



PLAZA BAQUEDANO AND BAQUEDANO STATUE

Santiago, Chile

33.4369, 70.6344



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Executive Summary

Plaza Baquedano at the centre of Santiago was traditionally the central meeting point for protests and celebrations in the Chilean capital. Since the outbreak of social protests in October 2019, the square and its monument became a central focal point. The protestors have tried to rename the square to *Plaza Dignidad* (Dignity Square) but are still waiting on the official decision of the Mayor. At its centre lies the monument to General Baquedano, a celebrated Chilean military and national hero, which has been a central focal point of the protests as it was painted, graffitied and even burnt. This case study examines the context for the contestation over the square and the monument and the decision the municipality took to address the protest.

Introduction

The monument to General Baquedano, a Chilean general glorified for his victory during the Pacific War, stands on the Plaza Baquedano, at the heart of Santiago de Chile, commonly known as *Plaza Italia* (Italy Square).¹ Both the monument and the Baquedano Square are major geographical landmarks filled with cultural symbolism in the minds of the citizens. General Baquedano has been considered a national hero for decades, and his statue was inaugurated in 1928 by the military dictator Carlos Ibáñez. Consequently, the square became the focal point of the anti-government protest of October 2019. The statue and its meaning were contested, vandalised and it suffered many attempts to tear it down, to the point that some protestors set it on fire in March 2021.² Even though, at the beginning of 2020, the National Monuments Council voted that it would remain standing in its original place, renewed protests and popular attempts to take it down,³ emerged once more in 2021. Resulting in the statue ultimately being torn down by protestors, albeit only temporarily as it was later restored.⁴ Today, both the square and the statue signify the collision of two divergent understandings of Chilean history and society that have played out in this Plaza.

Background

The History of Plaza Baquedano and General Manuel Baquedano

The Plaza Baquedano is a large square in the centre of the city of Santiago, prominent and spacious enough to have become the preeminent gathering point for Santiago's mass gatherings, whether for protest or celebration.⁵ The plaza derives its name from the statue of General Manuel Baquedano, which stands raised on a pedestal at the centre of the space. The sculptural ensemble also includes the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior, at the feet of the general's horse, and a female figure presenting a garland of *copihues* (or *Lapageria* the Chilean national flower), to the General.⁶ The statue, built in the 1920s, is crafted from bronze with a green stone base. It was inaugurated in 1928 by the military dictator Carlos Ibáñez del Campo. Ibáñez was the one who created the special corps of the *Carabineros*,⁷ who repressed the protests and strikes that started in 2019 at the square.⁸

General Baquedano is widely revered in Chilean national historical consciousness primarily as the military hero who led Chilean forces to victory in the War of the Pacific (1879-1883) against Peru and Bolivia, a much-celebrated event in the historiography of the state and part of the secular calendar.⁹ After leading counter-revolutions, a war of occupation against the Mapuche people and

¹ José Urrejola, "Chile: destrucción de monumentos como protesta contra la historia oficial," *DW*, November 11, 2019.

² El Mostrador, "Estatua de Baquedano en llamas," *El Mostrador*, March 5, 2021.

³ Juanita García, "Se queda: el Consejo de Monumentos decide mantener estatua del general Baquedano en Plaza Italia," *Emol Nacional*, January 8 2020.

⁴ AS Chile, "Retiro de la estatua de Baquedano," *AS Chile*, March 13, 2021.

⁵ José Urrejola, "Chile: destrucción de monumentos como protesta contra la historia oficial," *DW*, November 11, 2019.

⁶ Cristobal Hernández Serrano, "De Plaza Italia a Plaza de la Dignidad, de memoria de guerra a lugar de memoria," *Revista Común*, January 6 2021.

⁷ The *Carabineros* are the armed police force of Chile, as part of the Forces of Order and Security, they are in charge of guaranteeing and maintaining public order and security.

⁸ Gabriel Muñoz, "¿Quién fue Manuel Baquedano?," *La Izquierda Diario*, January 18, 2020.

