



THE CASE OF *CHILEVISIÓN*:

Negotiating Difficult Discourses on Chilean Television

El caso de *Chilevisión*: Negociando discursos difíciles en
la televisión chilena

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ABSTRACT

This essay looks at television in the context of contemporary Chile and the case of one of the five major broadcast networks in Chile—Chilevisión. Despite the constraints that we would expect to find on any commercial network, as well as the nuanced restrictions imposed on Chilean television that are unique to Chile's recent history, this network got some truly revolutionary “reality” TV programming on the air in the beginning of the new millennium. In the earlier part of the decade, it was the boldest of the big five networks, offering the largest amount of controversial, sensitive subject matter. This no longer appears to be the case.

Keywords: Television, Chile, human rights, censorship, self-censorship, media communication, freedom of speech, media ownership, politics on the media, historical memories.

RESUMEN

Este artículo investiga la manera en que la red de televisión chilena *Chilevisión* ha desarrollado y cambiado durante los últimos diez años. A pesar de las limitaciones que podemos encontrar en cualquier red de televisión, así como las restricciones impuestas en la televisión chilena, que son únicas en la historia reciente de Chile, esta red puso en el aire algunos programas de “reality TV” más o menos revolucionarios durante el principio del nuevo milenio. En la primera parte del decenio, fue la más intrépida de las cinco redes grandes, ofreciendo la mayor cantidad de temas sensibles y controvertibles. Ya no es el caso ahora.

Palabras claves: Televisión, Chile, derechos humanos, censura, autocensura, medios de comunicación, libertad de expresión, propiedad de los medios, política y medios de comunicación, memoria histórica.

1. INTRODUCTION

Chilean broadcast television illustrates the complicated ways in which mainstream commercial media can address sensitive issues, often through shared understandings of the unspoken, despite tremendous pressures for censorship and self-censorship. This essay looks at television in the context of contemporary Chile and the case of one of the five major broadcast networks in Chile, *Chilevisión*. This research is informed by a variety of methods: analysis of the content of television programs, analysis of the industrial and cultural institutions through which these programs circulate, and analysis of the ways in which television producers and consumers perceive and discuss this media within a specific historical context (post-dictatorship Chile, 2002 to the present). Consideration of the effect of media discourses on the current judicial processes taking place within and outside of Chile regarding dictatorship-era human rights violations¹ demonstrates the crucial role that media can play in raising awareness and expediting procedures for bringing perpetrators of “crimes against humanity” to justice; it also shows the degree to which the media, serving as an agenda-setter, can aid a nation in continuing along a path of avoidance, apathy, and impunity. This study also demonstrates how media communication can influence the ways in which members of a divided society choose to deal with a traumatic past and negotiate their competing historical memories.

Television plays a central role in the ways that Chileans choose to deal with the legacy of General Augusto Pinochet's regime (1973-1990) as well as move forward in the struggle toward a real democracy. According to Stephen Crofts Wiley, “The dictatorship maintained a tight grip on programming through censorship and the production of vast amounts of pro-Pinochet propaganda, all the while imposing a thorough commercialization of broadcasting and permitting the unregulated private development of cable television... Television, during this period, reinforced the authoritarian project of controlling national public space and reorganizing Chile as a territory of uncontested, transnationally dependent capitalist development” (Assembled Agency, 2006). After the dictatorship, the military generals stepped down as network heads, but many of the staff who had sympathized with Pinochet remained. Others who had worked during the regime may not have sympathized with Pinochet but they had learned that, in order to preserve their jobs and their safety, they needed to be careful. The result during the transition to democracy was extreme network conservatism.

In the early 1990s, television exposed Chilean citizens who had been removed from the violence of the dictatorship to many

of the atrocities for the first time. But by the mid-1990s, “public interest” in the violent legacy of Pinochet had declined. As former *Chilevisión* news director, anchor and current anchor of *TVN24* Alejandro Guillier described,

Pero en esa época el país estuvo perfectamente informado de violaciones a los derechos humanos, detenidos desaparecidos, tortura. Me da la impresión que después, en la democracia en los primeros años, se le dio mucha importancia al tema de derechos humanos. Después, hacia el año '94, se empieza a producir una cierta saturación. Y hay sectores que comienzan, de manera pública, a decir, “ok, ya sé lo que pasó, pero quiero cambiar de tema. No quiero seguir mirando hacia atrás”. Y la presencia del tema empezó a bajar (personal interview, April 8, 2002)².

In their book on post-repressive regimes in the southern countries of South America, Luis Roniger and Mario Sznajder write, “While certain minorities progressively adopted human rights as their banner for opposing military rule, wide sectors of the demobilized societies of the Southern Cone accepted the official versions and others reacted with apathy” (1999, 39). In addition, the media industry and the *Concertación* government were under the watchful eyes of the armed forces. According to Guillier,

El régimen militar chileno fue exitoso en muchos aspectos. Y por lo tanto, hay una parte importante en el país, sobre todo los que tienen el poder del dinero, el poder político, el poder de los medios de comunicación, que son partidarios del régimen militar. Y le tienen gratitud a Pinochet. Aquí fue una transición pactada o negociada. Y por lo tanto, entran los pactos, las cúpulas políticas. Dijeron, “bueno este es el marco de lo que podemos hacer y lo que no podemos hacer”. Y uno de los acuerdos que no están escritos pero que es tácito y que todos sabemos, es que a Pinochet no se le tomaba preso (personal interview, April 8, 2002)³.

When Pinochet was arrested in England in October 1998 with the possibility of being extradited to Spain, the Chilean media opened up. With a newfound sense of freedom due to their former dictator being held thousands of miles away and the knowledge that the international community was watching, they reopened their human rights dialogues. As Roniger and Sznajder state, “The massive publicity of these issues in the global mass media [added] another dimension of difficulty in any attempt to cover up, favoring public accountability” (1999, 146). When Pinochet was returned to Chile in

1 When I refers to human rights, I am informed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted and proclaimed by the United Nations on December 10, 1948. When I refers to human rights violations committed during the Pinochet regime, I mean primarily executions, forced disappearances, and torture.

