Introduction

The Coup

On a cold grey September morning, in 1973, the Chilean armed forces attacked the presidential palace of democratically elected Marxist president Salvador Allende. Within hours the palace was in flames, the president dead, and leading members of the government imprisoned or in hiding. Before the flames were extinguished, tanks and helicopters assaulted Santiago's impoverished *poblaciones* (urban slums and shantytowns) forcing tens of thousands of Chileans from their homes.

For the residents of Santiago's slums and shantytowns September 11 was a shattering experience. As one resident observed, "in a single day, a lifetime of work and dreams was torn asunder in a campaign of random violence and terror.'' But the children growing up in Santiago's "belts of misery" were even more deeply affected, and their trauma at the time of the coup lead inexorably to their activism in later decades.

When Gabriel was nine, living in a northern Santiago shantytown, the earth itself seemed to tremble:

> We lived so close to the Moneda (presidential palace) that the ground underneath us rose and fell with each assault. My mother said "war has come." We began to burn everything in the house, books, photos, newspapers. Before the military evacuated the area they had arrested both my father and brother. They later released my father, but they held my brother in a clandestine torture center for over two years.

For Alonso, thirteen at the time of the coup and living in a southern Santiago shantytown, September 11 was a day marked by murder:

> I remember the military in trucks and tanks, shooting everywhere. The children began a game. As the military advanced the children would hide in their houses, but when the military retreated the children would return to the streets. I remember I saw a truck pass, dripping blood. There was another truck standing alone, and a soldier asked me to help him. Trembling, I helped him lift a dead body into the truck. The corpse had a bullet wound in its back. I remember lifting the body as if it were a time bomb. It was my first contact with death.

September 11 was also the last day Mari, thirteen and living in the famous "red" (with heavy Communist influence) district of San Miguel, saw her father. "I don't even remember the coup, it's as if I have it blocked. All I remember is passing my father in the street. He yelled at me to quick, run home and burn everything in the house. He didn't return after that."

The experiences of Gabriel, Alonso, and Mari were not

unusual. By mid-1975 the military had detained between forty and fifty thousand civilians, brutally torturing many of them (Ad Hoc Working Group of the United Nations 1975, 50). They summarily executed, or "disappeared," over two thousand. They attacked every traditional feature of Chilean society—Congress, political parties, labor unions, neighborhood organizations, even local parishes.

For ten years, the only national institution able to defy the regime was the Catholic Church. Its increasing dedication to the struggle for human rights pushed it into direct conflict with the regime. At the local level, the church acted as an umbrella, protecting activists and victims alike. In the shantytowns, small human-rights and economic-subsistence organizations began to appear; in factories, labor organizers recreated underground political networks; and in universities, students defied regulations prohibiting political discussion and organized demonstrations against the regime. Yet these struggles all shared a common denominator; they were local, ephemeral, and easily repressed. As Alfred Stepan notes, "In Chile, eight years of authoritarian rule passed without significant movement out of the initial authoritarian situation: civil society remained debilitated in the face of state strength" (Stepan 1985, 322). The military appeared invincible. In May 1980, Augusto Pinochet held a plebiscite on a new constitution, institutionalizing his rule, and won overwhelmingly.

The Protests

Suddenly, on May 11, 1983, a storm of protest swept through Santiago's streets. The severe economic crisis of 1982 had divided military supporters, expanding political opportunities

(McAdam, 1982; Tarrow, 1989b) and opening the doors to a growing movement of opposition. And, as if a spell had been broken, unarmed students, workers, and shantytown residents flooded the streets demanding an immediate end to military rule. At the forefront of this emerging protest movement were the same poblaciones, targeted by the military for almost a decade.