⁹ Magdalena Alamos, "Manuel Baquedano: La historia del general cuyo nombre lleva la plaza que ha sido el centro de las protestas sociales," *EMOL*, December 8, 2019.

the war against Peru and Bolivia, he served as interim president in 1891, after former president Manuel Balmaceda was deposed in the civil war of 1891.¹⁰ The idea was that he would be able to control society, avoid a revolution or social conflict, and hand over the power to the captain Jorge Montt.

There are many contentious aspects of Baquedano's career, in particular he has been widely considered as an enemy to the workers and the Mapuche people.¹¹ However, what should be underscored is how the prominence of his memorialisation is emblematic of the role which the military and its victories played and continues to play in the nation and state-building project, as a manifestation of Chilean identity.¹² This education based on a patriotic culture that emanates from civic militarism was instilled and reinforced during the Augusto Pinochet dictatorship from 1973 to 1990.¹³

In tandem with this the plaza holds immense symbolic significance. Among 'Santiaguinos' (residents of Santiago) and Chileans it is widely regarded as marking the socio-economic divide between the rich and poor sectors of the city; to live 'uptown from the plaza' or 'downtown from the plaza' is a colloquial social categorisation, and broadly speaking, correlates accurately with the economic landscape of the city.¹⁴

The picture of stark social and economic inequality presented by this example ultimately lies at the heart of the impulse which led to the outbreak of protests and social unrest on October 18 2019. The catalyst was a rise in the price of metro fares in Santiago, but this quickly spiralled to become an all-out protest against the Chilean political and economic elite who, protestors claim, are the embodiment of the country's flawed neoliberal political and economic model, enshrined by Pinochet.¹⁵ The protesters claimed that these figures were both perpetuating and neglecting severe inequality, which, according to the OECD, makes Chile one of the most unequal countries among a group of 30 of the world's wealthiest nations.¹⁶ Tied to this is a host of political and social grievances, including indigenous rights, secularism, feminism, environmentalism and LGBT rights were also raised during the protests.

History of the Contestation

Since the social outburst on October 19, 2019, many protests and activist actions have taken place in the Baquedano Square. Only in November 2019, protesters destroyed the Tomb to Unknown Soldier of the sculptural ensemble, a group of activists installed counter-monument claiming the Indigenous Mapuche people, and a petition to change the square's name to *Plaza de la Dignidad* (Dignity Square) started and was presented in the city council. The protests continued for months until the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020. However, after the lockdown finished, protests

¹⁰ Gabriel Muñoz, "¿Quién fue Manuel Baquedano?," *La Izquierda Diario*, January 18, 2020.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Cristobal Hernández Serrano, "De Plaza Italia a Plaza de la Dignidad, de memoria de guerra a lugar de memoria," *Revista Común*, January 6 2021.

¹⁴ Ariel Dorfman, "Chile: Notes from a Revolt," *New York Review of Books*, March 13, 2020.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Reality Check, "Chile protests: Is inequality becoming worse?," *BBC NEWS*, October 21, 2019.

took over Baquedano Statue once more and in March 2021 the statue was set on fire by a group of anonymous protesters, which resulted in the statue being removed so it could be reconstructed due to the instability that the damages produced.

The Chilean Protests of October 2019

Historically, mass protests in Santiago have typically gathered at Plaza Baquedano which is perhaps only coincidentally related to the role of the space as a dividing line, and more directly a result of its geographical centrality and its suitability for outdoor gatherings. Nevertheless, according to academic Carlos Peña, to occupy this space is to tear down a social barrier, in some senses, which became apparent in the 2019 protests.¹⁷ Both practical and symbolic factors have transformed this space into what is now regarded as the 'ground zero' of Chilean protests.¹⁸ Today, a wooden plaque attached to the monument reads in black letters: '*Plaza de la Dignidad*, ground zero of social awakening, October 2019.'¹⁹ On the significance of the Plaza for the protest movement, professor Ariel Dorfman writes:

The choice of that location to shatter, symbolically and spatially, the border between the two Chiles is a deliberately transgressive way of declaring that for a new country to be born, the old boundaries and myths need to be demolished.²⁰

