



Photo by Juan Carlos Cáceres.

Mónica González Mujica (center) at a women's march in Chile, 1986.

CHILE

Mónica González Mujica: Between Sorrow and Hope

By Elizabeth Farnsworth, with María José Calderón

I first met investigative journalist Mónica González Mujica in Santiago in 2004 while producing “The Judge and the General,” a PBS documentary about the first Chilean judge to indict Augusto Pinochet for murdering and kidnapping political opponents. Chilean co-producer Patricio Lanfranco and I interviewed González six times during almost three years of filming. She is the brightest light, a beacon, among the hundreds of people I’ve interviewed in half a century of reporting in print and on public television. Her work has been pivotal in the struggle for truth and justice in Chile.

After studying Latin American history in college and graduate school in the 1960s, I was hired to assist in producing a feature film in Chile during the 1970 presidential campaign. Dr. Salvador Allende, a long-time leader of the Socialist Party, won that election, enraging the Chilean

right and high officials of the Nixon administration. The film, “¿Qué Hacer?” used documentary footage and fictional characters to explore, among other topics, democratic versus revolutionary socialism. Chilean actors portrayed leftists of various persuasions. A leader of the Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR, Movement of the Revolutionary Left) appeared as himself from prison. American actors played CIA spies conspiring to prevent Allende’s election. Berkeley’s Country Joe McDonald composed the film’s music and served as a Brechtian chorus.

After returning to the Bay Area at the end of 1970, I spent the next three years reporting U.S. efforts to undermine President Allende’s democratically elected government. I contributed to publications ranging from *Foreign Policy* to the Report on the Americas of the North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA).

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On September 11, 1973, General Augusto Pinochet overthrew Allende in a violent military coup. Allende committed suicide in the presidential palace before soldiers could take him prisoner. In the following months, people I'd known were killed, forced into exile, or made to disappear. Jorge Mueller, a cameraman on "¿Qué Hacer?", was kidnapped, never to be seen again. He may be among those tied to rails and dumped from helicopters into the Pacific Ocean. I am godmother to the son of a friend who survived imprisonment and torture.

According to the National Commission for Truth and Reconciliation (Rettig Commission), the National Corporation for Reparations and Reconciliation, and the National Commission on Political Imprisonment and Torture Report (Valech Report), between 1973 and 1990 a total of 3,227 people were disappeared or killed by the military government and its secret police, the Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional (DINA, National Intelligence Directorate),¹ and more than 40,000 people were tortured and/or imprisoned.

Mónica González was among tens of thousands of Chileans who fled into exile. Born in 1949, she had grown up poor and joined the Communist Party as a young girl. At the time of the coup, she worked for El Siglo, the Communist Party newspaper. In fear for her daughters' lives, she sent them into exile and then escaped herself. She lived with her daughters in France until 1978, when she returned to Chile, "obsessed," as she says, with the "death machine" of the Pinochet regime.

Her obsession has produced hundreds of investigative articles and seven books. She has also edited several leading Chilean publications. In 2007, with U.S. journalist John Dinges, she founded the Centro de Investigación Periodística (CIPER), a highly regarded investigative website, and served as its director until 2019. She resigned the directorship for reasons of health but is still president of the nonprofit Fundación CIPER. She reports freelance and frequently comments on television. Her work has received awards from around the world. In 2019, Chile honored her with its highest journalistic honor, the Premio Nacional de Periodismo.

Chilean filmmaker María José Calderón and I recently reviewed the transcripts of González's interviews for "The Judge and the General"² and found her words more relevant than ever. In recent years, the struggle for human rights has suffered setbacks around the world, and Chile is no exception. When González learned that she'd received the Premio Nacional de

1. In 1974, DINA established itself as the principal arm of repression of the Pinochet regime. It received technical, training, and infrastructure support from the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency. In the summer of 1975, DINA chief Manuel Contreras was even put temporarily on the CIA payroll.

