

Social movements and media in the neoliberal Chile

Movimientos sociales y medios en el Chile neoliberal

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E-ISSN: 2173-1071 IC - Revista Científica de Información y Comunicación
2014, 11, pp. 79 - 101
<http://dx.doi.org/IC.2014.i01.02>

Abstract

This article focuses on the relationship between social movements and media landscapes prior to the emergence of the recent wave of mobilizations in Chile. Taking a historical overview, it provides an in-depth analysis of media, social and political issues, highlighting the implications and consequences of the marriage between neoliberalism and democracy for the Chilean public sphere and for the nature of the demands put forward by contemporary social movements.

Resumen

Este artículo invita a observar la relación entre los paisajes mediáticos y los movimientos sociales previos a la reciente ola de movilización en Chile. Desde una mirada histórica, profundiza en los factores mediáticos, sociales y políticos, destacando las implicaciones y consecuencias del matrimonio entre neoliberalismo y democracia para la esfera pública chilena y para las reivindicaciones que portan los movimientos sociales contemporáneos.

Keywords

Public sphere, Chile, neoliberalism, social movements, media, democracy

Palabras clave

Esfera pública, Chile, neoliberalismo, movimientos sociales, medios, democracia.

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Recibido: 16/06/2014

Aceptado: 18/08/2014

1. Introduction

Beginning in May 2011, Chilean students caught the attention of the entire country and beyond with images and articles about their mobilization against the abuse of the market-driven education system. This protest movement was not new in democratic Chile, given the permanent mobilizations since the reinstatement of democracy, in 1990, but differences had been apparent since 2006, reaching a new level in 2011. During that year the students' mobilization marked a turning point: it lasted 8 months, covered every single region of the country, and demanded the end of the privately driven education system and a return to free public education. It was not the only mobilization in 2011.

That year witnessed several massive mobilizations against the megaproject for the construction of dams in Aysén, in Chilean Patagonia; regional protest in the Magallanes Region, in the south of Chile, against gas cuts; the movement for gay and lesbian rights, in the main cities of the country; protests in northern cities against their abandonment; strikes among contracted and subcontracted copper workers over working conditions; and also strikes, marches and rallies by state workers for unfair dismissals.

This article looks at the relationship between social movements, media landscapes and politics in contemporary Chile, providing a historical account that brings three issues into view: the displacement of political representation systems to the mediated field; the hegemonic position of mainstream media system in the Chilean public sphere; and the drive by activists to participate and make their voices heard, using old and new repertoires, through alternative means. The sum of these elements expresses a particular marriage between mainstream Chilean political institutions –the realm of the polity- and mainstream media that acts as an exclusionary device in a neoliberal environment. In this situation, the emergence of social movements occurs in spite of that marriage, calling attention not only to the means used to participate in the public sphere, but also to voice as a foundational political demand for recognition, belonging and discussion.

2. Chilean social movements: background and contexts

Social movements have a long history in Chile. From the second half of the XIX century (Grez, 1995), industrialization, wretched working conditions, and

the influence of ideologies relating to proletarian organization²⁰ provided fertile soil for the organization of railroad and factory workers, fishermen and craftsmen (Salazar and Pinto, 1999). Understood as organized efforts (McAdam, 1999, Della Porta and Diani, 2006) located within collective actions based on common purposes (Tarrow, 1998) and solidarity (Melucci, 1985), promoting or resisting change (Turner, 1987) in political and social terms (Garretón, 2007) of situations identified as a conflict promoted or defended by power holders (Tilly, 1999), social movements went evolved rapidly.

In the first 30 years of XX century mass movements developed from being organized and coordinated in local groups, to demanding positions in national unions and creating formal political parties. The Socialist Workers Party was founded in 1912, the Chilean Communist Party in 1922 and the Chilean Socialist Party in 1933. During the 1930's these parties ran together for the presidency in the Popular Front, a coalition of parties and groups led by Pedro Aguirre Cerda, who won the elections in 1940.