Protestors are not drawn only to the Plaza Baquedano to contest the presence of the militaristic statue, but rather a significant aspect of the protest has been to appropriate the plaza and the physical prominence of the statue for furthering the movements agenda.²¹ Subsequently the statue has become a central canvas of protest, for what some have regarded as 'vandalism' and others have regarded as 'reconfiguration.'²² As sculptor Luis Montes Rojas states statues and monuments have transformed into sites to represent conflict within the Chilean context:

Certain symbols, because of their monumental nature, allow the protest demands to be amplified, and the political demands have been on a pedestal in Chile since October 19. We were accustomed to understanding monuments as ornamental objects and not as political landmarks.²³

For example, on November 14, 2019, to commemorate the assassination in 2018 by Chilean police forces of Camilo Catrillanca, an indigenous Mapuche farmer, a statue in the form of the *Wünelfe*, a Mapuche symbol for the planet Venus, was erected at the feet of Baquedano's pedestal (see Figure 2).²⁴ On 25 November 2019, International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, the immediate surroundings of the statue were occupied by feminist groups who erected large banners promoting various causes (Figure 1). In front of the statue, artists had, at another point, installed

¹⁷ Equipo Infogate, "Carlos Peña analiza las razones de la ocupación persistente de la Plaza Baquedano," *Infogate*, January 5, 2020.

¹⁸ Cristobal Hernández Serrano, "De Plaza Italia a Plaza de la Dignidad, de memoria de guerra a lugar de memoria," *Revista Común*, January 6 2021.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Ariel Dorfman, "Chile: Notes from a Revolt," *New York Review of Books*, March 13, 2020.

²¹ José Urrejola, "Chile: destrucción de monumentos como protesta contra la historia oficial," *DW*, November 11, 2019.

²² Rodrigo Garrido T., "Un catastro preliminar indica que son más de 80 las figuras conmemorativas afectadas en espacios públicos," *EMOL*, Nombre 14, 2019.

²³ Rocío Montes, "Las protestas de Chile cuestionan la historia oficial de las esculturas," *El País*, January 23, 2020.

²⁴ Cristobal Hernández Serrano, "De Plaza Italia a Plaza de la Dignidad, de memoria de guerra a lugar de memoria," *Revista Común*, January 6 2021.

three wooden sculptures personifying indigenous tribes in Chile, including a homage to the exterminated Selk'nam people of Patagonia.²⁵



Figure 1: 'Feminist protest on November 25 2019' by Karla Riveros via Wikimedia Commons CC BY-SA 4.0



Figure 2: 'Indigenous Figures in front of Baquedano Statue' by Cuidro via Wikimedia Commons CC BY-SA 4.0

Renaming and reappropriating Plaza Baquedano

The pedestal of the statue has been consistently repurposed as a large canvas for protestors to inscribe their slogans, transforming it into a visually striking symbol of the nationwide protest movement, frequently captured by photographers and shared in the media. Perhaps the most significant act of appropriation and reconfiguration, however, was an attempt to change the name of the square to *Plaza de la Dignidad* (Dignity Square).²⁶ Since the beginning of the protests, one of the claims was to restore the people's dignity and the dignity of Chile.²⁷ In the middle of a protest on November 8, the protestors carried a banner that read *Plaza de la Dignidad*. Afterwards, the idea of changing the square's name began to feature prominently on social media and political and television figures, to the point that after a massive request from the protesters, Google Maps changed its name in its records.²⁸ This proposal was also echoed in the political arena, in December 2019 two councillors formally presented a motion to change the name of the square in the City Council.²⁹ The last decision will be made by the Mayor of the city, who as of 2021 is yet to publicly and officially address the issue.

The renaming of public spaces has occurred in many other instances across Chile, such as in Valparaíso, where *Parque Italia* was given the title *Salvador Allende Plaza*, a tribute to the socialist president ousted by Pinochet in 1973.³⁰ And this would not be the first change of name for Baquedano Square. Its original name in 1882 was *Plaza la Serena* (Serene Square), later on, it was changed to *Plaza Colón* but changed to *Plaza Italia* in 1919, and, even though it was changed to Plaza Baquedano in the 1920s, it is still commonly known as *Plaza Italia*.³¹

²⁵ Ariel Dorfman, "Chile: Notes from a Revolt," *New York Review of Books*, March 13, 2020.