In the *población* in which Alonso lived, residents built burning barricades, drummed pots and pans, and organized marches. In the poblaciones where Mari and Gabriel lived, protestors sprayed walls with political slogans, lead mass marches, and cut electricity to large portions of the city by throwing metal objects at electric cables. When the armed forces attacked these seemingly defenseless communities, residents responded by digging trenches, erecting burning barricades, and pelting military tanks with rocks. The deluge of protests in the same shantytowns that had been the target of military repression between 1973-1983 challenged the military's claim to have reshaped political loyalties in Chile. "In 1983, with the protests" Genaro Arriagada would later reflect, "Chile rediscovered the part of its reality that, in the delirium of the economic miracle, it had forgotten. From the start of those mass demonstrations, names [of poblaciones] like La Pincoya, La José María Caro, La Victoria regained their Chilean citizenship and a place among the concerns of Chileans" (cited in Timerman 1987,70).

For three years the protests raged. On July *2* and 3, 1986, the protest cycle reached its peak with a massive nationwide strike. The military responded with a new wave of repression. Ten people were killed, raising the number of protest-related deaths to over four hundred.

By August 1986, exhaustion had set in. Shantytown residents returned to the safety of their homes. Those who

Airport reception, in September 1986, for the body of Roberto Parada, the well-known actor who fled Chile and died in exile a year afer his son José Manuel Parada was tortured and then had his throat cut by the Chilean police. Estella Ortiz (José Manuel's widow and Communist Party candidate for deputy in 1989) is on the far left; her father was also disappeared by the regime. María Maluanda (Roberto's widow and José Munuel's mother, currently a senator for the Party for Democracy) is in the center. Ramiro Olivares (a doctor and Amnesty International Prisoner of Conscience who served a year in jail for having treated a boy with a bullet wound before informing the military) is on the right.

continued to resist the dictatorship through direct confrontation had become isolated. By 1987, only a small minority of *pobladores* (residents of poblaciones) was either organized or active. As Gabriel notes, "in 1984, I went underground. I wanted to fight the dictatorship directly. I was not alone in this. By 1987, there was not a single Communist in my población who organized in the open."

The Christian Democratic and allied sectors of the Socialist Party abandoned the protests. In 1987, they formed a coalition for free elections. In 1988, the coalition became the basis for the Coalition for No, a broad front aimed at defeating Pinochet in the upcoming, constitutionally mandated, plebiscite. On October 11, 1988, Pinochet lost the plebiscite on his presidency. In December 1989, the regime held democratic elections, and the opposition soundly defeated Pinochet's hand-selected candidate. On March 11, 1990, a democratically elected, civilian government took office.

THIS STORY OF PROTEST AND REPRESSION raises critical questions about the nature of political life in authoritarian Chile and our theoretical understanding of social movements and revolutions. Why did impoverished and almost defenseless shantytowns emerge as the center of resistance to authoritarian rule? Why did shantytown residents risk arrest, torture, and even death to fight a regime they seemed to have so little chance of defeating? Why did protests center in some shantytowns, but not others? Why did they suddenly decline in 1986? And, lastly, to what extent and in what way did the shantytown struggle contribute to the return to democratic rule in 1990?

This book examines the Chilean transition to democracy from the bottom up. It begins at the grassroots of civil

society, during the clandestine phase of the struggle, when activists began the difficult work of reconstructing the first organizations of resistance. It moves from the underground organizing of the immediate postcoup years to the open confrontations that began in 1983 when students, workers, and shantytown dwellers stormed the streets demanding the resignation of Augusto Pinochet. It ends, where most of the transition to democracy literature begins, with the 1988 plebiscite campaign, and the 1990 return to democratic rule.

This book is both an oral history, based on over a hundred interviews collected in Santiago's shantytowns between 1985-1992, and a comparative sociology that explores political differences among shantytowns in the same city. It concentrates, not on general processes and abstract structural change, but on the struggles of poor people to create and sustain organizations of resistance. It is about communities, personal networks, and shared historical memories and their power to unite individuals around a common goal. Its heroes are not political leaders, or members of the military establishment, but rather poor people who "burst through the boundaries of the accepted limits of social behavior," (Tarrow 1989b, 7) and risked their lives to fight tyranny and injustice.