Then, along with an increasing rural-urban migration, civil society and social capital grew in spite of the passing of the Law for the Permanent Defence of Democracy (1948)²¹ that banned the Communist Party and affected social and political organizations. That period, however, was the dawn of reorganization and radical political struggle (1960) led mainly by left-wing political parties and unions that culminated in the presidency of Salvador Allende (1970-1973), after which the country went through a period of prohibition, persecution and punishment (1973-1980). The putsch led by general Augusto Pinochet with the Chilean armed forces, plus the support of right-wing parties and the government of United States (Kornbluh,

20 Anarchism, socialism and, later, communism had a great influence on Chilean trade unions, which by the beginning of the XX century were very strong in terms of organization and commitment to furthering knowledge of the realities about workers around the world. The heritage of republican and libertarian thinkers, and the importance given to reading and learning, contributed to a very strong basis among workers about their rights and the position of workers in that context. In *Anarquistas, presencia libertaria en Chile* (Anarchists: libertarian presence in Chile) del Solar and Pérez state “the truth is that anarchism arrived in Chile to find a perfect environment, such as the explosion of the social thing and the earlier foundation of combative trade unions” (2008: 30-31). For Blakemore, in these times organizations were born called “resistance societies, formed under the influence of anarchist and socialist ideas imported -sometimes by migrant workers and union leaders- from Argentina. Generally industry- based, their immediate objectives were practical, related to working conditions” (1993:64).

21 In 1948, president Gabriel González Videla passed the Law for the Permanent Defense of Democracy. This law prohibited the existence of the Communist Party. Its members, almost 40.000 (Pavilack, 2011) were removed from the electoral lists, persecuted, imprisoned in concentration camps, or deported. Anarchists and other social activists were also persecuted, imprisoned or deported. Hiring members of this political party in any public office or office dependent on the government was banned. Jody Pavilack states that “men and women were not only removed from electoral registers but also barred from belonging to unions, going on strike, and enjoying other hard-won rights as workers and as citizens” (Pavilack, 2011: 2). The law, also known as “Ley Maldita” (Damned Law) was repealed in 1958.

2003), closed down trade unions, parties and the National Congress, while leaders and partisans were persecuted. This was a blow of “unprecedented magnitude of human rights violations under military rule” (Roniger and Sznajder, 1999: 265).

During Pinochet’s dictatorship different kinds of public meeting were banned, from the simplest conversation of more than three people on a street corner, to the most basic form of association: the neighbourhood committees (De la Maza, 2003). The only way trade unions could exist during the first years of the dictatorship was by refraining “from any political activity in the exercise of their functions”²², which was a clear attempt to discipline a group historically involved in social and political struggle (Álvarez, 2010). The status of citizenship, on the other hand, was finally changed with the passing of 1980 constitution²³ and the adoption of “modernization policies that were nothing other than the complete implementation of a neoliberal program” (Garcés, 2012: 125).

The first two spaces for people to gather and talk about their concerns, problems and hardship in a collective way were the Catholic Church, and to a lesser degree, the trade unions. Free from interference by the regime, the Catholic Church was a key actor against repression and for socio-political change (Cañas, 1997) because of its opposition to military power (Schneider, 1992) and its protection to the persecuted. The priests provided a secure space for communication in meeting centres, cultural groups and mothers’ associations (Adams, 2012). The trade unions, after being banned in 1974 and 1975, were reinstated but with fewer prerogatives than before the putsch (Falabella, 1981). Still, beyond divisions and fear, both church and unions provided a space to express opposition to the authoritarian regime (Salazar and Pinto, 1999), increasing confidence in certain parts of society and reaching other areas, like the university students’ federations (De la Maza and Garcés, 1985) which would play a key role after the implementation of shocking neoliberal policies by the Chicago Boys²⁴. The world economic crisis hit

22 Legislative Decree N ° 198, issued on December 10, 1973 by the Military Junta.

23 As Couso states, the Chilean constitution of 1980 is based on a deep distrust in democracy. The main author of the constitution, right-wing lawyer Jaime Guzmán, created this legal framework to protect the economic structure and to install a “protected democracy”. The latter reflected Guzmán’s -and right wing parties- views that “under democratic rule Chile had experienced a slow but sustained decline, due to the inclination of democracy to degenerate into demagoguery” (Couso, 2012: 398).

24 This was the name given to the group led by economist Sergio de Castro, who developed the neoliberal structural reforms in Chile in the late seventies. All the members of the group had studied economics at the University Chicago, being disciples of Milton Friedman’s neoliberal doctrine. As Andrés Solimano points out “their agenda called for abolishing price controls, deregulating markets, reducing import tariffs in an effort to boost exports and cheapen imports, bringing down the inflation rate by establishing macroeconomic discipline (through a drastic fiscal adjustment program in 1975 in which nearly 100.000 public employees were separated from the state sector in one year), restoring property to its former owners, and securing external credits” (Solimano, 2012: 25).

the country hard: unemployment reached 30% between 1982 and 1983, salaries decreased and the government privatized many public companies. Many Chilean families bore the social cost, with unemployment reaching 25% (Tironi, 1990). At its core this policy also aroused anger against the authoritarian regime (Correa et. al., 2008).

