of the Pinochet dictatorship in the 1988 referendum gave birth to the political and economic model that has ruled Chile until today. In political terms, the

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1 This paper is extensively based on the research I conducted for my book Las palabras no se las lleva el viento: lenguajes políticos y democracia durante el gobierno de la Unidad Popular (1970-1973). Santiago: Centro de Estudios Bicentenario, 2019, and the book I co-wrote with Sebastián Hurtado-Torres, La elección presidencial de 1970. Pasado y futuro de un momento extraordinario. Santiago: Editorial Historia Chilena, 2020. I also thank Sebastian Hurtado-Torres for his very useful comments of the draft of this work.

democratic stability of the last thirty years was achieved at the expense of popular participation in the decision-making process and the alteration of the rule of the majority on behalf of institutional and economic compromises. The center-left governments of Concertación were successful in sustaining high levels of growth while reducing poverty, but much less solvent in matching those achievements with equality in education, pensions, healthcare, and other social demands.\textsuperscript{3} The consequences of living in a radically-conceived individualistic, competitive and free-market oriented society and economy have placed Chile into the path of a deep questioning of the politics and economics of this neoliberal regime. Recently, Chileans at the ballot boxes overwhelmingly voted to discard the constitution of the dictatorship of Pinochet. While it is still too early to interpret this historical landmark in any direction, it is clear that the pace of modernization followed by the country since 1990 faces enormous political and socio-economic challenges injected by popular discontent with the relationships between state and society that have governed Chile during the last decades.

Although the constitutional process inaugurated by the 2020 referendum is still open-ended, I think that it is necessary to pose two questions to understand its historical dynamic tensions, potentiality and dangers. If, as Antonio Gramsci incisively proposed, crisis consists “in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear,”\textsuperscript{4} it is worth asking: what is the old dying in Chile? Or, in other words, what are the origins of the epochal cycle that has been challenged in the ballots? My second question is closely related to this one, and to some degree its answer depends on the answer given to the first question. In this paper, I hope to shed light on what is specifically at stake in the


Chilean process of drafting a new constitutional text: a trauma symbolic-healing of past events (therapeutic approach) or a revenge-centered upsurge of past events (detrimental approach)?

I propose that the answers to both questions are directly linked to the crisis of words that contextualized the overthrow of President Salvador Allende in 1973, the rise of the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, and the later imposition of a “founding father” kind of constitution in 1980.

I will develop my answers to these questions through four sections. First, I will review the principal aspects constituting the Chilean democratic regime before the coup d’etat in 1973. In the second and third sections, respectively, I will pay special attention to the major political actors participating in the pre-1973 political system and their connections with Cold War powers at the time as well as their predominant notions of democracy, deeply intertwined with the traditional liberal political culture of the country. Fourth, I argue that the different uses of the word “democracy” were at the core of the crisis of words that preceded the rise of Pinochet and the military in 1973, but that it was also redefined by the imposition of the authoritarian neoliberal project led by Pinochet. This resignification, specifically through the notion of “protected democracy” —clearly reflected in the original version of the 1980 constitution—decisively contributed to create a gap between the promises of democracy and the capacity of democracy to match these values and practices through the post-Pinochet era. In sum, I argue that the crisis of the word “democracy” in 1973, in both its abstract and practical dimensions, is,

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5 The political agreement that opened the path forward to the 2020 referendum through a constitutional amendment was sparked by a two-faced origin. On October 18th, 2019, hundreds of people destroyed and burnt several public landmarks of Santiago and other cities such as Metro stations, buildings, and other public goods. Since then, violent protests have characterized a revolt that tried to challenge the institutional way and consensual politics of Chile, with no success until now. Although the idea of drafting a new Constitution was not new by one week after these events, on October 25th, 2019, this prospect gained great strength due to mostly peaceful demonstrations that gathered more than two million people expressing their demands across the country. The results of the referendum on October 25th, 2020 and the peaceful celebrations that night showed that Chileans overwhelmingly prefer reform through democratic means over violent confrontations.
if I am allowed to introduce a metaphor, the smaller Matryoshka doll of the set of problems Chile
confronts today.

