

## **Book Review | *Violencia de Texto, Violencia de Contexto: Historiografía y literatura testimonial, Chile 1973 (Violence of Text, Violence of Context: Historiography and testimonial literatura, Chile 1973)***

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***Violencia de Texto, Violencia de Contexto: Historiografía y literatura testimonial, Chile 1973 (Violence of Text, Violence of Context: Historiography and testimonial literatura, Chile 1973); Freddy Timmermann. Santiago, Chile: Ediciones UCSH, 2008. 195 pp. ISBN 978-956-7947-67-6***

Far from bringing peace and prosperity, as prophesized Francis Fukuyama, the 20<sup>th</sup> century has witnessed how the classical structures of capitalism are renovated and reinvented to a new form. This is an ethical point of departure that has concerned many academicians and much scholarship in the world. The book *Violencia de Texto, Violencia de Contexto* authored by Freddy Timmermann not only gives a fresh alternative to understand the current problems of terrorism, but also reveals the connection between democracy and the crisis of republic. While the sciences of biology have forged ahead in leaps and bounds the field of ethics has been undermined in West.

Contextually, Timmermann adds, the 1970s meets Chile with the attention to Europe and the U.S. because of the cold war, the Cuban revolution, or the French uprising of May 1968 among other major events. At that time, social imagination valorised the belief that the quest for resources to achieve material success was more important than history. Of course, like the U.S., Chile has its unfortunate 9/11 (in 1973), where a coup conducted by General Augusto Pinochet overthrew the constitutional president Salvador Allende. This event not only was a blow against democratic institutions, but also paved the ways for the advent of new economic policies for the country and workforce. The psychological fear instilled by the violence resulted in the decline of political compromise, which created a gap between citizenry and government. It is important not to lose sight that decades later this hole would

be fulfilled by the neoliberal market. If more attention is paid to Timmermann's argument, we will realize that memory serves as a mechanism to explain how such violence works, its effects and mediate consequences in the culture.

As a good historian, Timmermann delves into the methodological problems of examining an object in absentia. The figure of forced-disappeared dissidents (los desaparecidos) is characterized by the absence of a body to validate or reject previous hypothesis of study. The act of disappearing people exerts considerable violence for the rest of society. Based on the testimonial literature, such as the two books of Rolando Carrasco (*Prigue* and *El Estadio*), Timmermann reconstructs not only the socioeconomic factors that facilitated the coup but also its most pervasive consequences for the political life of Chile. Let us first clarify that while *Prigue* was written in prison, *El Estadio* was edited in Buenos Aires in 1974, once the author was released. From different angles, they represent two views respecting the role of armed force that played in these turbulent times.

Originally, in the preliminary chapters of *Violencia de Texto*, Timmermann explores the existent conceptual framework to expand the evolution of memory in the social context. In the successive chapters, he focuses on what calls, the threshold of violence, which means the degree of sensibility where violence is socially tolerated and legitimated. Timmermann recognizes that events like this should be studied with primary sources of information, which the testimonies are written by victims before their memory was distorted by the passing of time. Whenever, there is distance from the original event its understanding declines.

On a closer look, the coup was founded in a terrible terror to "the advance of communism," the Red Scare. To Carrasco's texts, Timmermann combines the reading of two major document, Valech and Rettig's reports. The former signals to the illegal detentions, torture and human rights violations on dissidents, while the latter explores the socio-economic factors that affected seriously not only the economy, but also the Governance of Allende. Big economic asymmetries, a high degree of polarization between right and left, associated with an exacerbated archetype of military forces gave as a result a deep sentiment of unhappiness and resentment. Like the rest of Latin America, army forces in Chile had a national recognition and status; they were seen as austere agents of order and progress. Not surprisingly, a military *coup d'état* was promoted by civilians when the country faced economic problems. Conceptually, the Other was not a political rival; during this epoch it was radically constructed as an enemy which must be eradicated. This extreme view of democratic life not only led Chile to conflict and violence but also undermined the democratic tenets of Republic.

Nonetheless, unlike Argentina where militias had planned the coup one year before and presented a specific economic plan to govern, in Chile, there was neither a plan nor a program to be followed by the new government. The Malvinas/Falkland's war accelerated the throw of Argentine military forces and the restoration of democracy. Unfortunately, Timmerman explains, in Chile, General Pinochet found many gaps from where the ideological discourse was constructed. His force was never balanced by a counter-force, and this was the reason behind the view that he had too much time in the government. The violence was exerted originally to political dissidents, but later it was expanded to worker unions, politicians, social agents and everyone who wanted to articulate the compromise of the political life. Lay people, fully scared by the sad theatre they saw in street, were symbolically locked up at home. This resulted in serious problems to articulate the political resistance to neo-liberalism and its politics.