After eleven massive protests against dictatorship during 1983 and 1984, where people were killed in marches and police interventions, the feeling among the protesters was that even when their demand for democracy was voiced, in massive and continuous protests, none of the particular complaints were ever resolved. In other words, the authoritarian regime had not been defeated and democracy had not been won (De la Maza and Garcés, 1985). Nonetheless, these protests helped to open doors to dialogue and negotiations. These negotiations were held between the Minister for Internal Affairs Sergio Onofre Jarpa (a civilian) and leaders of an alliance of political parties opposing Pinochet's regime, who were allowed to exist. By 1987, all the political demonstrations were led by political parties who "reasserted their traditional dominance of political activity in Chile" (Oxhorn, 1994: 222). Finally, negotiations and public pressure led to an end of dictatorship with the referendum of 1988, finishing with the removal of the dictator. Open elections were called and Patricio Aylwin²⁵, the candidate of Concertación²⁶, won beginning a period known as the transition to democracy.

3. A democratic paradox

Today, history, sociological and political research shows this period to be a paradoxical moment that also resulted in the decay of social movements and social organizations in the awakening of the new democracy. Renowned for their struggle against poverty and for rights and freedom for over a century, social movements "largely diminished with the onset of post dictatorship democracy in the early 1990s" (Paley, 2001: 5). What Paley states is a common view among social movement studies in Chile. This perspective points out that the democratic

²⁵ Patricio Aylwin, the candidate of Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia (Coalition of Parties for Democracy), popularly known as Concertación, won with 55,2% of the votes, in the first elections after Pinochet, held in December of 1989. Hernán Büchi, Pinochet 's former Minister for the Economy, obtained 29,4 of the votes. Business man Francisco Javier Errázuriz came third with 15.4% of the votes.

²⁶ Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia (Coalition of Parties for Democracy) is the name of the coalition of left wing, social democratic and christian democratic parties that defeated Pinochet in 1989 and won four successive elections, completing 20 years in power. Originally, it consisted of the following parties: Demócrata Cristiano (DC), Por la Democracia (PPD), Radical Social Demócrata (PRSD) Socialista (PS), Democrático de Izquierda (PDI), MAPU Obrero Campesino, Partido Liberal.

administrations were nothing more than a continuum of the dictatorship in terms of the political legacy and the neoliberal model (Jocelyn-Holt, 1998; Salazar, 2005) or rather a drive for democratization (Garretón, 2006) to break the chains of a constitution written under the dictatorship (Otano, 2006). In this context, social movements were far from being powerful actors in Chile's brand-new democracy. Several factors contributed to this.

First: A neoliberal state. The neoliberal economic system implemented by the Chicago Boys in the late 1970s not only lasted throughout the Pinochet dictatorship, but also continued during the social democratic administrations of the 1990s as Chile agreed and followed the Washington Consensus²⁷, with a clear priority on economic stability (Garretón, 2007).

Second: The birdcage. Tomas Moulián (1995) used the metaphor of the birdcage to illustrate the fact that Chilean democracy could fly but was not free, because Pinochet made sure his legacy would continue. He remained in post as Commander in Chief of the Army, and used the two new right-wing parties to secure his pact with the new democratic administrations. Among the agreements was the electoral system engineered to assure almost equal representation in parliament and municipalities for right wing parties and parties of Concertación, even if the latter received two thirds of the votes.

Third: Demonstrable governability. According to Fernández et al. (2009: 106), the first target of new administrations was to achieve governability, which meant preventing the “accumulation of conflicts, ruling out protest methods as social unrest and mobilizations, so to create the conditions to govern effectively over the long-term”. These conditions implied a cautious quest for justice, as Patricio Aylwin -the first democratically elected president after Pinochet- expressed by saying that justice in human rights violations was going to be accomplished “as far as it was possible” (Human Rights Watch, 1991).

Fourth: Exclude the people. Beyond a vote to elect representatives in the National Congress, presidential and municipal elections, people were disconnected from participatory systems and in their daily life did not feel themselves as part of a community or the country (PNUD 2002). Chile, like the rest of the world, was weaker than before as a nation-state, due to a form of globalization that undermined people's chances to be part of collective decisions (Habermas, 2001) and a neoliberal democracy that gave shape to the idea that politics was a matter

²⁷ The name given to the Ten Commandments for economic growth promoted by the IMF, the World Bank, and the US Treasury, all of them located in Washington. This set of policies includes: fiscal discipline, tax reform, interest rate liberalization, trade liberalization, privatization, deregulation, secure property rights, the redirection of public spending priorities, and a competitive exchange rate and liberalization of foreign direct investment flows. The name Washington Consensus was given by the economist John Williamson.

for experts (Lechner, 2002). According to Garretón, Concertación “discouraged the formation and action of social movements and social actors and damaged its relationship with politics and parties” (2007:83). That is why people did not express a firm commitment to democracy and expressed fear about other people; fear about the future and the streets of their own cities (PNUD, 2002).