²⁶ El Mostrador, "De 'Plaza Italia' a 'Plaza de la Dignidad,'" *El Mostrador*, December 4, 2019.

²⁷ Ariel Dorfman, "Chile: Notes from a Revolt," *New York Review of Books*, March 13, 2020.

²⁸ Juan Pablo Andrews and Claudia Soto, "'Plaza de la Dignidad': el camino que debe seguir la moción que busca 'rebautizar' la Plaza Baquedano," *La Tercera*, December 4, 2019.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ R. R., "A propósito de la 'Plaza Dignidad,'" *La Tercera*, December 4, 2019.

³¹ El Mostrador, "De 'Plaza Italia' a 'Plaza de la Dignidad,'" *El Mostrador*, December 4, 2019.

Increasing Contestation of National Statues and Monuments

There have been direct attacks towards the statue, and protestors take issue with the statue itself, the figure of Baquedano and what he stands for. Three incidents are worth noting. On November 1 2019, following the largest march in Chilean history which had 1,200,000 participants, the memorial to the Unknown Soldier, at the feet of the statue, was destroyed.³² The Unknown Soldier symbolises one of the anonymous soldiers that fought for Baquedano. On December 31 2019 a group of protestors unsuccessfully attempted to pull the Baquedano statue down from the pedestal.³³ In March 2021, the statue was set on fire by protestors and burnt for almost half an hour before the *Carabineros* extinguished the fire which provoked some instability in some parts of the statue, which might fall if not restored.³⁴

The destruction of statues has been commonplace across Chile throughout the 2019 protest movement. In Concepción, a statue of the city's founder, Spanish conquistador Pedro de Valdivia, was toppled, as was a bust of the same figure in the city of Valdivia.³⁵ In La Serena, a monument to conquistador Francisco de Aguirre was replaced with a depiction of an indigenous woman *diaguita*.³⁶ Baquedano's statue is not the only example of contested statues in Chile, of 280 monuments in the city of Santiago almost 20% were damaged during the 2019 protests. Most of these monuments depicted figures from early colonial society like Columbus, the Chilean military, or the Catholic Church.³⁷ In general, these symbols represent a patriotic and conquering narrative of Chilean history that does not sit comfortably with, and in some cases contradicts, the causes which matter to the protestors, many of which are rooted in deeper historical struggles.³⁸ Economic grievances and indigenous rights, in particular, can be presented as directly in conflict with these symbols and patriotic narratives since these forms of oppression are largely a result of Colonialism and the authoritarianism of Pinochet dictatorship. In particular, attitudes to the military and police forces can be highly negative in light of the legacy of military dictatorship, and the actions of the authorities towards the protestors which have led to open confrontations.

During the months of protests that took over the country, there was a strong and forceful reaction from the government that for many protestors closely resembled the police brutality of past dictatorships. There have been thousands of complains filed for human rights violations by the National Institute for Human Rights, including: torture, sexual abuse, humiliation, indiscriminate use of force, gun shots wounds, unlawful deprivation of life, and more than four hundred people with eye damage or total loss of sight.³⁹ Notably, a 21-year-old⁴⁰ was blinded in both eyes by police rubber bullets in Plaza Baquedano on November 8, 2019, up to that day, the most serious case of

³² Tele13, "Manifestantes rompen estatua de soldado en Plaza Baquedano," *tele13*, November 2, 2019.

³³ María José Villaroel, "Intentan derribar con cuerdas estatua de general Manuel Baquedano en Plaza Italia," *Biobiochile*, December 31, 2019.

³⁴ El mostrador, "Estatua de Baquedano en llamas," *El Mostrador*, March 5, 2021.

³⁵ Rocío Montes, "Las protestas de Chile cuestionan la historia oficial de las esculturas," *El País*, January 23, 2020.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Beatriz Coeffé Boitano, "Monumentos en crisis," *Plataforma Arquitectura*, January 9, 2020.

³⁸ José Urrejola, "Chile: destrucción de monumentos como protesta contra la historia oficial," *DW*, November 11, 2019.

³⁹ France 24, "A un año de las protestas, Chile sigue pidiendo verdad y justicia por la actuación policial," *France24h*, October 17, 2020.