2. The film can be viewed on YouTube in English, French, and Spanish.

Periodismo, she said that fake news (*falsas noticias*) is now "a threat to democracy that threatens our lives." Her success in countering false news over almost half a century provides an example for today's human rights activists. Her courage and commitment are a tonic against despair.

Patricio Lanfranco and I first interviewed González on February 25, 2004, in the office of the Chilean magazine *Siete+7*, where she was editor-in-chief. I asked her opinion on the subject of our film, Appeals Court Judge Juan Guzmán Tapia, who was investigating Pinochet's alleged crimes (at that time, judges led criminal investigations in Chile).

It was widely known that Guzmán had supported Pinochet's coup against Allende, and at first, human rights activists had low expectations. Guzmán surprised them. Repeatedly threatened with assassination, he pursued a vigorous investigation and, on December 13, 2004, indicted Pinochet for murder and kidnapping.

Typically, Mónica González didn't condemn, but tried to understand, Guzmán's early support for Pinochet. Even after years of staring into the abyss, she still believed in the human capacity for change.

The death of Judge Juan Guzmán on January 22, 2021, makes the excerpts below more relevant than ever. CLAS had a close relationship with the judge and sends deep regards and sympathy to his family.

Mónica González: I was one of the first people Judge Juan Guzmán Tapia called to testify because in 1986 I had made public, with Ricardo García and Patricia Verdugo, the contents of a tape we called "Chile: Between Sorrow and Hope." At the end of that tape is something that had until then been completely unknown. It was recorded in September 1973, on the day of the coup d'état against President Salvador Allende. On the tape, Pinochet speaks the horrendous phrase, *Matando la perra, se acaba la leva*. Killing the bitch gets rid of the litter.³

Judge Guzmán called me to testify with others to find out where we'd gotten that recording and to learn if it was true.

I spent about three hours with Guzmán then, and as he began to question me, I realized that he knew next to nothing.

He is the son of Juan Guzmán Cruchaga, a Chilean poet, and in high school, we had to memorize one of his poems. Generally one doesn't like poems you're made to read, but I really liked that poem, and it is forever imprinted in my mind. Part of it goes like this:

3. In other words, "If we kill Allende, we get rid of his followers."

*Una lámpara encendida
esperó toda la vida
tu llegada.
Hoy la hallarás extinguida.*

A burning lamp
waited a lifetime
for you to arrive.
Now you'll find it extinguished.

I thought the poem reflected our situation because we'd been waiting so long for a judge, but I saw few indications that Judge Guzmán would be up to the task. When I told him that, he said, "Well, I don't want to be that extinguished lamp."

I think that Juan Guzmán is like Bishop Sergio Valech⁴ when he assumed control of the Vicaría de Solidaridad. Valech was, as he admits, a *momio* [mummy], a conservative, and yet he changed into an incredible defender of people's rights. There's a difference between decency and indecency, between sensitivity and negligence or selfishness. There are those who justify the bad, the deaths, regardless of where they come from. It could be a Communist who justifies crimes committed in the Soviet Union or, like here in Chile, where thousands and thousands of people justified the assassinations knowing they existed but without wanting to know.

There were also some who didn't know what was happening because they were in their own world.

Judge Guzmán is not the only one, but he is an example. He was privileged. He likes to collect fossils; he likes ancient history; he's refined; he has a French wife. He created his own refuge and buried himself there, and he had the luck not to be forced to confront reality. But because he is a decent, intelligent, and sensitive man, when he was confronted with reality, he had to decide whether to be a judge who does only the minimum or to commit himself and do the best possible investigation, and he did the latter. Thanks to his work, Pinochet's immunity from prosecution was lifted on August 8, 2000, and that opened the doors so that today more than 60 killers of many Chileans are in jail. Without that lifting of immunity, we wouldn't have the concept of *secuestro permanente* [permanent kidnapping] which allows for those people to be indicted and tried as long the bodies are not found.⁵

4. Bishop Sergio Valech was a fierce defender of human rights in Chile. He assumed control of the Vicaría de la Solidaridad (Vicariate of Solidarity) during the last years of the dictatorship (1986-1992). The Vicaría was created in 1976 by the Catholic Church and other religious institutions to defend and promote human rights in Chile. For decades, the Vicaría collected testimonies of victims and relatives of those imprisoned, tortured, and disappeared during the military regime. In 2013, Bishop Valech directed the National Commission on Political Imprisonment and Torture, which created the Valech Report, a record of human right violations during Augusto Pinochet's military regime.