Two years later, the 2004 PNUD report showed a shift, with people expressing the intention to “be players in personal and collective projects and get involved not as mere spectators or beneficiaries” (PNUD, 2004: 15). The report also concluded that people had limited influence to represent their thoughts, opinions and feelings in public, beyond polls and surveys conveyed by mainstream media. This inability to represent themselves was interpreted as a triumph by the supporters of the economic and political model. At the end of Ricardo Lagos’ presidency, the Chilean historian Gabriel Salazar wrote that “popular masses have disappeared from the streets and not a few intellectuals, with a socialist past and neoliberal present, have proclaimed with some secret joy the end of social movements. And gleefully report that the masses are now shopping at the malls...” (Salazar, 2005: 96). After the end of three democratic administrations, in 2006, the continued existence of “a model that champions the regulation of social life through the market” (Feres, 2009: 198) had produced a population disenchanted with a system that gave no participation, no recognition and an unequal distribution of income.

After the end of three democratic administrations, in 2006, the diagnosis of an incomplete democracy (Feres, 2009) and the absence of people from public participation were seen by President Michele Bachelet²⁸ as reasons to move towards an administration with and for the people. High school students tested the new citizens’ government immediately with a national mobilization in 2006 including strikes, occupation of schools, and marches in major cities demanding basic needs -such as transportation and meals (Vera, 2011)- and deep reforms in the education system in order to “guarantee an active role of the state, reduce the intervention of the market and improve both quality and equity” (Garretón, 2013: 136). Bachelet’s response was to negotiate, in order to keep her promise of a government which would listen to its citizens. So, she created an Advisory Committee whose output was a law that did not meet the students’ expectations “including the end of profit-driven education, the role of public education and the structure of the educational system” (Garretón, 2013: 136-7).

28 Chile’s first female president won the elections –the fourth Concertación victory in a row for the period 2006-2010.

Despite the lack of success of the mobilization in terms of the targets accomplished, the students showed four significant elements for newly emerging movements: a) readiness, energy and ability to mobilize; b) that after more than a decade of democracy, education was still an unresolved issue; c) the preservation of the status quo as Concertación's permanent policy; d) the rejection of political parties with representatives in the National Congress as valid repositories of people's demand for social change (Guerrero, 2006). The ending of 20 years of Concertación government, in 2010, and the first measures of the right-wing coalition led by president Sebastián Piñera, saw a massive emergence of social movements in 2011 against the megaproject of dams in Aysén, in Chilean Patagonia; the gas cuts in Magallanes Region in the south of Chile; the state's neglect of the north; among others, being the most massive and lasting the national students' mobilizations.

4. The Chilean media landscape

Following the end of Pinochet's dictatorship (1973-1990) and the beginning of the democratic administrations led by the Christian Democrat Patricio Aylwin (1990-1994), Chile held to the dream of a new society, with more freedom, liberty, the right to vote in fair elections and the right to freedom of expression. "The people have won their freedom, and now comes the time of truth, the people have won justice and peace, Chile is the future and starts to walk"²⁹, said a song of Aylwin's presidential campaign.

Freedom of expression and free media were viewed as critical issues for this transformation. Under Pinochet's rule, 21 journalists, 9 journalism students, 20 workers in media companies and 28 illustrators were killed or "disappeared", while another 21 journalists died later as a result of torture (Carmona, 1997). In the first days after the coup d'état in 1973, newspapers and radio stations identified as left wing were bombed and closed. Just four out of eleven national newspapers survived (Muñoz, 2008). Television was taken over. The national broadcasting company, Canal 7, was taken over and controlled by armed forces; the other three TV channels belonging to the state and catholic universities were controlled and supervised by the military.

The new regime's plan was to dismantle the socio-political project of the Unidad Popular³⁰ (Errázuriz, 2009) using detentions, persecutions, the creation

²⁹ Available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XuiNEKh61q8>

³⁰ Unidad Popular (Popular Unity), was the name of the government led by Salvador Allende between 1970 and 1973.

of black lists, the take over of universities, with a huge list of people exiled, fired and banned from universities, media and public offices. Books were burned in the streets, murals were painted over and publishing and music companies were closed, among other measures (Muñoz, 2008: 53).

