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Making Chile's October 2019-March 2020 'Estallido social' (Social explosion) accessible to students on campus

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April 18-19, 2021

Racism, Pandemics, and Other Struggles for Latinxs and Latin America

“Making Chile’s October 2019-March 2020 ‘Estallido social’
(Social explosion) accessible to students on campus”
by Elena Sánchez Mora, Professor, Department of Hispanic Studies
for the panel “Teaching and Learning in Turbulent Times”

The change of the original title of my contribution to this panel, from “A study abroad approach to the October 2019-March 2020 ‘Estallido social’ in Chile” to “Making the October 2019-March 2020 ‘Estallido social’ in Chile accessible to students on campus” illustrates how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected every aspect of education, particularly study abroad. As I will explain next, the name of the panel I participated in, “Teaching and Learning in Turbulent Times,” perfectly conveys the connection between the social unrest in Chile and the pandemic that disrupted it.

Earlier this spring, as I was preparing to direct the CSBSJU study abroad program in Viña del Mar, Chile, in Fall of 2021, our Center for Global Education announced that it was cancelled due to COVID-19 related issues. Many of the students that had been accepted to this year’s program had already been accepted for Fall 2020, which was also cancelled. Others, who were unable to go to our Guatemala Spring 2020 program, also due to COVID-19, were taking the ‘Guatemala in Minnesota’ course that my colleague Roy Ketchum, who is moderating the session, is currently teaching on campus. Several of them had also been accepted into the Fall 21 Chile cohort; yet they were only one more group of students at CSBSJU caught in the uncertainty of planning a study abroad program during the pandemic.

Going back to this presentation, an important part of the role of study abroad faculty directors at CSBSJU has been teaching a seminar that fulfills experiential and global components of our institutional curriculum. Specifically, the goals of its global

component are “to develop students’ awareness of their own culture as well as of other cultures from outside the U.S.”

When I directed the Chile program back in 2015, I gave it a literary approach using the 1984 novel *De amor y de sombra* by Isabel Allende and the 1990 play by Ariel Dorfman *La muerte y la doncella*, to explore the role of women in the resistance against the Pinochet dictatorship which ended in 1990, culminating with Michelle Bachelet’s election as president in 2006.

For the 2021 program, I had planned to center the seminar on the social upheaval that shook Santiago and all of Chile in the fall of 2019, which was taking place while a group of our students was in that country. This group, directed by Psychology professor Michael Livingston, all remained in Chile with the exception of one student. Upon their return to campus, Michael gave a presentation on December 2nd, 2020 about their experience at an online forum called “UAI International Virtual Fair,” organized by the Universidad Adolfo Ibáñez, our host institution in Viña del Mar, Chile. His presentation was called “The experience of a program director during the Chilean social outbreak;” it emphasized the unique opportunity presented to American students to witness the Chilean protests first hand in spite of the prevalent climate of insecurity and tension (<https://www.uai.cl/rrii/uai-international-virtual-fair/>).

Specifically, I had planned to engage my 2021 students on an exploration of how, in spite of the deep changes Chile has undergone since the 1990 democratic transition that followed the 1973-1990 dictatorship, there remains a widespread exclusion of entire social groups which results in great economic inequality. So, for this panel, I was going to concentrate on pedagogical strategies and teaching/learning approaches that would take advantage of the opportunities students would have while being immersed in Chilean society. To this end, I proposed a journalistic approach which involved direct observation of and interaction with the Chilean people and their culture; this would be achieved by keeping a journal of students’ day to day experiences and interviewing members of their host families as well as Chilean students and teachers at our host institution. This approach would be anchored in the reading of newspaper articles on the most

immediate social, economic and political conditions that precipitated the protests, including income disparities and lack of access to education and health care; in addition, students would focus on the in-depth long term structural causes related to racial, environmental and gender issues. The readings in turn would be supported by written reflections, group presentations and discussions. The course would culminate in a research project on a specific aspect of the topics analyzed.