5. Judge Juan Guzmán used the term "permanent kidnapping" to refer to those crimes that last as long as they are being perpetrated. In a kidnapping, the crime lasts

Guzmán conducted an investigation in which he put together all the pieces with the help of the lawyers and especially the relatives, the most forgotten characters.

Elizabeth Farnsworth: You have said that some relatives almost became lawyers.

MG: These are the most forgotten characters. There are families that had to learn to be lawyers. They learned so much they could almost be attorneys today. There are cases of women who had very hard lives. You can't live a normal life waiting 30, 25, or even 10 years for a husband who may not come back. They were young, and many remarried, because that's life. And they had a really hard time with their new partners. They thought, "How can I fall in love again? What if he comes back?" For them, it was like killing the disappeared.

Some women started looking [for their husbands] — and they had to hear things like, "He left you for another woman, he was never detained. It's a lie that he 'disappeared.'"

In the February 25, 2004, interview at the office of Siete+7, González also discussed "Operation Colombo," a 1975 DINA operation aimed at covering up the murder of more than 100 of the disappeared at a time when Pinochet's government was under scrutiny for human rights violations by the United Nations, Amnesty International, and other international organizations. González had discovered the truth about Operation Colombo while investigating the assassination in Buenos Aires of General Carlos Prats, who had sought exile in Argentina after serving as Commander in Chief of the Chilean Army under Allende.

MG: In July 1975, newspapers like El Mercurio and La Nación had come out saying that those who had blamed the military junta for arresting and killing people had to bite their tongues. The "disappeared" had died because of killings among themselves.

EF: If you hadn't gone to Argentina, we wouldn't have learned the truth.

MG: The truth would have come out another way or someone else would have done what I did. I have a lot

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from the moment a person is illegally deprived of freedom until they are released or until that person appears, even if dead. The 1987 Amnesty Law had shielded Pinochet and all involved in criminal acts as authors, accomplices, or accessories, committed between September 11, 1973, and March 10, 1978, without making a distinction between common crimes and those committed with political motivation. In a "permanent kidnapping," the crime of kidnapping and disappearance continued to be committed continuously, so the amnesty law could not be applied since it referred to crimes committed within a specific period.

of faith in life, and I think that somehow things that are hidden below ground appear. I feel like I was just an instrument. I have faith that another judge, journalist, or lawyer would have done what I did later.

EF: But you opened that box....

MG: Because I am obsessive. It wasn't by chance. The guy at the courthouse let me into a dark, dirty room all by myself, because who cared about court documents in Argentina during those years?

I had gone under precarious circumstances to investigate the assassination of General Carlos Prats. Argentina was coming out of a dictatorship. The courts were occupied by fascists. They would threaten you and describe in detail what they do to "women like you." Then one day the Argentine journalist, Horacio Verbitsky stopped me in a corridor and said, "You are Mónica González, yes? Look for the case of Enrique Arancibia Clavel,⁶ the spy case, and you'll find what you're looking for." I would have to get authorization from a judge to see that, and it was difficult. I spent many days standing outside the judge's house. It was winter in Buenos Aires. I started at 7:00 a.m.

Finally he gave in, and I was able to locate a room inside the judicial archives and find those boxes. I can see it as if it were today. They left me alone in this dirty place. I took the first box, and it was full of documents all jammed together. It was hard to open. I took a few things out and documents fell. The first things that came out were ID documents. I picked one up. It says, "Amelia Bruhn," a woman I knew, a marvelous woman, a disappeared prisoner. There was her ID.