In this landscape, any illusion of recovering a free press was shattered. Moreover, the property of the banned media outlets was confiscated, sold or became state property (Sunkel and Tironi, 1993). However, a fortnightly foreign affairs magazine called APSI³¹ appeared in 1976. A year later came *Análisis* (Analysis), a magazine sponsored by the Catholic Church, and *Hoy*, an independent magazine. These three publications were set up by dissidents from the official press and did not speak on behalf of any one party; they were the voice of a “multiparty opposition that at the time did not have channels of public expression” (Sunkel and Tironi, 1993). At the beginning of the 1980s, the dictatorship allowed print publications, an opportunity taken up by parties and independent groups, who with the aid of international funds, managed to create newspapers and periodical. Both undertook investigative journalism, breaking the uniformity of the official press, giving rise to an alternative discourse in the public sphere previously dominated by obedience to the official discourse.

Magazines like *Análisis*, *Apsi*, *Cauce*, *La Bicicleta*, *Hoy*, and newspapers like *Fortín Mapocho* or *La Epoca*, were important successes in terms of sales, political and journalistic influence (Alves, 2005), because they provided a flow of diverse information, gave voice to silent actors and encouraged journalists and media to cover issues that had been ignored. As a consequence of their impact, Pinochet tried to shut them down. Journalists were threatened, detained, imprisoned, tortured, killed, as well as constantly censored and controlled. If something caused dislike among the military, the media were not allowed to publish it or forced to publish articles without photography or sticking solely to international affairs (León-Dermota, 2003).

On the other hand, two major media companies, *El Mercurio S.A.* and *COPESA* (Consortio Periodístico de Chile S.A.)³², were acquiescent in and strong supporters³³ (Sunkel, 1983) of the dictatorship’s rules. *El Mercurio* is considered in the history of Chile as the voice of Chilean right wing parties (Correa, 2008), and is accused of acting as a direct conspirator in Salvador Allende’s fall (Kornbluh, 2003). Both, *El Mercurio* and *COPESA*, received a great deal of help from

³¹ Agencia Publicitaria de Servicios Informativos, is the acronym for Information Services Advertising Agency.

³² Journalism Consortium of Chile

³³ For Sunkel, *El Mercurio* played the role of a political party for the dominant class in Chile from 1969.

Pinochet as they saw their debts cancelled (Araya, 2007)³⁴ to avoid bankruptcy and received advantageous treatment regarding money they owed to the national bank (Herreros, 2003): the deal consisted in buying advertising in advance for ten years (León-Dermota, 2003:35). The other 1,293 companies on the verge of being declared bankrupt at that time were not saved (Salazar, 2009), making clear the importance of the media in the cultural shaping of Pinochet's new Chile, even beyond the end of his mandate.

One of the first measures of President Patricio Aylwin was to investigate crimes and violations against human rights. With that purpose, Aylwin created the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, also known as the Rettig Commission³⁵. The report was delivered in February 1991 and contained shocking evidence of the horrors of the previous 17 years. In one of its chapters, the report talked about the role played by the press under dictatorship, saying that “as a general rule, the media maintained during the period a tolerant attitude towards human rights violations and they refrained from using their influence to prevent them” (1991: 972).

At this historical moment we find one of the Chilean peculiarities in the transition from dictatorship to democracy. Independent media, having made a great contribution under very harsh circumstances, risking their life and resources, were not recognized or fostered by the new democratic regime. As Eugenio Tironi and Guillermo Sunkel argue, during the first years of democracy “some changes in the media system were introduced; but these were carried out in a logic of continuity with the system configured in the second half of the eighties” (1993:240). Tironi -himself- was the person in charge of communications policy for the new democratic administrations. In his own words, the best communication policy was one that did not exist (Rojo, 2006), so the idea was to avoid criticism of the government and pave the way for what was going to be the style of Concertación: consensus as the only way to do politics, consensus as a pact to protect Chilean democracy (Bascuñán, 2009). In the voice of Nelly Richard, this was the aim of the Chilean transition, a task destined to attenuate “all the scars of violence that remained clinging to the shapes of words that named the contentiousness of recollection, in order to euphemistically reduce the gravity of meaning contained in the drama of memory and to ensure that nothing intolerable, nothing insufferable, would spoil the official celebrations of the bearable” (Richard, 2004: 17).