I also wanted to incorporate arts-based sources like film and music, as well as the popular graphic art images and artifacts which were a mainstay of the street demonstrations. Regarding the goal of developing students' awareness of their own culture as it relates and differs from their own, I planned to end with a comparison of the protests that originated in Minneapolis in May 2020 and spread through cities across the U.S.

After having directed our program in Fall 2015, I saw a great opportunity to go back to Chile, and in light of its cancellation in Fall 2020 due to COVID-19, Fall 2021 seemed like the right time to direct the program again.

Upon hearing the news of the program's cancellation, I told my Sociology colleague Megan Sheehan, the director of this conference's program, that I was hesitant to present my work on teaching a course that wasn't meant to be. She suggested focusing instead on the question: how can we make area studies real and proximate for students even when we can feel so disconnected and can't travel to the country where key social and political movements are happening? In spite of the fact that it still felt awkward to talk about teaching a non-existing course on campus on the current ongoing developments in Chile from the point of view of my discipline of Hispanic Studies, I decided to give it a try.

I was also inspired by my colleague Pedro dos Santos of the Political Science Department and fellow Latino/Latin Studies (L/LAS) minor member's plan to teach a Latin American Politics course on the democratic history of the region, paying special attention to Chilean politics, particularly in light of the fact that Chile would be rewriting its constitution. Specifically, this opportunity was deemed by LLAS of great interest to students who intended to go to Chile in the fall of 2021 or who would be thinking of travelling to Chile in the fall of 2022.

Therefore, as the change of the title of my presentation to this panel to “Making the October 2019-March 2020 ‘Estallido social’ in Chile accessible to students” indicates, I will be covering some aspects of the course I had planned to teach in Chile that could still work for an on-campus course.

First, I would assign the reading of a general text on basic Chilean historical and cultural facts, such as John Hooper’s *Chile*.

Second, I would have students read information from articles that I found during my initial research on the unrest in Chile in order to provide a specific background on the recent social unrest. For instance, Rossana Castiglioni’s “¿El ocaso del modelo chileno?” (The down of the Chilean model?) in the Nov.-Dec. 2019 issue of the bi-monthly *Nueva Sociedad* based in Buenos Aires, Argentina. *Nueva Sociedad* is a periodical publication on different Latin American topics from various areas of the social sciences, which was founded in 1972 and is billed as centered on a progressive leftist academic approach; however, I find that the reading in Spanish would be fairly accessible to our more advanced students of Spanish. Another important sources are the mainstream Chilean newspaper *El Mercurio* and the political magazine *The Clinic*.

Third, I would add two other sources that I think could bring the events in Chile close to students even if they missed the opportunity to live and interact with host family members in Viña del Mar and study at Universidad Adolfo Ibañez in close contact to students who experienced the protests first hand. The first one is the 2019 documentary *La cordillera de los sueños*, directed by Patricio Guzmán, and the second one the Víctor Jara song “El Derecho de Vivir en Paz”.

a) The 1hr, 24 min film *La cordillera de los sueños*, winner of the Best Documentary award at the 2019 Cannes Film Festival, is the third film of a recent trilogy including *Nostalgia por la luz* (Nostalgia for the light, 2010) and *El botón de perla* (The pearl button, 2015); these films, according to an online description from Icarus Films, investigate “the relationship between historical memory, political trauma, and geography in his native Chile” (<http://icarusfilms.com>).

When I came across *La cordillera de los sueños*, what attracted me to it was an advertisement for the film's screening that described it as: "Unflinching in its presentation of contemporary Chile, 'The Cordillera of Dreams' moves beyond despair and looks towards the possibilities of political change by linking the ideological struggles of the past with the inequalities of the present" (<https://iuplr.org/event/virtual-film-screening-the-cordillera-of-dreams/2021-04-29/>).

I also found out that before this trilogy, Guzmán had made another trilogy of films titled 'La Batalla de Chile' (1975, 1977, 1979) on the coup in Chile and other related short films while in exile in France. In addition, he's planning a new film on the current events in Santiago.