From then on I was frantic. I very quickly asked myself, "What should I do?" So I started recording. Very quickly I realized these are DINA archives. It's the only file from DINA in existence.⁷

To my horror, I saw ID documents from disappeared prisoners, handwritten letters that describe the butchering, the deaths, people who were being followed.

EF: You recorded for days?

MG: I could have stolen those documents, but they were legal documents. If I took them, they'd lose their legal value. This "legality" is after us, but still we follow it.

6. Enrique Arancibia Clavel was the head of the clandestine network of DINA in Argentina. He was arrested in Argentina in 1978 and charged with espionage. After the arrest, his apartment was raided and more than 500 confidential DINA documents were found, seized, and filed in the Federal Court of Buenos Aires. Those are the documents referred to by Mónica González in the interview.

7. The "DINA documents" include cables, intelligence reports, and correspondence between Arancibia Clavel and his bosses in Santiago between 1974 and 1978. They reveal torture and disappearance techniques used by the Argentine death squads, as well as their cooperation with the Chilean intelligence agency to kidnap, torture, and disappear Chilean refugees in Argentina in operations known as Colombo and Condor, among others.

I tape and tape, and sometimes, I cry, sitting on the cold floor. It was very cold. I was there from 8 a.m. until they made me leave. No breaks. I tape and tape and cry, alone, because there are photos of bodies torn apart or when I read the story of my friend David Silberman.⁸

It was the first time I saw it, handwritten. My friend. There was his death.

Those DINA files show there was a systematic organization for the assassination of opponents of the Pinochet government, a decision to eliminate them brutally and leave no traces. The files show how they organized a "simulacrum" [fake newspaper story] to pretend the 119 disappeared had run away to Argentina, when the truth was they were killed in Chile.

Some of those prisoners were dynamited, others thrown in the sea. I found names of the disappeared prisoners they'd killed in that way. There were also three names that didn't appear on any list, and they became an obsession for me. It must have been six months until one day, while I was reading the testimony of a survivor, I found something that said, "...and González arrived together with the Andrónico Antequera brothers." And for the first time [the name of] Samuel González appeared.⁹ He had not been on the other lists [of disappeared prisoners].

It's one of the most emotional stories for me because it was only because I'm obsessive that my search helped discover that child — he was a very young man without a father or mother, an orphan. His sister was a cloistered nun, and we found that nun, who came out of her cloister only once — to file a case for her brother in the courts. And I felt that day that Samuel González lived. I am agnostic, but I felt that God put me there to find that ID, as if saying, "Mónica, you can't rest until you find him."

In 1991, I found the man who had provided the list of names to those newspapers. His name was Gerardo Roa. He was chief of the Public Relations Department of the City of Santiago. I was then editor-in-chief of the newspaper La Nación. He received me saying, "What an honor."

I said to him, "Close the door because what I have to say is private and I don't want anyone to interrupt us." Then I showed him the documents and asked, "What do you have to say about this?" The guy turned pale and began to perspire, and suddenly, he fainted.

I got him water, and he started to recover and said, "Yes, Manuel Contreras [the head of DINA] personally

8. David Silberman was a member of the Communist Party and the General Manager of the Cobre Chuqui copper mine until the military coup of 1973. On October 4 of the same year, he was detained by DINA agents and taken to a clandestine detention center from which he disappeared. In 1975, a mutilated body was found in Buenos Aires, Argentina, with an identity card that identified him as David Silberman. Later that body was found not to be Silberman, who continues to be among the missing.

9. No relation to Mónica González.

asked me to deliver the documents. I was in Rio de Janeiro then and had contacts with the newspaper O Dia, so I did it. We paid for that edition."

I said, "If you will declare this to the Rettig Commission,¹⁰ I won't publish it, but you must tell them everything. If you do that, I won't publish. What's important is that you establish, for potential prosecutions, how and who gave you the order, what information you gave to the newspapers, and how much you paid and to whom."