34 The debt was mainly caused by technological improvements made in the production chain.

35 Received this name because of the jurist who headed it, Raúl Rettig, former congressman.

The role of a free press, of divergent positions reflected across a wide spectrum of media, was not considered (León-Dermota, 2003). Without support from the state and private corporations, all the magazines and newspapers that opposed Pinochet fell apart in the very first years of the recovered democracy. Every critical word was avoided to maintain the status quo considered necessary for the new democracy. The landscape at the beginning of democracy in Chile was that the duopoly made up of *El Mercurio S.A.* and *COPESA*, who had defended and justified the dictatorship, its policies and the imposition of a neoliberal economic model (Santa Cruz, 1988), retained its dominance in a free market with no competitors, because the competitors were moribund, as Juan Pablo Cárdenas, director of *Análisis* magazine, described:

When the transition came up, these media aspired to have advertisements and, of course, the agencies of the big companies did not support us. They did not place ads, despite the high circulation we had. We thought we could have state ads with us, but we had neither. Aylwin respected the agreements that Pinochet had with *El Mercurio* and *La Tercera*. But the most scandalous was that offers from friendly countries, such as those from the Dutch government, to Fortín Mapocho, *La Época* and *Análisis*, *Hoy y Apsi* to support us, were blocked by the first democratic government (Becerra, 2006).

Moreover, none of the three first administrations of Concertación “demanded restitution of the subsidies that Pinochet’s men promised to the right wing media while at the same time saying ‘the best communication policy is no policy’” (León-Dermota, 2003: 35). Thus, the landscape of Chilean journalism after the elimination of potential dissident voices was one of uniformity, non-criticism and subordination to authority (Otano and Sunkel, 2000). In the eyes of international observers the situation of the press was considered as “subject to restrictions in a way that may have no equivalent among Western democracies” (Human Rights Watch, 1998: 49). This quote comes from research carried out in 1997 and 1998, a period when several reports criticized the Chilean media landscape in terms of democracy, a landscape that even with the creation of five new independent magazines in 1998³⁶, remained unaltered in the long term, due to the demise of these magazines less than a decade from their launch.

³⁶ The magazines were *Rocinante*, *Plan B*, *Lat. 33*, *The Clinic* and *El Periodista* (The Journalist). The first three on the list closed between 2005 and 2010.

5. Critical media issues: neoliberalism and democracy

The situation remained unchanged from 1998, when *Los límites de la tolerancia. Libertad y debate público en Chile*³⁷ was published, to 2006. Then a series of policy measures promoted change mainly due to criticism coming from four different angles:

- A.-** Restrictions on freedom of expression were noted in the three branches of government: executive, legislature and judiciary. Although journalists did not suffer physical violence and were not harassed, as in the 1970s or 1980s, there were laws punishing certain expressions as offensive, defamatory or slanderous when they were directed at the President, government ministers, parliamentarians, judges and top commanders of the armed forces. These laws were written in the military justice system, penal code and the state security law. Falling under military justice was especially serious, because they acted both as prosecutors and judges.

According to Human Rights Watch, during the first 10 years of democracy after Pinochet, the structure of military justice remained untouched and civilian power remained the same, which is why the “authorities have invoked that provision against their critics for two successive elected governments” (Human Rights Watch, 1998: 53). Even when during the administration of the social democrat president Ricardo Lagos (2000-2006) some laws were modified, the diagnosis on Chilean freedom of speech was disappointing as a consequence of a “legal tradition, an authoritarian and restrictive culture, and poor legislative pace in adopting legal rules that currently restrict freedom of expression and information” (Correa, 2004: 359).

The most emblematic case was the book *El Libro Negro de la Justicia en Chile* (The Black Book of Justice in Chile), an investigation written by journalist Alejandra Matus, who had to escape to the United States of America to avoid jail as a consequence of the judicial persecution against her for what was considered a “criminal defamation” (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2001). The book was banned and Matus lived in exile for three years.

³⁷ The limits of tolerance. Freedom and public debate in Chile

- B.-** The second area that suffered at the hand of censorship was cinema. The Consejo de Calificación Cinematográfica (Film Ratings Council), under the Ministry of Education, had the power to classify films as suitable for audiences of different ages, or ban them completely without even transmission on television. Moreover, every film that came to Chile had to go through the censorship of the Council. Anyone could go to court and demand that a film should be censored, a measure applied also to books or other publications. A landmark case was the banning of the film *The Last Temptation of Christ* (Inter-American Court of Human Rights, 2011). After ten years of wrangling in court, the Supreme Court ruled against the screening of the film, because it was said that the film offended the honour of Christ. Finally, in 2001, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights sentenced in favour of the screening of the movie. That same year, censorship of movies in Chile was abolished.
- C.-** A third critical issue in terms of freedom of speech and the exercise of a free press was accountability of state authorities and public bodies in relation to agreements, decrees, public expenses, purchases, judgments, selection and recruitment of workers, public workers salaries, etc. Public information did not have to be delivered if the authorities so determined. Judges could issue a ban on the progress of a criminal investigation until the court lifted the ban without giving a reason (Human Rights Watch, 1988). Even in the first years of the 21st century, international institutions such as the United Nations, human rights and media organizations, highlighted the lack of accountability and access to public information in Chile (Brett, 2001: 42; Montecinos, 2003; PNUD, 2006).
- D.-** Finally, in 2009, law 20.085 regarding Access to Public Information, known as the “transparency law”, was passed. After years of small steps forward -such as the creation of an open and accountable state procurement system, and the decision taken by president Michelle Bachelet to publish every single act of public bodies- the law guaranteed public information access at no cost and maximum disclosure in every single office or institution of the state³⁸, as a point of no return.