2 Traduction: “The country knew perfectly well about the human rights violations, the detained and disappeared, and torture at that time. But I'm under the impression that it was later, during the early years of democracy that the topic of human rights started to take on more importance. Later, around 1994, it started to produce a kind of saturation. And there are sectors that began to publicly say, 'OK, I know what happened, but I want to change the subject. I don't want to keep looking back'. And the presence of the issue started to decrease”. (personal interview, April 8, 2002).

2000, some of these dialogues were stifled again, but others remained. As with the rest of the media, television could no longer be so tightly controlled. This opening up of discourses has increased further since the death of General Pinochet in Chile on December 10, 2006. Pinochet was never successfully convicted for his crimes.

2. INDIRECTNESS AND STRUCTURED ABSENCES

Coverage of themes and issues related to the dictatorship and human rights is partial and cryptic. Chilean news does cover these cases of the disappeared regularly. Yet, especially until 2004, there was virtually no coverage or discussion of the systematic use of torture that was practiced on what many estimate to be hundreds of thousands of Chileans and non-Chileans detained during the dictatorship. As Guillier explained,

Nosotros mismos estamos más sensibles a la causa de encontrar a los detenidos-desaparecidos. La verdad es que no es una decisión editorial. Quizás simplemente la sensación de que los casos de tortura, en definitiva, veinte años después, no van a tener una mejor solución en los tribunales. Por lo tanto no van a avanzar mucho. Y probablemente, cuando uno se acostumbra a la violencia aguda y ya se salvó la vida de una persona, se alivia y prefiere concentrarse en las que murieron. No sé si es un mecanismo defensivo psicológico (personal interview, April 8, 2002)⁴.

The reasons for the selectiveness of television coverage regarding these themes and issues are multiple, and not all of the reasons are media-specific. One factor is the Rettig Report. Composed by a government-appointed committee in the early 1990s and known internationally as the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report*, this mandate asked that everything possible be done for the families of individuals who were killed or who disappeared during Pinochet's regime. The report did not suggest that any action be taken on behalf of survivors who experienced the violence. Thus, the report established an agenda detailing what was and was not to be addressed. The tacit agreement that was made between the leaders of the fledgling democracy and the military was that only the most egregious crimes against humanity—namely, those that resulted in death—would be investigated. As Lawrence Kirmayer contends, “The social world fails to bear witness for many reasons. Even reparative accounts of the terrible things that happen to people (violations, traumas, losses) are warded off because of their capacity to create vicarious fear and pain and because they constitute a threat to current social and political arrangements”

(1996, 192). Another possible reason for the avoidance of certain themes on television is that many torture survivors and citizens who were once exiled do not want to talk about their experiences. Personal remembrances of these traumatic events in Chile are very complex. However, there are factors specific to Chile's media system and its relationship to the nation's social, political, and economic structures that also strongly contribute to either the complete avoidance of human rights issues or a circuitous manner in dealing with them.

Before taking a closer look at mainstream Chilean media and its discourses, consider the notion of structuring absences or what Louis Althusser would call the ‘problematic’—the strategic withholding of certain themes, discourses, or ideologies within textual systems. Cultural studies scholar John Storey (1998) explaining the theory of Althusser describes,

The problematic of a text relates to its moment of historical existence as much by what it excludes as by what it includes. In this way, it encourages a text to answer questions posed by itself, but at the same time, it generates the production of ‘deformed’ answers to the questions it attempts to exclude. Thus a problematic is structured as much by what it absent (what is not said / what is not done) as by what is present (what is said / what is done) (117).

U.S. news coverage of the war in Iraq offers an example. Mainstream media institutions in the U.S. explained the situation in Iraq using narratives that highlighted specific elements and avoided others. During the war and ongoing occupation, U.S. television viewers were informed daily of the number of U.S. soldiers killed, but never shown pictures of bodies or coffins. Rarely was information given about the much larger number of Iraqis, including civilians, killed. Much media attention was given to Saddam Hussein's alleged weapons of mass destruction and links to Al Qaeda, but hardly any attention was paid to the fact that many members of the Bush Administration were board members on oil companies that were going to profit from the war. Neither was attention paid, especially on the NBC network, to the fact that the company which owned NBC, General Electric, is involved in the creation of U.S. military weapons. Just because the media may concentrate on certain themes does not mean that viewers will avoid considering others. The over-determination of those themes can lead some to question.

When we investigate individual responses to media texts in a post-traumatic historical context, it is useful to consider cultural studies scholar Stuart Hall's classic article, “Encoding, Decoding” (1999). According to his model, individuals can re-

3 Traduction: “The Chilean military regime was successful in many aspects, and therefore, a large part of the country, especially those who have the power of money, politics, or the communications media supported the military regime, and they were grateful to Pinochet. Therefore, this was a transition made through agreements and negotiations. They said ‘this is what we can do and what we cannot do’. And one of those non-written, tacit agreements that we all know about, was that Pinochet was not to be arrested”. (personal interview, April 8, 2002).

4 Traduction: “We are more sensitive to the cause of finding the detained and disappeared. The truth is that this is not an editorial decision. Perhaps it is simply the sensation that now, twenty years later, cases of torture are not going to find a better solution in the courts, and they aren't going to advance much. It is probably also the case that when you become accustomed to ruthless violence and you have already saved someone's life, you are relieved and would rather concentrate on those who died. I don't know, maybe it's a psychological defense mechanism”. (personal interview, April 8, 2002).

spond in three different ways to the dominant ideology of the text. They can agree with it, negotiate its meaning, or oppose it. If they oppose the dominant meaning altogether, they can look for gaps and fissures in the text which allow for alternative readings. Citizens of repressive and post-repressive regimes develop talents for readings messages between the official lines of media texts.

