

Gustavo Guzmán, “From Acceptable Undesirables to Respected Businessmen:  
Changes and Continuities in Chilean Right-Wing Attitudes toward Jews”

Studies on antisemitism have paid little attention to Latin America. Except for Argentina, an Atlantic country with a large Jewish population and a history of antisemitic violence well studied, the cases of most Latin American countries remained understudied. That is particularly clear when it comes to the nations of the Pacific basin, such as Chile. This study aims to partially fill that gap. However, instead of examining only far-rightists and their well-documented enmity to Jews, this dissertation focuses on an array of right-wing actors. Namely, mainstream rightists, less established rightists, and the camp formed by right-wing priests, military officers, and intellectuals. Likewise, this research examines an array of attitudes toward Jews, not only hostility. Thus, this study is at the intersection of political history, studies on antisemitism, and ethnic studies.

Part I is about the period 1932-40, a period marked by the persecution of Jews in Germany and the subsequent migration of thousands of them to the Americas. Chapter 1 deals with the subjects of Part I, that is, the rightists, the immigrants, and the Jews of Chile at the time. Like in the rest of the continent, the Chilean rightists of the epoch divided immigrants into desirable and undesirable; while “Aryan” Europeans embodied the former, an array of newcomers symbolized the latter. Although Jews primarily were viewed as undesirable immigrants, their economic skills, potential contribution to the Chilean economy, and whiteness turned them into *acceptable undesirables*.

Chapter 2 examines Chilean right-wing attitudes toward Jews between 1932 and 1940. When it came to the plight of the Jews in Europe, most rightists were indifferent. After Kristallnacht, for instance, the majority of them kept firmly silent. Similarly, most rightists were hostile to Jewish immigration, an issue that became urgent in the second

half of the 1930s. However, there were notable exceptions; while most right-wingers displayed negative approaches to Jews, others publicly condemned the German government over antisemitic violence, sympathized with the persecuted, and called the Chilean government to receive larger numbers of Jewish refugees. Those contradictory trends were found among both the right-wing establishment, less established, rightists, and the group composed of priests, the military, and intellectuals.

The conclusion of Part I shows the specificity of Chilean right-wing attitudes toward Jews through a triple exercise. First, such attitudes are compared to those of Chilean centrists and leftists; second, they are contrasted with right-wing attitudes toward other immigrant groups such as Chinese and Arabs; and third, Chilean right-wing approaches to Jews are compared with those of other South American rightists at the time. That triple exercise shows that the Chilean right-wing attitudes to “Israelites” were not unique. More importantly, it shows that most European studies on antisemitism, including prominent classics, do not give an accurate account of anti-Jewish hostility in Chile and South America.

Part II is about the period 1958-78, a period marked by the impact of the Cuban Revolution, the US Alliance for Progress, and other major events of the Cold War. The growth of left-wing forces throughout Latin America radicalized rightists everywhere and Chile was not an exception. However, despite the increasing authoritarianism of the rightists, antisemitism virtually disappeared from the Chilean Right. Chapter 3 deals with the administration of Jorge Alessandri (1958-64), a moment in which an unexpected test for right-wing attitudes toward Jews took place: the detention of Nazi war criminal Walther Rauff in Chile. Unlike Argentina, where Adolf Eichmann’s seizure was followed by a true wave of antisemitic violence, no rightist physically attacked Jewish-Chileans.

More notably, no mainstream rightist criticized the capture of Rauff. What prevailed was indifference.

Chapter 4 focuses on the administrations of Eduardo Frei (1964-70) and Salvador Allende (1970-73), years in which progressive Jews occupied top government positions and led crucial reforms. Despite the salience of Jewish-Chileans within the local Left, the rightists rarely contested the Jewishness of those figures. Further, notwithstanding the emergence of far-right terrorism in Chilean politics, such terrorists never attacked Jews. Again, the differences with Argentine in this regard were evident.

Chapter 5 examines Chilean right-wing attitudes toward Jews during the five first years of General Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship (1973-78). Despite the massive human rights violations that characterized the Pinochet regime and that turned it into the symbol of the Latin American right-wing dictatorships of the 1970s, the military did not attack Jews. Conversely, the belief that good treatment of Jewish-Chileans was crucial for a better relationship with the US interacted with the economic salience of Jews and the amicable relations between the regime and Israel, making Chilean rightists at the time remarkably friendly to Jews.

The conclusion of Part II shows the specificity of Chilean right-wing attitudes toward Jews during the period 1958-78 by comparing them with those of Argentinean rightists at the time. Such contrast suggests that the stance of Chilean rightists toward Jews between the late 1950s and late 1970s was relatively positive. However, those positive approaches were not a consequence of the democratic credentials of the Right, a sector which almost unanimously endorsed General Pinochet's dictatorship, but from an international scenario marked by the Cold War, on the one hand, and a positive valuation of the economic contribution of ethnic groups such as Jews.

The epilogue shows the changes and continuities of Chilean right-wing attitudes toward Jews between the 1930s and later decades. Those findings challenge some tenets of the studies on antisemitism in Latin America.