I

What Chilean democracy failed in 1973? By that year, Chilean democracy was regarded as a
stable regime both by its domestic participants and international observers. Harsh conflicts
between the President and the Congress, however, were not new in the history of the country and
its liberal political organization experienced more or less traumatic ruptures through the
republican era. Four civil wars (1829-1830, 1851, 1859, and 1891) and several periods of
instability due to military intervention or popular unrest marked the trajectory of democracy in
Chile. Nonetheless, the good standing of Chilean democracy in the sight of its incumbents did
not lack reasonable causes. In stark contrast with the rest of Latin American countries, Chile was
governed by the same Constitution from 1833 to 1925 after traversing a period of various
post-Independence constitutional experiments and political skirmishes. The 1925 constitution
ruling in 1973 reconfigured state-society relations and reflected a crisis of liberal hegemony, but
it is hard to argue that it broke with the preceding constitution to the same extent that the 1980
constitution did with respect to the previous democratic tradition.

The 1925 constitution strengthened the power of the President, reversing the tendency of
the Congress to impose its rule since before the 1891 Civil War. The 1925 constitution sheltered
the building of a capitalist welfare state, the deepening of the democratic rules, the consolidation
of a pluralist party system between the 1930s and 1970s, and the definitive rise of the
middle-class. The compromise state consensus built between these decades in Chile was not

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unique, but it did stand out in the region. It replicated the racialized national discourses, gendered division of labor, and economic nationalism so crucial for classic experiences of contemporary populist rules such as Cardenism in Mexico, Varguism in Brazil, and Peronism in Argentina. As in these national populist projects, the political elites' control of the Chilean state was always partial and contested. Political elites were not unanimous or sufficiently robust to ultimately impose their rules, and the democratic counterbalance of powers limited their capacity to dominate the state's mechanism of repression and economy. Ultimately, the Chilean state’s authority was cemented on physical force and economic limitations, but also in an ingrained democratic political culture. As in Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico, political elites had to negotiate with popular sectors and make concessions, allowing them to be an active part of the construction of rules. Distinctively, the heterogeneous Chilean workers played by the "rules of the game" implemented by state and capital training.

This compromise state allowed urban working-classes and feminist activists to accommodate through local negotiations. The incorporation of labor's leaders, feminists, and professional elites such as physicians, teachers, and social workers into the state during the popular fronts period (roughly 1938-1952) helped to consolidate working-class identity and strengthened the workers' ability to negotiate with elites. However, while the compromise state allowed the partial incorporation of popular demands, it left excluded those of peasants, Mapuche people, the urban poor, women, and youth. The rise of the Christian Democratic Party and Popular Unity in the 1960s and 1970s expressed, on the one hand, the strong refashioning of popular interpellations against the rule of political elites, but at the same time the dislocation

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between the compromise state and popular demands that the state was incapable of neutralizing or fulfilling such as housing, education, and land reform.\footnote{Francisca Rengifo, “El Estado de Seguridad Social Chileno y la Institucionalización Desigual del Bienestar,” in Iván Jaksic and Francisca Rengifo, eds., Historia política de Chile, 1810-2010. Estado y Sociedad. Santiago: Fondo de Cultura Económica, Universidad Adolfo Ibáñez, 2017, 397-423.}


Both the Christian Democratic Party and Popular Unity aspired to absorb these increasing popular demands by nationalizing the property of copper mines, organizing people at the grassroots level, implementing educational reforms, expanding the construction of low-cost housing, and reconfiguring land property in the countryside. Hence, the leaderships of Presidents
Eduardo Frei Montalva and Salvador Allende had personal strength, although they relied less on charisma than other Latin American populist leaders. While sharing a passion for profound economic and social transformations, their political ideologies and ways to implement them sharply differed, ultimately making their political projects collide rather than converge.\textsuperscript{12}

II

How did Cold War actors contribute to the Chilean crisis of words in 1970-1973? In decentering the history of the Cold War's influence in the region, several historians have argued that Latin American actors adapted to their national and local circumstances the features of the world conflict. Rather than mere responders to the dispute between Washington and Moscow, they acted as part of the conflict at the regional level. In the case of Chile's political conflict during the government of Popular Unity, several agents such as Cuban and Soviet diplomatic and cultural actors played an important role. The United States also had a great incidence in the breakdown of Chilean democracy in 1973.\textsuperscript{13}