This researcher has observed this phenomenon in the circulation of media discourses in Chile. In particular, many media texts offer opportunities for alternative readings through the systemic use of certain types of structured absences. A key theme or idea will be noted by audience members because its very lack of discussion and representation is obvious to Chileans familiar with their specific culture and history. A photograph of members of the Association of Relatives of the Detained-Disappeared holding a burial service for the remains of a victim formerly classified as missing was included in Chile's daily commercial newspaper, *El Mercurio*, but there was no article attached. Orlando Lübbert's popular feature film released in 2001, *Taxi para tres*, does not refer to the dictatorship directly, but a police officer character acts similarly to how members of Pinochet's secret police forces behaved, and one of the main characters mentions that he was raised by his grandparents because his parents were "taken away".

The Chilean public can fill in the gaps when delicate topics from the era of the dictatorship are avoided or indirectly addressed. Viewers are well aware of the limitations of media discourse—they experienced state censorship during Pinochet's regime. Yet, even then, messages were encoded and decoded through structured absences. When newspaper and magazine censors forbade the publication of certain photographs, editors would leave blank spaces where photographs would have appeared so that viewers would know something else was supposed to be there. When reporters wanted to share sensitive information in their articles, they often buried the information in a brief phrase or sentence somewhere near the end.

3. INDUSTRIAL CONDITIONS IN CHILEAN BROADCAST TELEVISION

The structuring absences of human rights discourse are not just a result of Chile's military repression. The economic structure of Chile's media industry is also an important factor. Ever since the economic reforms of Pinochet's regime, Chile has been a hyper-capitalistic society with extreme concentration of ownership. The same is true for the media industry. "Anticipating the transfer of power, the Pinochet government initiated

a radical transformation of the political and economic framework that had structured Chilean television under authoritarian rule. University-run television stations were privatized, broadcast licensing was deregulated, and cable television was allowed to develop in a regulatory vacuum... In short, before stepping down, the Pinochet government had set the parameters for the development of a post-authoritarian cultural environment that was morally conservative but, at the same time, thoroughly transnationalized and radically neoliberal in economic terms" (Crofts Wiley, "Transnation", 2006). In addition, virtually all media was owned by only a few different individuals and families who were supporters of the Pinochet regime.

The responsibility of network executives is to earn as much money for their networks as possible through commercial advertising. One strategy has been to attract mass audiences with entertainment—what not only appeals to a diverse public but also does not detract from or trivialize the commercials. Another strategy has been to attract smaller, more affluent, niche audiences—namely, those who can afford cable and frequently choose internationally imported networks instead. In both cases product placements and product endorsements by program stars and hosts are common. Transitioning from a discourse on torture to one on cell phones, shoes, aspirin, or soda cannot be done smoothly. However, that does not mean that hard-hitting themes are entirely avoided. How those news stories are shaped, though, especially regarding the degree to which audiences may be perceived to tolerate unpleasant descriptions and images, must be considered to avoid alienating the commercial sponsors.

The restrictions imposed on a capitalist television system do not prevent all significant discourse. Individual programs as well as individual producers and journalists have found ways to work through the system, introducing controversial subjects and material. In fact, sometimes a program's "subversiveness" can have market appeal. If enough of a sponsor's target audience is interested in the programming, discussing normally taboo topics may appear as an excellent business decision. To compete against the other networks, producers seek to offer something different and unique through counterprogramming. A show's "specificity" can sell. Controversial programming and news stories can have popular appeal to a commercial audience. Chilean journalists and media professionals appear to be attempting different strategies and techniques to get their socially and politically charged topics on the air.

One effective strategy is that of converting a local or national story into an international one, a technique with a legacy

that dates back to the dictatorship. Once a story reaches international status, it seems to be more protected for the Chilean press and perhaps more newsworthy for certain sectors of the audience. Although journalists have become adept at making these conversions themselves, sometimes, international angles and events are handed to them. Such was the case in 1998 when Pinochet was arrested in London. Pinochet's international detention allowed the national media to revisit themes and issues that had been shut down since the early 1990s when they were briefly aired after the dictatorship had ended but then effectively silenced again. What is more common is the blatant absence of discourse regarding Pinochet's regime. This was especially clear in 2002 when Channel 7, *Televisión Nacional de Chile*, aired a special documentary that it produced on Latin American dictatorships. Chile was never mentioned. Here, the international stood in for the national.

In addition to the constraints imposed on television due to Chile's recent history, the market forces of global capitalism, combined with a high concentration of media ownership, impose their own restrictions on the discourses that circulate on Chile's networks. Chilean TV producers usually try to appeal to a large, diverse audience, and exploitative entertainment is the rule of thumb. Even the morning "news" shows are not immune. Discussions circulate around star gossip as the "journalists" drink their Chilean juice or tea. In fact, throughout most of the day, when it is presumed that most audiences are women and children, Chilean television could be classified as a "media circus". The exception occurs during the evenings, when networks try to appeal to a more professional, educated, masculine, and affluent audience.

The five big broadcast networks are Channel 4, *La Red*; Channel 7, *Televisión Nacional de Chile (TVN)*; Channel 9, *Megavisión*; Channel 11, *Chilevisión*; and Channel 13, *Canal 13* or *UC13*, of *Universidad Católica*. Historically, most of the networks have been aligned with the political right. During the dictatorship, the two main networks, TVN and UC13, along with other university networks, were under virtually complete control of Pinochet's regime.