⁴⁰ Ivonne Toro Agurto and Paulina Toro Góngora, "Protestas en Chile: la mirada rota de Gustavo Gatica, el joven fotógrafo que quedó ciego en una manifestación," *BBC News*, November 30, 2019.

eye injuries during the protests.⁴¹ Quickly, protesters started to attend the demonstrations with one eye covered as a sign of solidarity with the victims and of criticism of the police brutality.⁴²

The Legacy of General Baquedano: Different Attitudes About His Figure

The legacy of General Baquedano himself and his past actions have come under scrutiny, particularly in some of the left-leaning press. In the context of the War of the Pacific, for which he is best known, he led forces in the battles of Miraflores and Chorrillos, where according to historians members of the army engaged in looting and direct attacks upon the civilian population.⁴³ Before this, he was involved in the Occupation of Araucanía (a region in the south of Chile), a military campaign that involved dealing harshly with the Mapuche population.⁴⁴ The campaign involved the forcible 'civilisation' of the Mapuches and the violent seizure of their land which also resulted in widespread famine and disease, which led many to death. These crimes against the Mapuches are described in detail in the military reports of the time, which describe the systematic massacres of the Chilean army in Wallmapu, in Huequén, Angol, Collipulli, Chiguayhue, Lumaco, Ercilla, Traiguén and other regions.⁴⁵ The impunity of these crimes have provoked a large social movement known as the Mapuche movement, in which advocates for the promotion of human rights have proposed the creation of the 'Mapuche Historical Clarification Commission', to clarify the historical facts surrounding these campaigns, establish the truth, repair the damage caused to the Mapuches and establish institutions to maintain a peaceful coexistence between Mapuche and non-Mapuche citizens.⁴⁶

These attitudes have been mirrored by those who value the statue and its symbolism and have expressed concern about damage and its potential destruction. In January 2020, parliamentarians from the centre-right coalition *Chile Vamos* petitioned the Council for National Monuments (*Consejo de Monumentos Nacionales*, CMN) to reject a potential plan to remove the statue of Baquedano out of concern for its safety, since this, they argued, would be bowing to the pressure of those they refer to as *violentistas* (violents) and would only serve to encourage them to carry out further acts on different monuments.⁴⁷ In April 2020, Chilean President Sebastián Piñera attracted criticism and accusations of insensitivity for posing in front of the Baquedano statue for a photograph, whose one of many graffiti reads '*Fuera Piñera*' (Piñera Out).⁴⁸

There is discussion among commentators and academics over the extent to which vandalism of the statue and attempts to pull it down represent direct attacks on the figure of Baquedano. Carlos Peña has written about a general push for 'devalorisation of the past' on the part of protestors.⁴⁹

⁴¹ Ariel Dorfman, "Chile: Notes from a Revolt," *New York Review of Books*, March 13, 2020.

⁴² Brent McDonald, "En Chile protestar cuesta un ojo de la cara," *New York Times*, November 21, 2019.

⁴³ Gabriel Muñoz, "¿Quién fue Manuel Baquedano?," *La Izquierda Diario*, January 18, 2020.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Aucan Huilcamán, "General Manuel Baquedano: Pacificación de La Araucanía, crimen de genocidio y su impunidad," *Diario UChile*, March 7, 2021.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Rocío Montes, "La disputa simbólica en Chile por el monumento en el epicentro de las protestas," *El País*, October 18, 2020.

⁴⁸ BBC News Mundo, "Sebastián Piñera pide disculpas por tomarse una foto en el epicentro de las protestas en Chile," *BBC News*, April 4, 2020.

⁴⁹ Equipo Infogate, "Carlos Peña analiza las razones de la ocupación persistente de la Plaza Baquedano," *Infogate*, January 5, 2020. N

While some in the government attempt to portray the protestors as anti-patriotic, Gabriel Salazar from the University of Hull argues that the protestors do not feel represented by these monuments and the so-called 'heroes' of Chilean history, as the protestors reclaim Chile's Mestizo and Mapuche origins.⁵⁰ Sociologist Tomás Moulian, on the other hand, regards the attacks as 'spontaneous' with 'diffuse meanings' that cannot be attributed monolithically.⁵¹ Other academics such as the anthropologist Sonia Montecino explains how the carnivalesque aesthetic of the protest is also a rupture with the previous order and situates the contestation of statues in a wider context of the rejection of images of power that has happened before in many other countries.