After watching his latest film, I thought Guzmán centered it too much on the Andes as a metaphor for Chile's isolation by presenting numerous stunning views of the mountain chain as well as segments on artists who used it as inspiration. But in my opinion, he didn't make enough connections with Chile's coup and the ensuing dictatorship; these drawbacks were aggravated by the lack of dates and captions for the film's footage and scenes' locations, as well as the absence of historical background for a non-Chilean audience. I would also be interested in exploring his first trilogy as a complement of the second, as well as viewing his planned next film.

In spite of its shortcomings, I found that the interview with the director at the end of the film presented great teaching opportunities for U.S. students to establish connections between the Chile 2019-2020 protests and the BLM protests in the U.S., which began in Minneapolis in May 2020 after the death of George Floyd at the hands of police and reverberated across the country. Some examples of these connections are:

Unresolved issues:

CHILE -- The fact that the social inequalities created by the 1980 constitution went unchallenged after the return to democracy.

U.S. -- The inequalities of slavery continuing after the Civil War among the freed former black slaves, through the Jim Crow laws, with repercussions lasting until now even after the Civil Rights movement.

Disinformation:

CHILE -- Many people in Chile not knowing or not being able to talk about the repression (torture, disappearance, murders, censorship).

U.S. -- The conspiracy theories propagated by certain media, for example, critical race theory to create division and to take away 'freedoms.'

Push for unfair economic policies.

CHILE -- The opening of the country to foreign/private investment by large companies, excluding marginalized groups from benefits (health, education, jobs), leading to increasing inequality.

U.S. -- White supremacy embedded in laws excluding marginalized groups from benefits (health, education, jobs), leading to increasing inequality.

Deep social divisions:

CHILE -- Many people in Chile thought they were doing the right thing by militarizing the country to achieve a rightist/anticommunist agenda.

U.S.-- Slogans like MAGA, cancel culture, woke, we support law enforcement, patriots; created a large gap between social groups.

Demonization, dehumanization

CHILE -- The right used it to justify the repression of the leftist opposition in Chile

U.S. -- The rioting and looting, which were initiated by radical rightists during peaceful protests were blamed on Antifa and radical leftist groups.

The 'Social explosion's' origins in seemingly routine acts that gave way to a moment of reckoning with a much deeper social malaise lurking beneath the surface.

CHILE -- The increase in the cost of the metro ticket in Chile precipitated the street protests.

U.S. -- In our own backyard, it was yet another incident of police brutality that resulted in the death of a black man for a minor infraction, which precipitated a mixture of peaceful BLM protests and rioting resulting in widespread social unrest.

Finally, confrontation between right and left created a war-like atmosphere, resulting in a split even within families in both countries.

Additional parallels between Chile and the U.S. that could be emphasized are Chile as a rich country in Latin America and the U.S. as rich country in the world. Although following different paths, both are awaiting results of potentially shattering changes with the writing of a new constitution in Chile and the trial of the officer accused of killing George Floyd.

(For the next art-related source, I will mention the PowerPoint presentation accompanying this paper, which I will refer to as “PP.” From then on, I will use this abbreviation to point at the appropriate slides with pictures pertaining to different images associated to the protests).

b) The second art-related source I would use is the song “El Derecho de Vivir en Paz,” released by Víctor Jara in his 1971 album of the same title. Although the song celebrates Ho Chi Minh, what I want to highlight is that it was made into a new version sung by a group of 30 Chilean singers. In this respect, it’s highly significant that an emblematic protest song of the 70’s within the Nueva Canción Chilena movement against the dictatorship, has been revived.

In the new version of “El Derecho de Vivir en Paz”, only four lines from the original song are repeated while the rest is a reference to the protests. But the fact that Jara’s song was adopted and adapted also says a lot about the unresolved issues mentioned by filmmaker Patricio Guzmán. Particularly relevant is the reference to “Un nuevo pacto social,” followed by “Dignidad y educación, que no haya desigualdad” (PP, slide 2).