³⁸ The law is available at <http://www.leychile.cl/Navegar?idNorma=276363>

Whilst today journalists have more freedom to do their job, cinema censorship does not exist, access to public information has been improved and the public sector has been made accountable, media ownership is still an unresolved issue. The political option to not have a communication policy kept the status quo and consolidated “the groups of owners of print and audio-visual media. Even radio, traditionally considered diverse and plural, today shows symptoms of concentration in big chains” (Monckeberg, 2009: 3). Regarding print media, in Chile there are 98 magazines and newspapers, almost all of which belong to the El Mercurio S.A and COPESA groups. Both share similar political perspectives (Sunkel, 2011) and, according to the National Press Association, during the first semester of 2009, they received 99% of readership of the national media in the country.

In radio, just a few groups control ownership of commercial frequencies: the Spanish holding Prisa Radio (11 radio stations), the Luksic Group (4), the Bezanilla Group (3) and the Dial Group (6). These four groups own 70% of the radio companies and Prisa Radio alone receives 50% of total advertising revenue. On the other hand, community radio in Chile suffers from restrictive legislation “establishing arbitrary limitations to the technical and administrative features to broadcast” (Asociación Mundial de Radios Comunitarias, 2009: 18).

During the 1960s and 1970s television had cultural, educational and entertainment objectives (Hurtado, 1989: 53). There were only four TV stations. Today, there are six national free-to-air TV stations, two regional and nine local stations (Mayorga, del Valle, Nitrihual, 2010). TVN (formerly Canal 7) is the national TV station, but works as a public-private company with a board including members of political parties with representation in the National Congress. Press, television and radio now exist in a fiercely competitive market with Cable TV and the Internet. In terms of advertising revenues, free-to-air television gets 49% of the total, the daily press 29.5%, radio 8.3%, magazines 3.5%, cable TV 1.7%, on line media 1.1%, movies 0.3% and the rest goes to street and highway ads (González-Rodríguez, 2008).

A final element regarding media issues is that in general, but especially in television, Chile moved during the 1990s from a format based on news, soap operas, movies and talk shows, to one based on reality shows and satellite gossip and scandal programs. The realm of ephemeral local celebrities and public exposure of private life permeated the media spectrum. For media companies, this works well because it attracts money without much effort and funds; but for its critics this is bad news, due to the low importance given to the social role of media (Norambuena, 2006), the treatment of news as a merchandise and the closure of debate in favour of celebrity gossip (Monckeberg, 2009), giving spectacle a commanding power over any other criteria (Arancibia, 2006).

6. Implications and consequences

This historical account highlights a number of implications and consequences in the relationship between social movements, politics and the media landscapes that contribute to a better understanding of the character of recent social movements in Chile and as a standpoint from which to deepen research about the links between media and democracy in neoliberal territories.

The first implication comes after the symbolic displacement from political to mediated systems of representation. As Arancibia states, today “the quintessential mainstream political scene is the media landscape” (2006: 93) and amongst all media, television is a political actor. As a powerful political actor, the media shape characters, construct identities and give voice to certain actors according to a validity frame given by the market, which is in turn validated by state law. And for mainstream media, social movements might be valid actors within a social realm, but not legitimate and valid actors within the political system. During the first fifteen years of social democrat administrations, Concertación chose to silence social movements and empower the voice of right-wing media. The only way for social movements to appear on national TV, in the main newspapers or radio was through urban protests or violent clashes with police in a media that was more interested in the cost of the riots, the number of protesters detained and the damage to local business than about the focus of what they were demanding. Alvaro Cuadra calls this a ‘happy ending’ moment in the usual Chilean media coverage of mobilizations, “when students demands are overshadowed by ‘vandalism’ or, at best, minimized with promises or placebos to keep everything the same as before” (Cuadra, 2012: 7).