The presence of the United States in Chile is older than the 1960s, but in this decade the relationship between both countries acquired a new status due to the intensification of the partnership between the Johnson administration and the government of the Christian Democrat Eduardo Frei. This alliance stood as much on a shared vision of modernization as it did on their opposition to the Marxist Left.\textsuperscript{14} Both administrations shared the transformative spirit of the


Alliance for Progress, the program of economic support to reformist, middle-class oriented
governments in Latin America with which the Kennedy administration tried to prevent the
emergence of more Cuban Revolutions in the region.15 The support of the Johnson administration
to Frei’s presidential candidacy in 1964 and the Christian Democratic Party’s platform of
structural changes in land property, education, housing, and popular participation was decisive
for the relative success of Frei’s government, but it also contributed significantly to further
polarize Chilean politics during the years of the Frei government and beyond.16

Towards the end of the 1960s, the general policy of the United States to Latin America
experienced changes due to the ineffectuality of the Alliance for Progress in delivering its
promises and the more pragmatic view of the Nixon administration on international relations that
led his government to reduce the public exposition of the United States’ image before local
public opinions and play down the promotion of economic development. This view rested upon
the notion that Latin American countries must consolidate their progress by their own means
while Washington would monitor the development of Latin American domestic politics with the
possibility of an export of the Cuban Revolution as a limiting factor.17

Several contradictions of U.S. policy towards Latin America emerged amidst the Chilean
presidential election in 1970. Under the new prism of the Nixon administration, more distant
than those of the previous administrations, coexisted the different approaches of the Department
of State, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the U.S embassy in Santiago, whose staff had
developed a broad network of relationships with Chilean political figures whose interests
converged with those of the United States in the 1960s.18 The presence of the United States in the

15 Stephen Rabe, The Most Dangerous Area in the World: John F. Kennedy Confronts Communist Revolution in
16 Hurtado-Torres, The Gathering Storm, 6-8.
1970 Chilean presidential race was chaotic and ineffective. The warlike anticommunist slogans of the 1964 presidential campaign were obsolete in 1970 and Washington did not fully embrace one of the two candidates that ran against the eventual winner of the election, the Socialist Salvador Allende and its Marxist revolutionary coalition, Popular Unity.\textsuperscript{19}

The reaction of the Nixon administration to the triumph of Salvador Allende was hostile and precipitous. Since no candidate reached an absolute majority in the popular election held on September 4th, according to the constitutional path it was the Chilean Congress who had to choose between the two highest votes on October 24th: Allende and the rightist candidate and former President Jorge Alessandri. Nixon’s approach to the Chilean electoral process in September and October 1970 was strongly different from that of the previous administrations in the 1960s. In contrast with his predecessor’s policies on overt and covert actions in Chile, strategically respectful of the robust institutional means existent at the time, Nixon instructed the CIA to prevent Allende from winning the Chilean presidency at any cost. Thus, Nixon dismissed the warnings of Edward Korry, U.S. Ambassador in Chile since 1967, against any U.S.-backed military intervention in Chilean politics. While Chilean political actors were building a compromise to set a path for Allende to the presidency, the CIA partnered with informal military actors led by a retired general to conceive unrealistic plans for a coup d’etat. As a result, the CIA-supported saboteurs ended up killing the Army Commander in Chief Rene Schneider on October 22th, the same day that Chilean institutional political forces reached an agreement to nominate Allende as President.\textsuperscript{20}

It is well-known that the United States provided economic and political support to the opposition formed against the Popular Unity government, ranging from the Christian Democratic

\textsuperscript{19} Fermandois, Chile y el mundo 1970-1973, 277-286.