This book, then, is about politics, about the context in which individuals make choices about their lives, and the political histories that shape their vision of the possible. As such, it fills an important gap in the literature on social movements. Some of these writings see protests as a spontaneous response to grievances, real or imagined. Others see them as the result of manipulation by a skilled political elite. Both approaches view protests only as they appear from outside or above. They omit history and historical continuities, leave aside the political context that determines how

individuals organize around grievances, blur the distinctions between successful and unsuccessful centers of protest and, most broadly, fail to flesh out the nexus between political and civil society.

Political scientists and sociologists such as Genaro Arriagada (1988) and Eduardo Valenzuela (1984), for example, explain the eruption of protest in Santiago's shantytowns as a result of the deprivation, social dissolution, and anger produced by the 1982 economic crisis. "During the protest years the poblaciones consisted of a mass of unorganized individuals and a few isolated, weak and unfinanced organizations of several thousand residents" (Arriagada 1988, 61).

Yet, this explanation runs up against a significant set of facts. In 1983, there was no association between the level of economic depression and the intensity and scope of protest action. Those poblaciones hit hardest by the crisis, in relative or absolute terms, responded weakly to the call for protests. When protests emerged in these areas, they were short-lived, the protesters being unable to withstand the accompanying repression.

Other sociologists, including Tilman Evers (1985), Fernando Leiva and James Petras (1986), and Teresa Valdés (1987) focus on the construction of autonomous neighborhood organizations and the formation of a new social actor, the *poblador* movement, to explain the eruption of protests. Valdés, for instance, argues that the economic crisis fortified the poblador organizations, and catapulted the poblador movement into national political prominence (Valdés 1987, 296).

But those pobladores who joined soup kitchens or economic cooperatives did not necessarily participate in the protests or the so-called "poblador movement.'' The steady

increase in the number of economic-subsistence organizations between 1983 and 1989 does not explain the irregular pattern of protest activity across both space and time. Protests did not occur with equal intensity in all poblaciones, or on all national protest days. Protests were most intense in June, July, and August of 1983, September and October of 1984, September of 1985, and July of 1986. They erupted most forcefully in the traditional Communist shantytowns. Indeed, Eugenio Tironi insists, "the so-called poblador movement has been completely confused with the activity of traditional political activists" (Tironi 1987, 74).

But the 1983-1986 poblador movement, if not the harbinger of a new social actor, or a spontaneous riposte to the 1982 economic crisis, was far more than an isolated group of political activists organizing rebellion in shantytowns. The capacity of Santiago's poor urban neighborhoods to mobilize mass political resistance, despite a decade of severe military repression, lay in the political heritage of decades of work in the popular culture and in the formation of a skilled generation of grassroots militants.

> Grassroots activists who had been active years before the coup played key leadership roles in all these organizing activities. As one party leader noted "we as parties could do little, but political activists at the local level rebuilt the social movement during the darkest moments of the regime." The ideological and political consciousness that broad sectors of the population had acquired over the years prepared them for political work at the community level and for organizing around local needs, even when their ties to the political leadership had been broken. (Burbach 1987, 18)

In Chile, the politicization, organization, and solidarity

in such shantytowns were a direct consequence of their historical ties to the Chilean Communist Party and the party's consistent emphasis on the creation of solidary communities with skilled grassroots leaders. Much as the left-wing enclaves of the American civil-rights movement, "these enclaves of elders and subterranean channels, rivulets, deep-running springs . . . [nurtured] unconventional wisdom, moods, and mystiques. With left wing politics in a state of collapse most of these opposition spaces were cultural— ways of living, thinking, and fighting oneself free of the . . . consensus" (Gitlin 1987, 28).