Televisión Nacional de Chile was the official network of Pinochet's regime. Since the country's return to democracy, it has been run by a directorate of representatives from every political party represented in the congress. Decisions made at the network need to be accepted by all political party representatives on the directorate. Many producers and journalists who have worked at this network complain that this causes inefficient bureaucracy. In recent years, though, this network has

offered the most extensive lineup of programming and subject matter on the legacy of the Pinochet regime and other hard-hitting themes, offering programs such as *Informe Especial*; *Via Pública: La Política sin Restricción*; *360°: Ventana al Mundo*; *Estado Nacional*; and *Esto No Tiene Nombre: Porque todos tenemos derechos*.

Canal 13 is run by the Catholic University of Chile and serves as the official network of the Catholic Church. Although it has always been a conservative network, during the dictatorship it was able to sneak some criticism toward Pinochet through its channel due to the unique position of power that the Catholic Church has maintained in Chile. Human rights was a cause that some elements of the Catholic Church took up during the dictatorship; indeed, during Pinochet's regime, the Church was the only relatively safe place for human rights victims. Since the return to democracy, its concentration on these issues has diminished, but the network still demonstrates a concern for the theme of poverty and the responsibility of viewers to help those less fortunate. It also offers fairly consistent coverage of judicial cases pertaining to those killed and disappeared during the coup.

Megavisión is not a key player in the circulation of human rights discourses. The owner of the network was, until his death in 2008, conservative Chilean billionaire Ricardo Claro, who also owned and controlled the cable television company *Metrópolis-Intercom* (León-Dermota, 153). During the dictatorship, Claro criticized the media that did attempt to cover human rights violations, describing the coverage as irresponsible and unpatriotic. *La Red* is also not a significant contributor to human rights discourses. This network was created in 1991 by the Copesa media group. In 2006, the network was owned by Mexican business magnate Ángel González.

This essay concentrates on *Chilevisión*. Despite the constraints that we would expect to find on any commercial network, as well as the nuanced restrictions imposed on Chilean television that are unique to Chile's recent history, this network managed to get some truly revolutionary "reality" TV programming on the air during the beginning of the new millennium. Indeed, in the earlier part of the decade, it unquestionably was the boldest of the big five networks, offering the largest amount of controversial, sensitive subject matter. As will be discussed, though, this no longer appears to be the case. By conducting a "symptomatic reading" of some of the network's most innovative programming, we can see that significant human rights discourses have materialized within the gaps and fissures characteristic of the structuring absences of Chilean television, but we can also see how those discourses have been contained, and in some cases, completely eliminated.

4. CHILEVISIÓN: OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS

Channel 11, *Chilevisión*, was formerly the network of the University of Chile. The University of Chile was one of the military junta's first targets after Chile's coup since it was considered a bastion of left-wing ideology. The network was controlled by the military generals during the dictatorship and, with the return to democracy, privatized. In 1993, the network sold 49 percent of its stock to *Venevisión*. *Venevisión* had acquired 99 percent of the company by 1997 (Crofts Wiley, "Transnation"). Until 2005, the owners were not Chilean, but rather Venezuelan Gustavo Cisneros of *Venevisión* and Claxson Interactive Group Inc., headquartered in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and Miami, Florida, in the United States. In 2002 and 2003, journalists at *Chilevisión* cited the network's international, non-native owners as a reason for the greater independence and freedom of expression experienced at this network in relation to the two other most significant networks, *TVN* and *UC13*.

In 2005, *Chilevisión* was purchased by Chilean billionaire Sebastián Piñera, owner and shareholder of, among other companies, LAN Chile Airlines and the *Colo Colo* soccer team. He is a political conservative and member of the *Renovación Nacional* political party who ran for president in 2005. In 2008, he ran for president again as leader of the National Renovation Party, and he eventually became the only candidate for the politically conservative *Alianza* coalition of the National Renovation and extreme-right *Unión Demócrata Independiente* (UDI) party. In December 2009, he finished in first place in the first round of presidential elections. In January 2010, he ran against centrist Christian Democrat and former President Eduardo Frei Ruiz-Tagle (1994–2000), whose father, Eduardo Frei Montalva, was also a president of Chile (1964–1970) and allegedly killed by Pinochet's men while he was recovering from surgery in 1982, in the final round of elections. Piñera's ownership of *Chilevisión* correlated with a noticeable difference in programming and editorial decisions, and when he appeared on his own network, he seemed to receive especially gentle treatment in comparison to the appearances of other political leaders and candidates, especially those from the left. Piñera won the January 17 election and became President on March 11, 2010. As on May 2010, the network is now in the process of being sold to Linzor Capital (Grupo Linzor).

Before the Piñera takeover, *Chilevisión* displayed unique network identification and self-promotional spots. Each spot showed "regular" Chileans standing on different street corners in Santiago, holding up hand-painted placards with slogans such as, "Quiero más libertad de expresión" ("I want more freedom of speech") and "Necesitamos menos miedo," ("We need less fear")

in sepia-toned camera images playing to the upbeat music of an individual whistling. A voice-over accompanied a digital graphic reading, "*Chilevisión: Tu canal*" or "*Chilevisión: Tu Mirada*". Unlike the "reality" TV programming that was available on other networks in Chile, *Chilevisión's* programming confronted its nation's real societal problems and engaged diverse segments of the Chilean public, allowing them to have a voice in a mediated, semi-pluralistic public sphere. While audiences for other reality shows could register their votes by phone or e-mail for who they believed should become the next pop music icon, viewers of *Chilevisión's* debate show, *El Termómetro*, voted on how effectively their government had controlled smog in Santiago, whether their police forces had succeeded in hunting down pedophiles, and whether these same police forces used excessive violence during street protests and demonstrations. Furthermore, on another *Chilevisión* program called *Ciento*, which aired in 2002, the producers handed out cameras to their viewers and encouraged them to go where they wanted to go and interview who they wanted to interview. The program then broadcasted the interviews during primetime TV.