Party to the right-wing, insurrectional organization Fatherland and Liberty and the main newspapers of the country such as *El Mercurio*. The United States also cut direct economic assistance to the Chilean government and prevented the Allende government from obtaining credits and loans from multilateral institutions such as the World Bank and the Interamerican Development Bank. Along the same lines, Washington defended its interests in the negotiations on the expropriation of copper companies and the external debt putting more pressure on the political economy of the Allende government.\(^\text{21}\) The Chilean Armed Forces had strong economic and ideological links with their U.S. counterparts as well. These measures reflected the ideological hostility between the Nixon and Allende administrations, and it has been largely discussed whether they were legitimate or not. In any case, these can be regarded as a political response from the United States to a defying power in Chile that threatened its interests in Latin America within the larger scene of the Cold War.\(^\text{22}\)

This intervention had its counterpart in the relationships between the Chilean Marxist Left and the Soviet Union, Cuba and other countries from the Socialist sphere. The “Chilean Road to Socialism” received formal and informal help from these governments, although the strength of its discourse rested upon a potential economic and political independence from imperial powers. In practical terms, the close partnership between the Chilean Communist Party and the Soviet Union and between the rest of the Leftist political elites and Cuba and the Socialist regimes in Eastern Europe showed that the interests of the Popular Unity government progressed in the same direction as those of those revolutionary states.\(^\text{23}\)


\(^{22}\) Fernandois,*Chile y el mundo 1970-1973*, 306-313.

Conceptually, the majority of Popular Unity regarded the Soviet Union as their paradigmatic horizon, a country which they admired and asked for assistance. The leaders of Popular Unity expected more economic assistance than what the Soviet Union was capable of offering, and this support was already substantial in technology, loans, copper imports, and other deals. The Soviet commitment to the Chilean case was limited by their interpretation of the “Chilean Road to Socialism” as no more than a “revolutionary process” that needed to prove that it could consolidate in a democratic context. While the Soviets believed that it was necessary to show moral solidarity with the Chilean process, their financial support was dependent on the success and hegemonic role allowed to Communists. Allende visited the Soviet Union in December 1972, but this approach made clear for Chilean leaders that the political and moral understanding between both countries had no match in economic terms.24

Cuba was the other most important paradigm for the Popular Unity administration. Geographically closer than the USSR, Chilean Marxists could see the future of their revolutionary project in Cuba. Since the triumph of Castro in 1959, the presence of the Caribbean island in Chilean politics had become significant. It fed a conceptual shift in the idea of revolution and emotionally encouraged a generation of young Chileans to follow Castro’s and Guevara’s anti-imperialist revolutionary path and rhetoric. The example of Cuba had an enormous impact on the political parties of the Chilean Left during the 1960s, especially the party of Allende, the Socialist Party. Undergoing a process of Leninization, several factions of the Socialist Party adopted the thesis of the legitimacy of armed struggle to conquer power and eventually the Party adopted the same idea in 1967, although without forgoing participation in democratic elections. This ambiguity was reinforced by the participation of Allende as honorary

president of the Latin American Organization of Solidarity (established in 1967), whose purpose was to promote revolution in Latin America under the guidance of Cuba. Cubans were skeptical about the chances of their Chilean allies within the institutional setting of democracy, but that did not prevent them from embracing the somewhat surprising triumph of Allende and Popular Unity in 1970.25

The outstanding realignment of Chile’s foreign policy under the Allende administration, helped by the understanding that Latin America and the United States had different interests, began with the reestablishment of diplomatic relations with Cuba in November 1970. This institutional presence was added to an extra-institutional presence of Cuba in Chile that was outside the legal architecture of the Chilean state, international laws, and diplomatic and institutional traditions. The three-week visit of Fidel Castro by the end of 1971 was one of the main examples of the growing intromissions of Cuba in Chilean politics during the Allende years.26

Despite the magnetism that Castro projected onto his supporters, it would be wrong to think that Allende or the Chilean revolutionary process were modeled by his designs. Nor were the ideas and actions of Allende’s opponents mere reflections of the United States’ strategic movements. The origins, development, and outcome of the institutional crisis in 1973 Chile were forged, shaped, and decided by Chilean actors who responded to the political and economic pragmatism of their international allies and foes with the intellectual means at their disposal. That is why it is so crucial to understand the crisis of words that characterized the Allende administration from its very beginning.27