Most certainly, at the time many Latin American scholars devote their passion in judging the terrorism of state, Timmermann attempts to build a conceptual bridge to understand this slippery matter. He likes to avoid any ideological and pre-conceived frame, which constitutes one of the primary positive aspects of this project. Timmermann undoubtedly deserves recognition for that. Readers who want to open this book will find a solid argument that sheds light on the problems of terrorism and democracy as well as a description on the roots of terrorism of state. Timmermann alludes to the fact that Carrasco's texts are based on a biased and romantic view of political dissident, at the time the state is pointed out as "fascist, genocide, and authoritarian." The "desaparecido" is portrayed as a hero whose supreme merit was not only hostage and torture but also resistance to the status quo. Situated in a sharp opposition with desaparecido, the Chilean military is viewed as a demon, a traitor, a devil, which managed by the U.S., introduced the ruin of the republic. However, Timmermann not only argues convincingly that one of the problems of Valech's report and Carrasco's text, is that both ignore the abrupt fracture that Pinochet initialized for the nation, and remains a serious contradiction respecting to the figure of military-forces. Brilliantly, Timmermann evidences the paradox of Carrasco's ideology. May we put the military forces under the same lens? Is there the same responsibility for soldier than for officials? If not, why were soldiers so cruel with other workers? Was it a crucial struggle of workers against other workers in favor of a financial elite?

Notably influenced by the solidarity of class, Carrasco is unable to exert his criticism against the soldier, or able to make a self-critic of the situation, simply because the problem of violence always is generated by elites. The contextual narration of the coup is frozen in an unhistorical space, where there was no before or later. In this debate, the popular culture played a pivotal role as a mechanism of emancipation, as ideologized instrument of

resistance. What should be more than important to discuss in this review, is the legacy of Foucault and Jaeger, Timmermann takes. Every good books merits to be placed under the lens of scrutiny, and of course this seems not to be an exception.

There is a main contradiction in Timmermann's argument, which is rooted in the way Foucault sees history. On the preliminary chapters, Timmermann acknowledges that Foucaultian studies should not be neglected in the examination of history. This development leads him to confirm that any type of violence dis-structurates history to the extent to give further legitimacy to political power. The objective fact sets the pace for the imagined discourse. We agree with Timmermann unless by the fact that precisely this was the opposite argument proposed by Foucault and Jaeger. Both thinkers encouraged us to believe that history was a biased construction based the hegemony power of winners. This point of departure begs two intriguing questions: Why do we have to employ the historical sources that in definition are a fabricated story? Is history an objective fact or only a biased or ideologized narration? Like Foucault who criticized history but kept his passion for archaeology, Timmermann recurs to violence to avoid elegantly the contradiction.

Given the limitations of Foucault, Timmerman innovatively suggests that Pinochet kept the legitimacy of state by means of discursive mechanisms that caused a process of accommodation and dissensibilizing procedure; to tolerate the violence the society disposes of meaning to understand the history. At times, the interpretation is far away from the original event, further possibility to suffer an ideological manipulation of the memory. To put this in another way, the lack of counter-resistance in Chile facilitated not only the advance of Pinochet in manipulating the democratic institutions, but also the creation of a new institution that ultimately granted his impunity, his view of the world and politics.

Another point it that should be addressed in this book is the connection between the anthropological process of apotheosis and the forced disappeared people. The roots of any cult are given by a mystery, the lack of hero's body. From Christ to Gilgamesh, all heroes go down to hells to fight against the forces of evil, or were subjected to extreme suffering. Their pain reminds us not only their strength, but also the mystery of life that cannot explain why good people suffer (Korstanje, 2012). As a consequence of this, the cult of disappeared dissidents would represent a fertile ground for more anthropological examinations which would enrich the book. The principle of apotheosis explains much more than we thought respecting the problem of violence and fear, as founding cultural aspects but not limited to religions.

Irrespective of this, one might recognize that *Violencia de Texto*, *Violencia de Contexto* exhibit a masterful domain in the reading of historical source so that potential readers

can understand the reasons and consequences of a dark side of Chilean history. To my end, this represents one of the best books I have read on human rights violation and terrorism of state.

## References

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