Those who became politicized because of contact with the Communist Party or Communist neighborhoods—even those who became militants of other political parties or never joined a political party at all—shared a political conception: they identified their problems in structural terms, and sought solutions through collective action. Life in traditional Communist neighborhoods overcame a fundamental attribution error—the tendency of people to explain their situation as a function of individual, rather than situational, factors (McAdam, 1982). As one Christian Democrat living in a Communist población explained, "I used to be ashamed of my poverty, I saw it as a personal failure. A Communist neighborhood organizer explained to me that I needn't be ashamed. That we all shared the same problems." "Revolutionary culture is the product of politics." It is through the conscious strategies of political parties that "communities, real or imagined . . . become active agents" of change (C. Smith 1990, 271). In Chile, decades of political struggle had convinced residents of Communist directed shantytowns that their fate was inextricably linked to that of

their community and that solidary collective activity was capable of defeating even the most powerful regime.

THE EXPERIENCES OF ALONSO, GABRIEL, AND MARI, three of the leaders of the shantytown movement interviewed for this study, are illustrative. All three learned their organizational skills in Communist shantytowns. Alonso began organizing in the Communist shantytown Yungay because he felt isolated in the shantytown where he lived. "In my población, people were afraid to participate, and they were ashamed of their poverty. They were always worried about appearances." Status and occupational differences were exacerbated by political conflicts and distrust. "They called us extremists, politicos," recalls Alonso. "In Yungay the neighbors had a different attitude. They said, "Look at my house! How dare they force us to live in such misery." Their sense of shared suffering empowered them and encouraged them to work for collective solutions. "People who are in similar situations and who have identical interests often find themselves in competition with one another . . . the relative salience of class [as a collective identity] . . . is a cumulative consequence of strategies pursued by parties of the left" (Przeworski, 1985).

Even Gabriel, who was traumatized by the coup, only became politically aware when he moved to the Communist shantytown Herminda de la Victoria:

> After the disappearance of my brother, my whole family was badly traumatized, but we blocked it in a sort of collective amnesia. I remember my mother and I, three years later, applauding Pinochet!
>
> In 1977, I moved to Herminda de la Victoria with my

sister. Herminda changed my life. I began to understand what was going on around me. First, I became involved with the Christian community. The Church attracted me because of its devotion to the poor. I even considered becoming a priest. . . . But in the Christian community there were many members of the Communist Youth whose courage and commitment appealed to me. Indeed, of the eight of us new to the Christian community, five would later join the Communist Youth.

For Mari, born and raised in a Communist family in the Communist población La Victoria, identification with the Communist Party was never in doubt. The Communist Party had politicized the neighborhood so successfully that the other political parties also found it easier to organize in La Victoria. As Hugo Flores, president of Solidaridad (the Christian Democratic shantytown organization) observes:

> Even the priests participate in La Victoria . . . since residents are more conscious of their role in the struggle. La Legua, as well, like Cerro Navia and La Pincoya [are three other poblaciones that, like La Victoria, are Communist and mobilized]" (interview with Hugo Flores in Santiago, December 1989)..

The Reemergence of Political Parties

During the first ten years of the dictatorship, these informal grassroots networks were the only resources available to the urban poor. Informal networks linked political activists to one another, gave movement members a sense of community and identity, and reinforced their faith in both the

power of collective action and the importance of their own contribution to such action. In 1983, a national economic crisis created the political context for the reemergence of formal political parties, unions, and nongovernmental organizations. These institutions provided neighborhood organizers with new resources, such as meeting halls, salaries, and national support networks, inspiring an explosion of grassroots activity, even in the less organized poblaciones. But the reemergence of political parties also damaged the movement in several respects.

First, political infighting alienated some pobladores thereby reducing political participation. As one organizer recalls, "We were so busy trying to control the organizations that we didn't notice that once we controlled them, everyone else abandoned them."

Second, political divisions and conflicts over strategy and tactics confused Santiago residents. On September 4, 1986, there were four separate calls for political action ranging from the Christian Democratic plea for a day of prayer and silence, to the Movemento de la Izquierda Revohionaria's (MIR; Movement of the Revolutionary Left—a guerilla group formed by Universidad de Concepción students in 1967) cry for an indefinitely prolonged general strike.