The program on *Chilevisión* that most consistently offered a unique opportunity for the discussion of significant and sensitive topics was *El Termómetro*. *El Termómetro* aired Monday through Friday, usually from 8:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m., leading into Chilean television primetime (9:00 p.m. to midnight). Most of the networks—*Chilevisión*, *TVN*, *UC13*, and *Megavisión*—show the national news from 9:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m., followed by feature films, documentaries, specials, or other programming. The network heads of *Chilevisión* wanted to attract more lucrative primetime audiences by offering counterprogramming—a live show in the 8:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. lead-in slot. As Pablo Alvarado, editorial director of the program in 2002, described the decision to create this program, "Los criterios no son políticos ni religiosos, sino que son comerciales. No era una tensión ideológica lo que había sobre el programa, sino era una tensión comercial"⁵ (personal interview, April 4, 2002). The fact that *Chilevisión* did not, previous to its purchase by Piñera, have to deal with local or national constraints to the extent that most other networks did seemed to make a difference.

John Caldwell explains in *Televisuality*, "At the same time that networks publicly applaud viewer activity and choice, they counterprogram to ensure audience share against the new and volatile viewing practices" (1995, 259). This was the case for *Chilevisión*. Not many *telenovela* viewers who religiously tuned in to the other channels were going to switch over to *El Termómetro*; rather, the network was clinching a favored target audi-

5 Traducción: "The criteria were neither political nor religious, but commercial. It wasn't a case of ideological tension over the program; it was commercial".

ence for the following evening news. “Counterprogramming, a marketing strategy that helps fuel stylistic individuation, has also taken on increased importance in the face of heightened competition” (Caldwell 1995, 294).

The share of viewers (percentage of households with their television sets turned on to a specific network) for *Chilevisión* during this time slot was actually quite small compared to the other major networks (on July 15, 2003, 6.7 percent, compared with 41.2 percent for *TVN*, 24.5 percent for *Megavisión*, 19.9 percent for *UC13*, and 6.7 percent for *La Red*). But the audience that the channel did get was one highly esteemed by advertisers—that is, one composed of professional, educated, and affluent viewers. In this case, the network was less concerned with broadcasting to a wide audience than it was with narrowcasting to a more lucrative select audience.

El Termómetro was usually the only live program broadcast on any of the five major networks in the pre-evening news time-slot. *El Termómetro* was hosted until 2005 by Iván Núñez. After the change in ownership of the network, he moved to *Televisión Nacional de Chile* and has recently returned to *Chilevisión* in 2009. *El Termómetro* continued, first with Macarena Pizarro, and eventually with regular host Matías del Río, until 2007.

Each evening, four guests were invited to participate. Many panelists were repeat performers who came back every couple of weeks. Most were prestigious professionals—mayors, representatives from congress, journalists, lawyers, business owners, filmmakers, and pop stars. By 2006, the diversity of guests was wider. In addition to the four panelists, others had the opportunity to participate through phone calls and e-mail messages. The host dedicated some time in every show to sharing these responses. Every show had a poll in which you could vote on a “yes”–“no” question through the phone or Internet. Results of the poll were revealed at the end of the program. Occasionally, there was a live studio audience that sometimes posed questions and opinions at the end of the program.

Nancy Fraser advises, “One task for critical theory is to render visible the ways in which societal inequality infects formally inclusive existing public spheres and taints discursive interaction within them” (1999, 526). Her admonition emphasizes our need to consider who was allowed to participate in these *El Termómetro* discourses, and to what extent they could in fact participate. Social class, gender, political affiliation, and education level all played significant roles, not only in terms of who was invited, but also in relation to who had access to the technology—the television for viewing and a phone or Internet access for responding. Added to these issues is the fact

that advertisers were seeking the exclusive, upwardly mobile, and economically comfortable sector of the viewing public to which the program was catering. According to Crofts Wiley, “the capitalist construction of the public as potential consumers leads to a dual society and, some argue, to the social disarticulation of one sector (the globally connected elites and upper middle class) from the other (the mass audience constituted by broadcast television and radio)... in other words, in a deregulated context where capitalist logics drive infrastructural development, the wealthy are incorporated into a broader range of global media flows and those who lack value as consumers are left out” (“Transnation”). Nonetheless, despite its constraints, this show did allow a public forum for the airing of sensitive issues.

For six years, *El Termómetro* seemed to have struck an appropriate balance between “edginess” and network decorum. Confronting sensitive themes on the program, especially those regarding the legacy of the Pinochet dictatorship, must have been a delicate operation, since it was very likely that large sectors of the audience confronted these themes with much resistance. Alvarado stated, “Claro, se hacen cosas así pero no van al fondo. Nos vamos siempre por la periferia”⁶. Via this circuitous route, what was normally taboo material for network television slipped through.

Several episodes contained elements of a controversial nature with issues that addressed human rights. In 2002, one episode aired in response to international news about the priests who were under investigation in Boston for allegations of child sexual abuse. The host reminded panelists and viewers that the Church frequently would transfer troublesome priests to other countries, and Chile likely had some priests who had been sent from elsewhere for this very reason. Making that connection from this international situation to the national and local level was daring; the institution of the Catholic Church holds tremendous power in Chilean society. The most emotional moment in this episode of *El Termómetro* came when an adult in his fifties called to say that he had been sexually abused by a priest when he was a young child and that he was still damaged and traumatized by that experience.

Another episode addressed the police search for Paul Schäfer—the leader of Colonia Dignidad, a German commune in Chile—who was accused of sexually abusing dozens of children from the commune and from neighboring communities who had attended the school or been treated at the hospital on its grounds. During the dictatorship, the leaders of Colonia Dignidad sympathized with the leaders of Pinochet’s regime. A torture center was located on their land in underground caves. While most of

⁶ Traduction: “Sure we do things like that, but we don’t go into detail; we always skirt along the edge”.

the debate addressed the child sexual abuse and the Chilean police force's inability or disinterest in finding and capturing the leader (suggesting that high-ranking members of the military may have been protecting Schäfer), the role that the commune played in the tortures and disappearances of many victims of Pinochet's regime was also introduced by the host. Recorded video was shown of then president of the Association of Relatives of the Detained-Disappeared, Viviana Díaz, explaining how witnesses have testified to the existence of underground cells, on the property of the compound, where political prisoners were tortured during the dictatorship. Schäfer was later found and arrested in 2005.