III

The political persuasions and individual actors that participated in the crisis of words between 1970 and 1973 were present in Chilean politics since the 1930s, but relevant at the national level only since the mid-1950s. That was the case of the Chilean Christian Democratic Party, established in 1957. It was born of the merge of a tiny organization of Social Christian ideology, Falange Nacional, with conservative and nationalistic sectors disillusioned with the government of 1920s- dictator Carlos Ibáñez (1952-1958). The Christian Democratic Party represented a multiclass amalgam concentrated in the middle classes, women, peasants, and urban squatters, but they gathered the support of far fewer unions than most populist movements in Latin America. The Frei administration economic policy resulted in redistribution of income in favor of the middle and lower classes while continuing to protect capitalist industry. Its economic policies were more moderate, more technocratic, and less inflationary than those of most populist governments. The clearest populist inclinations of Christian Democrats surfaced through the extensive use of mass media-based propaganda in the presidential campaign of 1964, their rule as one party lacking allies, their promotion of national developmentalism, and the incorporation of the poor into the state through agrarian reform, literacy programs, the expansion of access to housing, healthcare and education, and the deployment of grassroots organizations.

For its part, the Popular Unity formula originated in 1969. It gathered Communists, Socialists, and Radicals, and a few other small parties. This coalition of center-left parties differed from the 1938 Popular Front formula composed by the same parties because of the
predominance of Marxist ideology and the critique of the logic of compromise prevalent between the 1930s and the 1950s. The political base of Popular Unity came mostly from the working-class with significant middle-class participation. While Popular Unity attempted to increase the purchasing power of the working-class, it also set out to expropriate rather than foment national industry. Allende employed some populistic wage, price, and spending policies to redistribute income to workers and peasants in his first year, but the explosion of a political crisis made them untenable in the long-term. As I have mentioned, the Popular Unity administration aligned with Fidel Castro's Cuban Revolution rather than other Latin American populist movements. Its government deployed collectivist-inspired programs for extensive socialization and redistribution of power, profits, and property. However, as some historians have shown by studying the reception of the Allende government among young and old workers, the Popular Unity's social engineering from above clashed with the adaptation from below implemented by these popular sectors.28 These workers along with urban squatters and peasants seized factories, housing spaces, and farmlands, becoming builders of a "revolution from below" that rerouted the pace and direction of the Popular Unity government.29

Both projects represented contending political cultures that struggled not only at the level of personal leadership or votes, historical legacies or popular affection, but also at the level of historical consciousness and political philosophy. The future, with all the universality and indeterminacy of this word, was at stake. Thus, the Chilean political culture was characterized by political parties that paid a great share of attention to philosophical struggles and ideologies. Ultimately, Marxists and Christian Democrats collided at the level of philosophy of history, a clash that is only partially captured by the opposition between tradition and revolution.

The political culture of the Chilean Left was rooted in the philosophy created by Karl Marx between the 1830s and 1880s, and since then adapted to different national realities by many interpreters of the German philosopher, among them the leader of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, Vladimir Lenin. As for the Chilean Left, their mostly Leninist interpretation of Marxism set up an impenetrable force field which only those who acted in the same political space and who spoke the same political language could access. This ideological basis provided the Chilean Left with a course of action about the state, democracy, and private property that explicitly confronted ideas about consensus, representation, and self-interest that have modeled state, democratic, and property practices in Chile since the nineteenth century. It also gave them a geopolitical position in which they were allies of the modernization project advanced by the Soviet Union and the application of that hegemonic project in other socialist experiences around the world of the Cold War, closely intertwined with the philosophy of history introduced by Communism as a historic final stage of social organization.

Something similar can be said about the political culture of Christian Democracy. The main progenitor of the political language of the Chilean Christian Democratic Party was the French philosopher Jacques Maritain, who had attempted to secularize the Social Teachings of the Catholic Church started with Pope Leo XIII’s 1891 encyclical Rerum Novarum. Although this Social Christian language was not as dominant as the Marxist language was among the Left, Christian Democracy contributed with a spiritual-oriented view of politics that had no comparison in the spectrum of Chilean politics. Beyond its anticommunism, this philosophical stance led Christian Democracy to propose a societal transformation called “communitarianism” that placed at its center the Catholic concept of person, but with few echoes in the juridical and economic mechanisms that governed Chilean society. Nonetheless, as it proposed a teleological
vision, with a New Christianity as the final stage of history, this perspective created several tensions in the relations of the party with the remaining actors playing a substantive role in Chilean politics. In the scene of the Cold War, the main regional allies of Christian Democrats were the Democratic administrations of the United States in the 1960s, while the country closest to becoming their model was Konrad Adenauer’s postwar Germany.