Third, the 1980 decision of the Communist Party lead-ership (living in exile in the then U.S.S.R.) to pursue an insurrectional strategy isolated its members from other shantytown residents. While the focus of Communist activists before 1983, was on rebuilding social organizations and linking people who shared grievances, after 1983, the Communist Party began to pull its leaders out of mass organizations and employ them in clandestine military operations.

In so doing it brought down a rain of repression on the
poblaciones in which the Party once had been most wel-
come.

Fourth, the reemergence of the more moderate parties
provided movement leaders with whom the government
could negotiate, and, thus, drive a wedge between them and
the more radical shantytown activists. The more moderate
movement leaders were gradually reabsorbed into normal
political channels, while the shantytown activists were iso-
lated, repressed, and demobilized. Ironically, it was the
government's concessions to these moderates that created
the conditions for Pinochet's defeat in the 1988 plebiscite
and Chile's return to democratic rule. The transition to
democracy was simply the final phase of the protest cycle.

The Chilean protest movement followed a pattern sim-ilar
to that of other successful protest movements in the East
and West (Shorter and Tilly 1974; McAdam 1982; Pizzorno
1978; Castells 1983; Tarrow 1989b; Eisenstadt 1992). Like
the American civil-rights movement, it began in tradition-
ally active grassroots communities where solid communica-
tion networks, solidary incentives, and an established
infrastructure linked "members of an aggrieved popula-
tion," and recruited "activists by virtue of their involve-
ment in [previous] organizations" (McAdam 1982, 43-48).
These neighborhoods functioned like a "small motor that
later turned the larger motor of the mass movement" (Gitlin
1987, 26).

Like the French strike waves of the 1960s, the scale and
intensity of protest depended closely on "the prior organi-
zation of workers in the setting, on the availability of a
structure that identifies, accumulates, and communicates
grievances on the one hand, and facilitates collective action

on the other" (Shorter and Tilly 1974, 81). Its leaders were like those of the 1970s citizens' movement in Spain, "fully political: they introduced political goals and consciousness into the movement and connected it to leftist politics in the broadest sense . . . [yet] they were able to develop a widely supported network because they focused primarily on urban issues" (Castells 1983).

Political parties and unions mobilized in Chile, as they did in the prodemocracy movements in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, around alternative collective identities and "conceptions of the good" (Eisenstadt, 1992). These identities, solidarities, and commitments were "forged—shaped, destroyed, and molded anew—as the political parties . . . strive[d] to impose on the masses a particular vision of society" (Przeworski, 1985).

The Chilean movement also followed a cyclical pattern, similar to that observed by Pizzorno and Tarrow in their studies of protests in France and Italy (Pizzorno 1978; Tarrow 1989b). The cycle was forged through the interaction of formal (political parties and institutions) and informal (political culture, collective identities, and solidarity networks) political resources. The movement began in communities where political parties had formed strong collective identities and solidary bonds. An economic crisis allowed organizers to draw new adherents, to extend the movement's scope, and to mobilize widespread resistance. Political parties returned and were thrust into prominence. Competition for control of the movement brought a stream of resources (salaries, meeting halls, concert artists, media support) to the shantytowns, infusing the movement with new energy. Simultaneously, the return of formal political parties, and their attempts to gain control over the new

movement, weakened informal solidary networks. As confrontations with the state became more violent and costly, moderate political leaders adopted a conciliatory stance, winning significant concessions from the state. The movement declined as the party elites cut the flow of political resources to grassroots activists.

It is from this "political process" perspective that we can best understand the Chilean movement. Like more institutional forms of political action, it emerged from within the confines of traditional political alignments, and was shaped by traditional political actors and institutions, in particular the popular culture that was the heritage of the Chilean Communist Party. At the same time, the movement was transformative. It introduced new political actors, established new repertoires of collective action, and paved the way for the reemergence of Chilean democracy. It also recast the contours of Chilean political life.