I had it all planned [for him to reveal the information on that same day], but he was having a hard time breathing. He was afraid he'd have a heart attack. He was very fat and sweating profusely. So I told him, "You can't do it today. I will come pick you up on Monday at 11:00, and nobody will know. I assure you that privacy." Luckily, we are compassionate. We are different from them, and we celebrate that difference.

So I went back on Monday. I was received by a composed man. He let me into his office, opened the drawer, and took out a recent photo of my daughters in Paris, and he said, "Do you want them to stay alive?"

He worked for a democratically elected government but still had that job. I spoke to his boss, who said, "Don't publish, you'll get killed." I told him, "You have to fire that man."

In spite of the threat, I immediately published the story in La Nación, including all the details of Roa's participation.

González is emphasizing here that her encounter with Gerardo Roa occurred early in the democratically elected government of President Patricio Aylwin, a Christian Democrat. Even in 2004, with Pinochet under investigation for murder, she believed much more had to be done to uncover the truth about his death machine, but she nonetheless praised what had been achieved thus far. Some people were more critical.

MG: I respect all opinions, but personally, I feel proud every morning for what we have achieved. But do you know what is sad? If we don't appreciate the work that we have all done, the relatives won't heal their wounds. Because if we keep saying we haven't done enough, then what else should we have done? There's no other country that had a dictatorship in South America that now has so many military officers in jail like we do in Chile, and there will be more.

10. Pinochet's dictatorship ended in 1989 when he conceded to holding elections and lost to Patricio Aylwin. Shortly thereafter, President Aylwin established Chile's National Commission for Truth and Reconciliation — known as the Rettig Commission — to investigate human rights abuses that occurred during the Pinochet regime.

Did you know that there wasn't a single day during the dictatorship when there wasn't a complaint that included the name of a torturer, the address of a secret detention center? All that is the history of Chile, and it's now in the courts. It's our work, our achievement. I feel proud in front of my daughters. A lot of bad things happened, but we've left something beautiful to our children and grandchildren.

The following interview took place on December 15, 2006, five days after Augusto Pinochet died of a heart attack in the Military Hospital of Santiago. Judge Juan Guzmán had, in December 2004, ruled that Pinochet was medically fit to stand trial and indicted him and placed him under house arrest. By 2006, other Chilean judges had also indicted Pinochet. At the time of his death, he faced more than 300 criminal charges.

MG: The first thing I thought of on Sunday when I learned that General Pinochet had died, and it was confirmed that he was going to be cremated, was that it was unbelievable.

He won't have a tomb!

He condemned thousands of Chileans to be disappeared, to be thrown in the desert or in abandoned mines, so nobody would ever find them or remember them. And he — not because of the force of the bayonet, but because of the fear of his own people — will be another disappeared person. I'm convinced that for many people, it's still very difficult to believe.

In 1974, after the coup, Pinochet had built a great tomb, a mausoleum, in the cemetery at his mother's request. But his mother died many years later, in 1986. And when his mother died, they buried her there, and soon afterwards, the grave was desecrated. Pinochet realized then that he could never be buried there. The times had changed. So he changed his dream to a grand Napoleon-style tomb inside the Military Academy. But the army didn't accept that. And that's interesting: today's army didn't accept him having a tomb inside the Military Academy.

The family had to accept that they must cremate him because his body would never be safe anywhere. As we have seen, more than one child or grandchild, more than one survivor of his crimes, someone who was tortured and survived was going to open that tomb so that nobody would ever find a milligram of his remains. But what I like is that nobody condemned him to suffer that. His own family did it out of fear. It's incredible how history has changed.

Thirty-three years ago, those who were scared down to their bones were those who opposed him, and he was the Almighty who declared, from some hidden spot in the headquarters of the coup d'état, "Se mata la perra,

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se acaba la leva.” Today, his people are the ones who are afraid of what is to come. That’s why they had to burn him, incinerate him at more than 1000 degrees Celsius, incinerate him with the coffin in which he was placed. Not a trace of that coffin will be left.