The theories of Lenin and Maritain did not fall in a vacuum nor were applied to immutable circumstances. Nor did they control social realities from the top. Those theories were concrete in struggles such as the Agrarian Reform, the property of copper companies and other mineral resources by the Chilean state, the massive construction of low-cost housing complexes for the poor, the ways to organize popular sectors at the local level, the expansion of primary education and, in general, the broad scope of controversies that characterized Chilean democracy in these years. Christian Democrats and Marxists were not the only actors of this plot that also includes right-wing political forces, the military, international actors, and Chileans who fed the democratic game with their votes, their words, and their mobilizations. The spaces in which these political languages circulated as well as their receptions also were multiple, varying from the countryside to the city, the university to the factory, and the intimacy of the home to the publicity of a protest.

IV

The meaning of the word “democracy” became a battleground throughout the Popular Unity administration. In my research, I have found a broad spectrum of ways to refer to democracy. This was an irrefutable signal of the challenge posed against the structural unity of the meaning that gives coherence and comprehensibility to the word. The fragmentation of the meaning of the
word democracy was in great part due to the diversity of ideas nurtured by the democratic regime ruling since the 1930s itself. Within the core of Chilean society, it emerged a political persuasion whose ideological bedrocks were the critique of democracy as an essential ally of capitalism and its use as a means to transit to a reputedly better stage in historical development, socialism. Beginning with the revolutionary language of its political platform in 1970, the Popular Unity administration strongly defied the ideological conventions upon which Chilean democracy operated. Its members referred favorably to democracy when they called it “socialist”, “popular” or “of the people”, becoming ipso facto a “real” democracy in contrast to the representative democracy defended by their opponents. Popular Unity members referred pejoratively to democracy when they called it “bourgeois” or “legal formality”, and even some of them trespassed the principle of non-contradiction by calling the soon-to be socialist regime a “democratic dictatorship”.

The ideological challenge to Chilean democracy was not monopolized by Marxist forces and there was a degree to it. Far-left extremists attacked liberal democracy, claiming for its violent substitution by a “proletarian democracy” or a radicalization of popular power. Within the far-right pole, influenced by fascist corporatism, emerged idealizing interpretations of workers’ participation in the social body: in these accounts, democracy should be “organic”, “functional”, “corporatist”. The decomposition in several different uses of the word democracy reflected the deep intellectual and political divide among the many participants in Chilean democracy at the time. Although these extreme actors of the left and the right were institutionally marginal, they were sufficiently well organized to reduce and threaten the field of action and debate of the President, his undisciplined and strategically divided coalition, and his opponents in the Congress and the public sphere. Violence became a real factor in Chilean politics. The
assassination of General Rene Scheneider on October 22th, 1970, was followed by the murder of
the former Ministry of the Interior Edmundo Perez Zujovic in June, 1971 by members of an
ultra-left organization, and the assassination of President Allende’s Navy aide-de-camp Arturo
Araya on June, 1973 by ultra-right extremists. Moreover, by 1973 protests and clashes in the
streets between supporters and opponents of the Popular Unity administration were the daily
bread in a polarized Chile.

The Cold War was an unavoidable atmosphere that determined the language used in the
different conflicts within Chilean democracy, natural to the democratic game under any
circumstances. Not so natural was the predominance of a language shaped by the eschatological
consciousness that there is a historical time in which human beings will fulfill their most beloved
expectations and that in that future differences between human essence and existence will vanish.
In other words, the democratic struggle transformed into a battle of transcendental nature
between good and evil, between the new and the old, between intransigent world visions about
the future.