Figure 3: 'Protest at Plaza Baquedano' by BarbyBox via Wikimedia Commons [CC BY-SA 4.0](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Protesta_Plaza_Baquedano.jpg)

Writer Jorge Baradit defends that the protests are a response to the structural problems of the country, its inequality where a 'small elite exploits and oppresses the middle and lower classes' which has happened 'through history,' thus, he understands this as a 'movement with a historical conscience' which 'answers the need to build their own history, with their events, myths and heroes.'⁵²

Decision-making process

The Future of Baquedano's Statue and the Renaming of Plaza Baquedano

Concerning the statue itself, the main decision-making body has been the Council for National Monuments. This is a government agency, under the oversight of the Ministry for Cultures, Art and Heritage, responsible for the protection and upkeep of national monuments. The Council of 22 members is presided over by Emilio de la Cerda, Subsecretary for Cultural Heritage - a government

⁵⁰ José Urrejola, "Chile: destrucción de monumentos como protesta contra la historia oficial," *DW*, November 11, 2019.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

appointee - and includes representatives from various disciplines including history, archaeology and architecture.⁵³

Following the attempt in December 2019 to pull down the statue, the Council expressed its concerns about the state and security of the monument. Its immediate action was to solicit the *Consejo de Defensa del Estado* - the state prosecutor - to authorise a legal complaint to the attempt to topple the statue against the protesters.⁵⁴ Similar action had followed the earlier damage to the tomb of the unknown soldier. Following this, the Council convened on January 7 to discuss the future of the statue, specifically whether or not it should remain standing in its present location.⁵⁵ The Council, in unison, decided to keep the statue in place with additional precautions, such as the removal of unstable elements which may fall and the creation of a technical team to monitor the situation.⁵⁶ The precise influence upon this decision of the petition of politicians a few days earlier to keep the statue in place is not clear. Wider consultation does not seem to have been part of the process; the CMN's role primarily concerns the protection and conservation of the statue rather than being a forum for debate over its historical or sociological value. On March 19 2020 the statue was cleaned and repainted, which seems to have been in line with local government policy. However, in March 2021 it was taken down, though only temporarily, the CMN clarified in a press release that: 'this measure is based on the structural risk that the sculpture presents today, which could put people at risk. It must be considered that the interventions carried out cannot be considered as restoration work.'⁵⁷

In respect of the proposal to change the name of the Plaza, following the presentation of a motion at a Council meeting, the process and final decision are in the hands of Mayor Evelyn Matthei, and remain in the early stages. At present, there are several possibilities that could emerge within the statue's fate, one is that the Mayor declines to bring the petition to the floor, the other is the



Figure 4: 'Baquedano Statue Removed in March 2021' by Rocío Aravena via Wikimedia Commons CC BY-SA 4.0

⁵³ Ministerio de las Culturas, las Artes y el Patrimonio, "Subsecretario del Patrimonio Cultural anuncia querrela y pasos a seguir para la protección del monumento a Baquedano," *Ministerio de las Culturas, las Artes y el Patrimonio*, January 3, 2020.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Juanita García, "Consejo de Monumentos evaluará el miércoles si retira estatua del general Baquedano de Plaza Italia," *EMOL*, January 3, 2020.

⁵⁶ Juanita García, "Se queda: Consejo de Monumentos decide mantener estatua del general Baquedano en Plaza Italia," *EMOL*, January 8, 2020.