When I saw the ashes [when Pinochet was being cremated], that long cloud of black ashes going up, it was as if in Chile we were delaying the return of the monster. We signaled that murderers get punished. If someone wants to obtain glory by killing, torturing, imprisoning, throwing bodies into the ocean with their stomachs split open, they won’t get glory. What they’ll receive is reproach.

EF: I was surprised by the vehemence of both the hate and the love towards Pinochet, even though those people shouting his praises in the streets knew what he had done. How do you explain that?

MG: It’s true, there was love, there was vehemence, because I think what happened on the day he died was an explosion in which the masks came off. Countries have very few opportunities to experience those moments.

The *pinochetistas*, who have for many years hidden their love for Pinochet and their hate towards all those who think differently, are unable to control it. Their real personality comes out from deep inside them.

EF: What’s in the soul of a human being in society that allows these things to happen?

MG: It’s happened since the Roman circus, and probably before that, when an emperor gave a thumbs-down sign and an entire people screamed for blood, and those Christians or slaves died in the most brutal way in front of the crowd. That story repeats itself time and again. Today, it’s worse because there’s anesthesia. We see via a TV screen where journalists look for blood to show the audience, and the more blood, the greater success. Those 60,000 fervent, hot-headed pinochetistas, had so much hatred in their eyes and gestures. If you’d given each of them a machine gun, I don’t know what they would have done or how many people they would have murdered.

There’s a death machine, which is there, latent. I think this country is like a clock, which marks a pulse each minute, tick-tock, tick-tock, it’s the pulse of the country, the sound of the streets. The streets talk: they speak of the rage, the sadness, the passion, the pain of the citizens.

We have to look into their eyes and decipher those words full of hatred because when you don’t listen to them, they reach more people. They conquer more spaces. Their hatred invades everything. It’s very dangerous. We have to stop it.



Photo courtesy of Mónica González Mujica.

Mónica González Mujica.

“That’s the task of journalism, to alert us when there’s hatred, to alert us when hate expands through the streets, to alert us when madmen acquire positions of power...”

That’s the task of journalism, to alert us when there’s hatred, to alert us when hate expands through the streets, to alert us when madmen acquire positions of power, to alert us when there’s someone who isn’t democratic [who is] in control of weapons in a certain army unit, to alert us to not allow permissive judges to be judges, to not allow antidemocratic generals to remain in the army.

It’s a clock that we must treat with great care because if we don’t, what has happened before and has always happened will occur again. But we shouldn’t lose hope. Our work consists of this: how to delay the return of the monster.

Sunday evening something very powerful happened to me, a whirlpool of images as I drove towards Santiago after learning of Pinochet’s death. I had to keep moving, working, writing articles for Clarín newspaper that afternoon. I had a whirlpool of images — it was very powerful — images I thought were no longer registered in my memory, but they were very clear images, even odors, of many tough episodes. And suddenly, at one point during the evening, I got a terrible chill because I realized — and to this day I am terrified to say this — that I have two children because of Pinochet, because I could have had more, but I lost them. I have the loves I have had, the lost loves, and those I had, the pain I’ve gone through, the hours without love, the discipline, the crankiness, the desire to cry that I sometimes feel, the happiness I feel — so many things of mine have depended on what that madman has done. *Fue muy fuerte...* It was very strong....

Elizabeth Farnsworth is a filmmaker, foreign correspondent, and former chief correspondent of the PBS NewsHour. Her 2008 documentary, “The Judge and the General,” co-directed with Patricio Lanfranco, aired on television around the world and won the DuPont Columbia Award, among other honors.

María José Calderón is a Chilean documentary producer and editor based in Oakland, California. She associate produced “The Judge and the General” and has produced and edited documentaries for PBS, Latino Public Broadcasting, Univision, and other networks.

Mónica González Mujica is a Chilean writer and journalist, winner of the UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize. The interviews were conducted in 2004 and 2006 during shoots for “The Judge and the General,” which first aired on POV(PBS) in 2008.