Other episodes indirectly approached the legacy of Pinochet and his regime. For example, one program dealt with the purchase by the mayor of Providencia—a *comuna* (municipality) of Santiago—of the dining room table that Pinochet used when he was under house arrest in London. The question posed by the program was whether the mayor had the right to use public funds to purchase this table, but mention was also made by members of the panel that the interest in purchasing this table at all was disturbing. In another episode, a young man who had been assaulted by the grandson of Pinochet when he was coming out of a nightclub was interviewed. The question for the panelists and the viewers at home was, is justice the same for everyone in Chile? While this case purported to be about justice being served to the grandson on behalf of the victim of the assault, the question could also be interpreted as being directed toward Pinochet himself.

Another program addressed the alleged excessive use of force and violence of the *carabineros* (police) during public protests and demonstrations. On May 21, 2002, President Lagos gave his annual state of the union address to congress in the city of Valparaíso. Political groups, unions, and university students marched and protested in the streets outside of the congress building. Some protestors became violent, looting stores, spray-painting graffiti, and throwing Molotov cocktails at the police water cannon trucks. Several people were injured as the police tried to barricade streets, and protestors tried to break down the barricades. Hundreds of people were arrested. During the program's debate, emphasis was placed on police actions in contemporary times. However, the issue was also portrayed, with encouragement by the host, as a legacy of the dictatorship when those who dared to demonstrate were routinely beaten, humiliated, imprisoned, and sometimes killed.

In April 2002, when members of the opposition to the administration of President Hugo Chávez in Venezuela attempt-

ed a coup to topple his regime, *El Termómetro* covered it. Several times, Núñez and panelists referenced Chile's own coup in 1973, suggesting that the events in Venezuela had much in common with those that had taken place in Chile. By making the analogy, they warned that the future did not bode well for Venezuela. They even insinuated that the United States was probably involved in this attempted coup. They froze an image from news footage that showed a man shooting into a crowd with a handgun and suggested that he was a member of the CIA trying to instigate trouble and cause violence that would be blamed on Chávez's security forces. All of these examples demonstrate how peripherals—themes that are tangential to the human rights violations of the dictatorship—became displacements for a more direct confrontation of Chile's recent past.

El Termómetro allowed a space on network TV for the airing of sensitive topics and an opportunity for members of a diverse audience to express their concerns in a public forum. Nonetheless, *El Termómetro* was not a utopia for public discourse and freedom of expression. Especially in the early years, most voices were screened before they were broadcasted and silenced if they were too direct in their criticism of social and political conditions, or if they belonged to human rights groups or extreme left political parties. Furthermore, the host often had to become the good-natured harmonizer, with twinkling eyes and a broad smile, soothingly coaxing the contending panelists to calm down and not be so "extreme." In these regards, the discourses available through *El Termómetro* certainly were compromised. According to Alvarado,

Nosotros hemos generado una cantidad de enemigos públicos. Hasta ahora, tenemos algún "portero" por allí que nos dijo que lleguen las presiones... Pero, ningún problema⁷.

Nonetheless, there must have been a high degree of self-censorship.

As the show achieved higher ratings, more advertisers were interested in placing commercials during the program. Moreover, the host was often their spokesperson, appearing in the commercials or plugging the sponsors' products during the actual program. In one ad, Núñez looked straight into the camera and said, "There are some opinions that I *don't* like to hear. Before you speak, use *Listerine*." And during the show, the host encouraged the audience to use their *Telefónica* cell phone plan to call in and give their comments.

After the Piñera takeover of *Chilevisión*, *El Termómetro* changed. This evolution, in some ways, allowed more diversi-

7 Traduction: "We created quite a few public enemies. Even now we have people here and there who tell us when there are pressures... but we haven't had any problems".

ty of guests and opinions but there was also a noticeable shift in political tone. For example, guests included leaders of human rights organizations, leaders of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning (LGBTQ) organizations, members of non-moderate political parties, members of Nazi youth organizations, and student leaders. In June and July of 2006, significant time was given to the national student strikes, the largest grassroots movement in post-Pinochet Chile in which high school and college students from different socioeconomic classes and political perspectives united to oppose the state of the Chilean education system. Other topics that received attention during this time period included violence committed between neo-Nazi gangs and anti-Nazi skinheads, discrimination and violence committed against members of the LGBTQ community, the annual flooding of poor people's homes and communities during the winter rainy season, and house break-ins and assaults, especially in the wealthier regions of Santiago. An emphasis was placed on violence.

Embedded in this discourse of violence was a critique of Socialist President Michelle Bachelet⁸ and her administration. Guest speakers suggested that Chile's first female president was not able to control her people, whether it was the juvenile delinquents, the students, or the neo-Nazis. On the one hundredth-day anniversary of Bachelet's inauguration, the show took place in front of the Presidential Palace rather than in the studio to highlight the theme of the night, regarding how successful the president had been during her first one hundred days. One would assume that Bachelet's losing presidential rival Piñera, as owner of *Chilevisión*, would have influence over the tone and content of the network's content and perspective. Del Río said that he and the show's producers received minimal pressure from Piñera. On the date of our interview in 2006, del Río had yet to meet him.