The second implication is that the media today in Chile are a space where a small number of companies make profits (Mastrini & Becerra, 2011) and most largely support the economic system from an ideological standpoint (Sunkel, 2001, Leyton, 2010). Media companies are reluctant to broadcast any article or investigation about something that could affect a friend, an ally, a business contact, a supporter or the neoliberal economic system (Leyton, 2010) because it would result in a loss of sponsorship. On the other hand, new media giving space to a dissident voice have had difficulties finding advertisements to survive in the long term. In sum, the media in Chile are ideologically biased and the state has not changed that, not even through advertising. In fact, the Chilean government has supported this tendency, by spending 15 million dollars in 2011 on advertising campaigns on television, press and radio, mostly in the Chilean oligopoly media (Saleh, 2012). Similarly, there is no debate regarding regulation of the media. This topic is never covered in terms of ownership or representation, only in terms of ethical behaviour

of journalists or media workers (Zúñiga, 2008). The reason for this avoidance lies in the connection between an extreme neoliberal notion of the media (Mastrini and Becerra, 2011) as well as the links between current mainstream political power and established media. This situation, far from changing, has been fostered: the first measure related to media implemented by Chilean president Sebastian Piñera in 2012 was to close La Nación, a 60 year old state owned newspaper, because it was “not necessary for the state to have a newspaper” (Vargas, 2012) as the vice president Andres Chadwick put it. Critics of its closure argued that the reason was because La Nación, even when it belonged to the state, remained as the only national newspaper to be critical of the Chilean economic and political system.

There is a third implication and it is the use of non-mainstream channels. Here, there is fertile soil for research, but it is possible to say at least two things. First, the use of ICT's has opened a gap for new actors, especially allowing a faster flow of information and organization of collective action (Coscione, 2009; Millaldeo, 2011). In this context, what happened in 2006 with the “Penguin Revolution”³⁹ was very important. That struggle showed that even when participation in institutional channels was still very limited via media and government, the social movement could manage to have a voice, spread it and make it heard across the country (Calderón, 2012). Second, urban demonstrations and the body of the protester as the most ancient medium for social movements are still very much alive. The predilection for the use of the street has been a response from the social movements to the need to express complaints, share concerns, let people meet others face to face, and use a public space. The street, the body and the voice have been a powerful and traditional medium in the history of Chilean social movements, but they have increased in recent years (Segovia and Gamboa, 2012) as they are conceived as a powerful means of expression and a democratic form of participation in the social movement, contrasting with free-to-air television and radio, which according to the Chilean law, are still national public goods, but in reality are quite the opposite (Fernández, 2013).

7. Conclusion

There can be no question that Chile is a formal representative democracy. But there is likewise no question as this article has shown that it is a democracy with problems: Chilean contemporary democracy was conceived and shaped in the

39 In Chile primary and high school students receive the nickname of penguins because of the uniform they use at school.

constitution of 1980 under a non-democratic government that restricted popular participation beyond voting in regular elections. In general Chilean democracy works within the margins of the polity, but has not been able to deal properly with demands for a broader political approach that conceives politics as the unfinished construction of the future (Lechner, 1984), with greater degrees of participation, recognition and legitimacy for external institutional actors, otherwise known as the citizenry, civil society, the people, the community, etc.

The mainstream media, in turn, have not played any role in counteracting this lack of participation, but have reinforced it. Rather than working to open up spaces to convey and contrast different and divergent voices in the public sphere(s), they have done the opposite, reasserting misrecognition (Fraser, 2000) of those not regarded as legitimate actors. Both democracy and the mainstream media contribute to delegitimize subaltern voices -understood as “a process of giving an account of one’s life and its conditions” (Couldry, 2010: 7)- as worthy of taking part in public debates and in the construction of a lively democratic process. The article has shown that this has not happened by mere chance or by an act of nature. As long as Chilean democracy has been unable to modify its lack of participation and its media system, the metaphor of the birdcage –posed by Moulian in the middle 1990s- remains as an image to depict the problem.

We can see that the production of a self-made voice has been at the root of Chilean contemporary social movements, something that is not far from what scholars studying social movements -for example Tilly, Melucci, Della Porta- have found in their studies. But what seems to be a common factor and very distinctive of contemporary Chilean social movements is that in the context of neoliberal democracies this is a mean and an end to escape from the polity and to open up the political (Mouffe, 2005). Thus, the analysis of the blocking of the public sphere, comprised by mainstream media and neoliberal democracy, allows us to see two things. On one hand, that this marriage has determined the varied –innovative, traditional, old and new, collective, connective, etc. - means that social movements have chosen and created during the last years to exist into the public. But on the other hand, it allows seeing a deeper element at the foundation of the political, which is that the social movements’ quest for voice is also an end in itself, the exercise of a basic political right asserting the right of politics as a place for recognition, belonging and discussion. This is an important outcome in the study of the relationship between social movements, politics and the media in Chile, leaving open questions regarding issues such as political agency, activism, political participation and media regulation.

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