Under the Popular Unity administration, Chile traversed a path to “radical equality”. This
experiment repeated the dangers that Pierre Rosanvallon has pointed out in his critical approach
to the communist idea of absolute equality. This vision of democracy was based upon the
extinction of the political problem by creating a world based on unanimity, that is to say, a
society without classes, or in terms of dialectic materialism, the perfect synthesis, the end of
history and the beginning of a radically new era; the aspiration to transform the economic system
into a realm of potential abundance rather than a tool to combat real scarcity; and the negation of
the psychological problem by suppressing envy and selfishness in personal relations.30 The

put the concept of equality in crisis, thus destabilizing political and social relations based on consensus, negotiation, respect for democratic authority, and the acknowledgement of the liberal orientation of the institutional system.

There was a practical philosophy of democracy in Chile, and these tensions took shape in ways defined by domestic interpretations of the world conflict and the limits set by the Chilean constitution. The arguments that cemented the democratic conviviality between two groups with different creeds and visions about the future gradually lost their appeal, primarily at the level of political elites but rapidly among the people as well. No wonder then that the Constitution, the rule of the majority, and healthy, mature relations between the main political parties of the Chilean scene, the Socialist Party and the Christian Democratic Party, became more partisan and irreconcilable than ever. The democratic system in Chile was torpedoed at its very foundations, those of civic amity in which the argumentative rationality that sustained its conventions originated.

The victory of the revolutionary promise of Popular Unity magnified the climate of tensions that characterized the presidential race of 1970. The relative majority achieved by Allende in the popular vote opened the constitutional scenario of a runoff held in Congress. The Popular Unity coalition and the Christian Democratic Party, which had a majority in Congress, reached an agreement to secure the path of Allende towards the presidency in a set of constitutional amendments known as the Statute of Constitutional Guarantees.\textsuperscript{31} In part, it was a circumstantial arrangement to solve the presidential conundrum, but it was also an agreement about several issues to modernize Chilean democracy: political parties, education, unions, social security, the police and the armed forces. At last, the Statute of Constitutional Guarantees did not become an acceptable agreement for every actor to give continuity to Chilean democracy with

\textsuperscript{31} Hurtado-Torres, \textit{Las palabras no se las lleva el viento}, 125-163.
some revolutionary forces in government. The failure of the Statute to do so was also the failure of the political culture in which democrats from the left, the right, and the center developed their political careers.

Unfortunately for Chilean democracy, the Statute of Constitutional Guarantees did not include an amendment about private property, which then became a sort of “apple of discord” within the political process until 1973. Apart from the revolutionary reorganization of the three traditional branches of government and a populist realignment of national security, the Popular Unity platform rested on the two pillars of the new economy that the coalition intended to advance: the Social Property Area and the Agrarian Reform. The Social Property Area would consist of state-owned companies of copper and other minerals, banks and insurance companies, foreign trade, systems of energy distribution, and other economic activities crucial for the socioeconomic development of the country. The Popular Unity coalition also advocated for a radicalization of the Agrarian Reform already initiated under the Frei administration.

Since its very beginning, the Allende administration was overwhelmed by the mobilization and demands of its supporters – peasants, workers, squatters, youth, the Mapuche people –, who were summoned to constitute the popular power that would be the basis of the popular democratic government of Popular Unity. This lack of direction led the law-oriented strategy of President Allende and the Communist Party into a crisis. Seizures of land in the countryside and the city, as well as takeovers of industries to force the construction of the Social Property Area contributed decisively to make the illegal tolerable, but they also brought about a coherence within the political and social opposition to the Allende administration. Although I only can address few details of the political process between 1970 and 1973 in this paper, it is worth noting that these struggles on property opened a constitutional puzzle that confronted
government and opposition through 1972 and 1973 and remained unsolved until the coup d’etat on September 11, 1973.32

The general crisis of words in Chile ended up dramatically, with the establishment of a brutal dictatorship responsible for violating the human rights of thousands of Chileans. The Pinochet regime crystallized the collapse of center and left hegemony, dismantling the pillars of the compromise state. Dialogue, negotiation, and the embattled and heterogeneous nature of multiple political and social actors so substantial for the welfare state consensus ended abruptly. Free-market policies replaced the import-substitution industrialization model, and Pinochet's neoliberal experts drastically reduced the economic intervention of the state. The building of social security for popular sectors experienced a significant halt. The 1979 Laboral Plan, which derogated the 1931 Labor Code, shifted the balance of labor relations by weakening unions' collective bargaining power, and the 1980 Constitution redefined the social responsibilities of the state marking the definitive end of an era that enabled a tense, mainly disciplined popular participation in the imperfect democratic game.