⁵⁷ AS Chile, "Retiro de la estatua de Baquedano," *AS Chile*, March 13, 2021.

implementation of a citizen consultation, that although not binding, could influence the final decision. The last possibility is that the Council brings up the issue and decides to hold an open debate to listen to different opinions on the matter.⁵⁸ As of November 2021, none of these possibilities have happened and the future of the statue remains in an uncertain limbo. However, protesters continued to meet in Plaza Baquedano, and in October 2021 they marched towards the Plaza to commemorate the second anniversary of the social outburst.⁵⁹

The 2021 National Elections

In December 19, 2021, Gabriel Boric, from the party *Apruebo Dignidad* (Approved Dignity), won the Chilean National Elections,⁶⁰ a historical moment as Boric is not only the youngest president of the history of Chile but also the one with the highest number of votes, more than 4.6 million.⁶¹ The 35-year-old former student leader started his political career in the 2011 and 2019 protests, his ideology and program responds to the social demands from the 2019 Protests.⁶² Even though it is earlier to anticipate what his actions will be regarding the contestation around Baquedano's Square and Statue, everything points to the fact that Boric will most likely heed the petitions and demands of the social, student and indigenous movements.

Furthermore, his victory also marked the end of the political predominance of the two large centre-left and centre-right blocs since the establishment of democracy in 1990, Boric is the first president elected from outside those blocs as his party *Apruebo Dignidad* was an alliance between the *Frente Amplio*, left-wing coalition founded in 2017, and the Communist Party.⁶³

Summary and conclusions

The contestation over the Baquedano statue presents various ambiguities and paradoxes. On the one hand, the space of the Plaza itself is not especially contested - it is widely accepted as the home of the protest movement, its 'ground zero.' However, its name and central landmark, the statue of General Baquedano, presents a challenge to a movement that finds itself at odds with what the monument represents. The default position of the government authorities has been to protect and preserve the statue at all costs whether through removal or maintenance. Emilio de la Cerda of the CMN only tentatively suggested that there might be more room for dialogue or compromise, stating that:

As a Ministry of Cultures, Arts and Heritage, we have been emphatic in saying that cultural heritage is dynamic. Every generation can make revisions, through debate or new perspectives on symbolic goods, but this action must be done through means of tolerant dialogue and respect for proper institutions, not through violence. We reject any kind of damage done to public property, which is part of the soul, memory and history of society.⁶⁴

⁵⁸ Juan Pablo Andrews and Claudia Soto, "'Plaza de la Dignidad': el camino que debe seguir la moción que busca 'rebautizar' la Plaza Baquedano," *La Tercera*, December 4, 2019.

⁵⁹ Santiago AFP, "Miles se manifiestan en Chile dos años después del estallido social," *France24*, October 19, 2021.

⁶⁰ Equipo Digital, "Presidencia 2022: ¿Cuándo será el cambio de mando?," *Diario Concepción*, December 20, 2021.

⁶¹ BBC News Mundo, "3 hitos del triunfo electoral de Gabriel Boric en Chile (aparte de su edad)," *BBC News Mundo*, December 20, 2021.

⁶² El País, "Cambio En Chile," *El País Opinión*, December 21, 2021.

⁶³ BBC News Mundo, "3 hitos del triunfo electoral de Gabriel Boric en Chile (aparte de su edad)," *BBC News Mundo*, December 20, 2021.

⁶⁴ Carlos Reyes P., "Tras 93 años," *La Tercera*, January 3, 2020.

Whether or not protestors reclaim the statue again after it has been restored and fill it with new graffiti, or attempt to topple it again, remains to be seen. The prospects of the government opening up channels of dialogue on these particular issues, as expressed above, also remains uncertain as Chile embarks on the new Constitutional Process.⁶⁵

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About Contested Histories

In recent years, there have been many contestations over memorials, street names, and other physical representations of historical legacies in public spaces. These contestations often reflect deeper societal tensions whether triggered by political transitions, demographic shifts, inter-ethnic strife, or a growing awareness of unaddressed historical injustices.

The Contested Histories project is a multi-year initiative designed to identify principles, processes, and best practices for addressing these contestations at the community or municipal level and in the classroom. Conflicts about history, heritage, and memory are a global phenomenon, and, although each case is different, comparative cases can indicate lessons learned and reflect best practices.

About IHJR at EuroClio

The Institute for Historical Justice and Reconciliation (IHJR) is a research centre at EuroClio - European Association for History Educators in The Hague, The Netherlands. The IHJR works with educational and public policy institutions to organise and sponsor historical discourse in pursuit of acknowledgement and the resolution of historical disputes in divided communities and societies.

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