Finally, although many contemporary song writers and singers were directly engaged in the artistic manifestation of the “Social explosion”, as proven by their collective rendition of the song, my own experience as a Mexican student enrolled in the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) at the time of the Chilean coup, endears me to the protest songs of that era, which led me to teach a course on that topic called “The New Song: Music with a Message” at CSBSJU in Fall of 2012.

Although I would concentrate in the new version of Jara’s song, I would still mention other contemporary songwriters connected to the protests that students

may find more relevant to their own musical preferences, such as reggaeton and rap. For example, Ana Tijoux, who wrote the song “Vengo” against gender violence in 2014, and the song “Antifa dance” in March 2020. More importantly, she introduced the song “Rebelión de Octubre” for the 1st Anniversary of the beginning of the protests, which I present in its original Spanish version, as well as my translation to English (PP, slides 3 and 4). It is worth mentioning that this song has a few verses in Mapudungun, the language of the Mapuche indigenous group of Chile, thus reflecting the heritage of the singer-song writer (https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Ana_Tijoux).

I would also add Mon Laferte, who wrote the 2019 protest song “Plata ta ta” with Puerto Rican rapper Guaynaa as a response to the repression by the government (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plata_Ta_Ta). Laferte participated as well in the collective singing of “El Derecho de Vivir en Paz”.

In conclusion, through Patricio Guzmán’s latest film and the new version of Víctor Jara’s song, I believe students can perceive two different but complementary perspectives. While Patricio Guzmán represents the view of a Chilean coming from outside of Chile looking in through a moment captured in his camera lens, that of the Chilean musicians is one of Chilean insiders looking into the past through a song, while connecting it to the present and projecting it into the future.

c) Besides these two examples of art-related sources, I would present to students pictures of some cultural artifacts that have been used in the protests and have become emblematic of the so called “Efervescencia social”, and other terms used for the social unrest such as “Primavera de Chile” (Chilean spring). For instance:

i) Protest signs such as “Chile despertó” (Chile awoke), which shows protesters holding a banner atop a statue of a hero, a reminder of the worldwide movement to remove historical figures representing the wrong side of history. Others are “Hasta que la dignidad sea un hábito” (until dignity becomes a habit) and “no fueron 30 pesos, fueron 30 años” (it was not 30 pesos but 30 years). This last one refers to the

raise of 30 pesos (around 4 cents) to the metro fee during peak hours as the trigger of the unrest, and the 30 years between the end of the dictatorship in 1990 and 2020, when the Constitution will finally be replaced. In addition, the sign that reads “No + abuso de poder” (No more abuse of power), lists some of the basic demands like free education, health and dignified retirement (PP slides 1, 5). Finally, The one that reads “Paro 2019” (Strike 2019), made to look like a bus stop sign, mentions abuse, inequality, violence, corruption and repression.

ii) A costume like Picachu from Pokemon that has gone viral in social networks (PP slide 6). This image shows the great appeal of some global popular culture characters.

iii) A character like El Guasón from the film “The Joker”, which has been used in graffiti to represent president Sebastián Piñera (PP slide 6).

iv) Wall paintings (rayados) like the Negro Matapacos (a large black dog with a red bandana around the neck who attacks policemen repressing protesters through violence) (PP slide 7). There is an obvious connection to a worldwide protest against police brutality. The black dog is also shown as a real life size figure lifted up by protesters.

v) Light projections on buildings of signs like “Por un nuevo país” (For a new country) or “No hemos conseguido nada. Sigue la lucha” (We have not gained anything. The Fight continues) (PP slide 8).

vi) La bandera negra chilena (The black Chilean flag), representing the popular sorrow in the face of the violence, and the mapuche flag (Wenufoye) representing this marginalized indigenous group of Chile (PP slide 9).

vii) Public street events like Cicletadas, large solidarity marches on bicycles and ‘cacerolazos’, a multicultural old way of street protest by making noise with pots and pans (PP slide 10).

I would now like to invite questions and comments regarding my tentative course program as well as your own experiences with the disruptions caused to Study Abroad by COVID, as we continue to engage in teaching and learning in turbulent times.

Works cited

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