In July 2006, the Bachelet government criticized *Chilevisión* for concentrating almost exclusively on certain themes, especially delinquency, which, they argued, promoted a particular political agenda. Del Río responded,

Por el lado del gobierno, lo que pretenden decir y hacer es que, este canal, como es de Piñera, está tratando de decir que el gobierno no hace nada en contra de la delincuencia. Pero no saben que Piñera aquí es el dueño, pero no se mete en los contenidos de los medios. Ellos [periodistas] no se van a vender a Piñera por un sueldo. Si ellos se van porque Piñera se está metiendo, Piñera pierde mucho más, y el valor de este canal se puede ir a no sé dónde. Piñera es un empresario, y el empresario está buscando

también que el valor de este canal crezca. El periodista más creíble en este país se llama Alejandro Guillier. Él es el que conduce las noticias de este canal. Entonces, decir eso, tiene un significado que a mí me parece que no es muy legítimo hacerlo [decirlo]. Este canal tiene una pauta más cercana a los temas de la delincuencia y la seguridad. Pero, porque es una pauta propia, que es anterior a que Piñera comprara este canal. Es anterior⁹.

When asked about the selectiveness of the program's discussion of human rights, del Río explained,

Los últimos casos que conozco sobre derechos humanos son dos. Y aquí están cubiertos absolutamente. Nosotros en *El Termómetro* hicimos un programa en particular sobre eso. Los dos temas que yo recuerdo están vinculados a los derechos humanos. Uno: el que se descubrió que las personas que estaban en el Patio 29 no eran quienes suponíamos que eran. Aquí hicimos dos programas en *El Termómetro* sobre eso. Y la segunda cosa de derechos humanos que yo recuerdo es el informe reciente de la Corte Suprema que dice que en las cárceles chilenas se están violando los derechos humanos. Si pretenden decir que este canal no es sensible a temas de los derechos humanos, yo te quiero decir, primero, que el dueño de este canal era contra el régimen de Pinochet. Era contra Pinochet. Dos: los periodistas que hay acá trabajaron en las revistas en que se opinaba de los derechos humanos y en las revistas de oposición en la época de la dictadura. Los asuntos de derechos humanos son un gran tema para nosotros. Donde sepamos de un tema de derechos humanos vamos a hacer un programa sobre él¹⁰.

Nonetheless, this coverage appears to be very selective, and the media plays a crucial role in predetermining what will get societal attention. We can only assume, then, that the likelihood of these themes getting any coverage is contingent upon factors such as a new event in the Tribunals of Justice, something else with sensational appeal, or, the level to which the story is international.

El Termómetro was cancelled in 2007. Del Río is now the host of the late night show *Última Mirada*, which airs Monday through Friday between midnight and 1:00 a.m. or 1:30 a.m., immediately after the late night news recap. On May, 2008, the program covered the news that the case of the detainment, torture, and execution of singer-songwriter Víctor Jara on September 15, 1973, in *Estadio Chile* (now called *Estadio Víctor Jara*) was suddenly cancelled on May 15. Del Río interviewed the prosecuting attorney Nelson Caucoto. The interview was broadcast

8 Michelle Bachelet and her family experienced the violence of the Pinochet regime firsthand. Her father, a general in the military, was tortured and killed for his opposition to Pinochet. Michelle and her mother were both imprisoned and tortured at Chile's most notorious detention center, Villa Grimaldi.

9 Traduction: "What the government side is trying to say is that this station, which belongs to Piñera, is saying that the government isn't doing anything to stop delinquency. But they don't know that although Piñera is the owner, he does not get involved in media content. The reporters aren't going to sell out to Piñera for a job. If they leave because Piñera is getting involved, he loses much more, and the station's worth could drop to who knows where. Piñera is a businessman, and he's also looking out for the value of a station on the rise. Alejandro Guillier, the station's news anchor, is the most credible journalist in the country, so it doesn't seem to me that what they are saying is very legitimate. This station has guidelines on the issues of delinquency and security, but they were developed before Piñera bought the station".

10 Traduction: "The last two cases of human rights that I know of were thoroughly covered here. *El Termómetro* did a special program on it on. There are two issues that I remember related to human rights. One was the discovery that the people buried in Patio 29 [of the cemetery] were not who they were thought to be, and we did a show on that. The second thing I remember about human rights was the recent Supreme Court report that said that Chilean prisons were violating human rights. If someone tries to say that this station is not sensitive to issues of human rights, well, I just want to say that first, the station owner was against the Pinochet regime. He was against Pinochet. And second, the reporters who work here worked in the magazines that spoke out on human rights and the opposition during the dictatorship. Human rights is a big issue for us. Whenever we learn of a human rights issue, we do a program on it".

with a split screen—Caucoto and del Río on the left, and film footage of Jara and the people and experiences he sang about on the right, including footage of soldiers and prisoners in Santiago's athletic stadiums that were converted into concentration camps, with the song "*El derecho de vivir en paz*" playing softly in the background. Perhaps because Jara is such an internationally recognized figure of the Chilean *Nueva Canción* movement and an emblem of the brutality of the Pinochet regime, and also due to the public call that Jara's widow and daughters made asking for more witnesses to step forward with information, the case was reopened on June 3, 2008.

Del Río is also a regular member on the Sunday evening (10:00 p.m.) talk show *Tolerancia Cero*. Piñera has appeared on both programs—*Última Mirada* and *Tolerancia Cero*. On most occasions, based on the material available to me through the Internet, I did not hear any acknowledgment that the guest also happened to be the owner of the network. Disclosure of such information is expected in such cases in the United States. However, when he appeared on *Última Mirada* in December 2008, del Río was able to raise the topic with Piñera since Piñera's presidential candidacy was being criticized by many as a conflict of interest with his ownership of multiple companies.