V

Democracy and consensus are theoretical practices that are nurtured by the human condition of unpredictability and plurality. There is no sustainable definition of democracy without looking closely at the historical transformations of its two main Greek elements, demos and kratos. In its basis, democracy depends on words, the arguments that we made of them, and the meanings they carry. Democracy incorporates gradual change and the balance that the arrangements among its participants allow is key for the production of communication and creativity, two essential aspects to confront the question about the future. In moments of crisis, democracy can offer leadership that leads societies to the common objective of survival and

32 Hurtado-Torres, Las palabras no se las lleva el viento, 231-296.
solidarity, and the government of the political only has as a destiny the responsibility to deal with challenges, different in depth and shape, from birth to death, faced by the people. Democracy is a structurally complex system that protects and is protected by the citizen’s exercise of representation and participation, the people’s consent, the fulfillment of established legal procedures, political accountability of its leaders, encounters and conversations between diverse ideas, the development of critical rigorous thinking and science, and the unconditional enforcement of universal human rights.

The case of Chile between 1970 and 1973 shows that robust democracies also fail in taking care of portions of that virtuous cycle and that these failures can affect the future of the national project. The political struggles of Chileans in 1973 that led to the weakening of democratic values and practices, a process that I have characterized as a crisis of words, ended up in the establishment of a revolutionary dictatorship that transformed the socioeconomic face of Chile by adopting an orthodox economic model based on the deregulation of markets and the drastic reduction of the size of the state. These changes were, to a great extent, disproportionate even if considering the crisis of words during the Popular Unity administration as a very acute one. The civilian technocrats so essential to the authoritarian military government drafted a new constitution that gave Pinochet and the armed forces an overarching control over decision-making. The 1980 constitution restructured state-society relations by organizing social welfare to constrain popular participation and the neoliberal social engineering was designed to control the flow of resources to poor people through the concentration of social expenditures on the ‘absolute poor’, a statistical figure referring to people in dire conditions of poverty that differentiated from the poor ineligible for state subsidies. Despite the claims of the Pinochet
regime’s officials, until the mid-1980s signs of the deterioration of living standards among the majority of the population were eloquent.

The polarization and social stress through which Chilean democracy navigated from 1970 to 1973 was part of a larger picture of the Cold War in Chile. Most of the radical political and economic changes implemented by the Pinochet regime were shocking and unprecedented for many Chileans, let alone the brutality of the military rule against dissidents. The crisis of words to which I have drawn your attention was also part of a larger picture of economic and sociological forces shaping the modernization of Chile. The solution implemented by the Pinochet dictatorship in 1980 was antidemocratic, and its legitimacy was never well grounded in the feelings of Chileans. The disproportionate relation between the certainly deep crisis of the word “democracy” and the restructuring of Chilean democracy after 1980 was a major symbolic problem of the political architecture of the post-Pinochet era, but never addressed in terms beyond amendment and the acknowledgement of *ex-post facto* legitimacy.

The resiliency of Chilean democracy has historical roots and these traditions have started to operate. Some weeks ago, in October 2020, Chileans majoritarily voted to draft a new Constitution, taking a critical distance from the political elites that have governed the country during the last decades. The Chilean constitutional process is still too young to arrive at definitive conclusions, but it seems clear that the traumatic breakdown of democracy almost half a century ago is starting to fade as the central political cleavage that it was until recent years, shaping feelings, arguments, and memories of Chilean society. It also seems clear that there are at least two competing approaches struggling to define the ultimate meaning of the drafting of this new constitution and both entail a different way to approach these traumatic past events. The
alternatives of violence and peace pose a fundamentally symbolic question to Chileans: to heal or not to heal?, as well as one pragmatic: will there be a solution made of words?

Bibliography