Perhaps the constraints imposed on *El Termómetro* and other network programming were never made more explicit than in another daring program on the same *Chilevisión* network called *Ciento*, which aired in 2002 on Monday nights from 10:00 to 11:00. The Spanish word *ciento* means one hundred, in the case of the TV show, signifying 100 percent since the show revealed statistics about the Chilean people (suggesting that 100 percent of the Chilean population counts; everyone is included). However, spelled with an "s," *siento* also means, "I feel," which is just as relevant for the show since it posed questions to the Chilean public through surveys as well as one-on-one interviews conducted by amateur videographers.

One episode of *Ciento* that aired in February 2002 was titled, "¿Quién manda en Chile?" (Who's Running Chile?). Among the individuals interviewed in this episode were *El Termómetro*'s host, Iván Núñez, and journalistic editor, Pablo Alvarado. When approached, Núñez initially turned his back on the camera and the questioner. When he finally agreed to comply with the questioner, he lightheartedly replied that Alejandro Guillier, then news anchor and news director for *Chilevisión*'s nightly news, ruled. Alvarado, seated at his desk with a poster of revolutionary icon Ché Guevara plastered to the wall behind his computer, was more forthcoming. He identified Chile's powerful economic groups as ruling Chile.

In his 2002 interview, Guillier envisioned a moment in the future when human rights discourses would more rigorously be initiated again. He emphasized,

Yo soy de los que piensa que los países, si no tienen memoria histórica, se confunden. Hay un período en que los que tienen interés en saber lo que pasó son las generaciones que están comprometidas. Después hay un período en que el tema como que agota, la gente se cansa. Pero de pronto, ya, cinco años después, el tema vuelve a surgir. ¿Pero de quiénes? De los hijos, que quieren saber lo que pasó¹¹.

Guillier's prediction that these sensitive discourses would eventually circulate more vigorously through a younger generation has in many ways come true as the first decade of the new millennium draws to a close. Although many of this younger generation have decided to seek outlets less restrictive than commercial television, their voices can be found if one seeks them out. During his interview, Alvarado declared, "Eso si merece un trabajo periodístico serio. Como los militares juegan con los detenidos-desaparecidos..."¹² Perhaps it is no surprise that he did not stay at *El Termómetro* for long.

On May 26, 2008, ninety-eight ex-agents of the DINA — Pinochet's secret repressive forces— were charged in the cases of detainment, torture, murder, and disappearance of forty-two victims. The victims had been detained at some of the most infamous torture centers in Chile—*José Domingo Cañas*, *Villa Grimaldi*, *Londres 38*, and *La Venda Sexy*. According to the newspaper *La Nación*, this was, to date, "El mayor golpe a la represión de la dictadura de Augusto Pinochet"¹³ (Escalante, May 27, 2008). Yet, scanning through the text and video links on the *Chilevisión* Web site during the last week of May and the first week of June, there was no information available on this case, and limited information available in other media outlets.

5. CONCLUSIÓN

Television is expensive, limited, and tightly controlled. Sometimes the constraints imposed on journalists, producers, and networks seem insurmountable. Censorship and self-censorship are normally the rule. Nonetheless, certain discourses regarding crucial subjects normally considered taboo can sometimes maneuver their way into the mediated public sphere. It is what happens through these gaps and fissures in the television industry that offers hope in Chile, where, presently, the unspoken is often more pronounced than the spoken.

As divided as the Chilean people may be, they have all lived

through some of the same experiences, especially during the dictatorship. While they may cling to different myths, or as historian Steve Stern would describe them, *emblematic memories* – whether they are the myth of Pinochet as savior of the fatherland, Allende as savior of the working poor, or something entirely different – they were all encouraged to accept *one* version of history during the military regime. It is that version of history, *already known* by those who survived the dictatorship, that now becomes, as the editors of *Cahiers du cinema* would describe it, the ‘factor of non-recognition’. Consider their discussion of the film *Young Mr. Lincoln*: “But such repression is possible (acceptable by the spectator) only inasmuch as the film plays on what is *already known* about Lincoln, treating it as if it were a factor of *non-recognition* and at the limit, a not-known (at least, something that nobody wants to know anymore, which for having been known is all the more easily forgotten)” (Mast and Cohen, 797). Despite a lack of direct confrontation with the legacy of Pinochet’s violent regime, television producers and viewers alike share a common bond – one of silent knowledge, which occasionally gets articulated, usually briefly and incompletely, but oftentimes poignantly, in the flow of commercial television discourse.

The media’s central role in structuring knowledge about history involves not only representation but also a lack of rep-

resentation that ensures the strategic absence of certain topics. However, a lack of representation does not necessarily lead to a lack of consideration and even coded discussion of taboo subjects in the mainstream media. As Caldwell explains, “Televisionality is indeed a leaky system. Those who describe it as an inherently illusory, hegemonic, and deceptive system fail to see that it is also an instrumental system, one that can be used by the marginal as well as abused by the powerful” (1995, 330). Spigel and Curtin confirm the subversive potential of a medium that can sometimes challenge the very hegemonic structures that maintain it: “In short, it seems more productive to understand the ways in which powerful media institutions must transmit certain types of popular knowledge that ultimately disrupt the logic of their own functional requirements for economic stability” (1997, 9).

Those who wish to dismiss television as a tool that belongs exclusively to the controlling economic and political elite need to reconsider. As television personalities and audiences delicately dance around the sensitive themes of human rights, social justice, and political change, some significant dialogue is taking place through a medium to which an enormous number of Chilean people are exposed. Those who work within the industry, though, are quite aware of the constraints imposed on them.

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- 11** Traduction: “I’m one of those who believes that countries that don’t have historic memory get confused. There is a period in which those who want to know what happened are the generations that were most affected. Then there is a period during which the people are tired of it. But then, maybe another five years later, the issue comes up again. But by whom? The children who want to know what happened”.
- 12** Traduction: “The way that the military plays with the detained and disappeared deserves serious journalistic investigation...”
- 13** Traduction: “The greatest blow to the repression of Augusto Pinochet’s dictatorship”.

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