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Melancholy and Memory: The Generation of Cultural Trauma Carriers Among Pinochet's Children

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Abstract

This article analyzes structures of feeling among the generation of trauma carriers who grew up under Pinochet's dictatorship. Drawing on interviews with thirty-seven cultural producers (including filmmakers, novelists, visual artists, and memory activists), we shed light on the generational memory work involved in processing cultural trauma, emphasizing the emotional force behind memory transmission in postconflict societies dealing with legacies of terror. Drawing on Raymond Williams's notion of structures of feeling, we explore how the generational memory of children during Pinochet's dictatorship is shaped by melancholic intergenerational identification with past struggles. This intergenerational bond is characterized by melancholic affect in representing the previous generation, which is rooted in experiences of state violence and resistance and plays a key role in processing historical trauma and shaping contemporary social critique in postconflict Chile.

Keywords: generations; cultural trauma; memory; structures of feelings; melancholy

Resumen

Este artículo analiza las estructuras de sentimiento de la generación de quienes crecieron bajo la dictadura de Pinochet. A partir de entrevistas con treinta y siete productores culturales (entre ellos cineastas, novelistas, artistas visuales y activistas de la memoria), nuestro objetivo ha sido arrojar luz sobre el trabajo de memoria generacional involucrado en la elaboración del trauma cultural de la dictadura, haciendo hincapié en la fuerza emocional que subyace a la transmisión de la memoria en sociedades post-conflicto que lidian con legados de terror. Basándonos en el concepto de "estructuras de sentimiento" de Raymond Williams, exploramos cómo la memoria generacional de los hijos de Pinochet, ahora adultos, está moldeada por una identificación intergeneracional melancólica con las luchas del pasado. Se argumenta que este vínculo intergeneracional se caracteriza por un afecto melancólico hacia la generación anterior, arraigado en experiencias de violencia de estado y resistencia, lo que juega un papel clave en el procesamiento del trauma histórico y en la conformación de la crítica social contemporánea en el Chile post-conflicto.

Palabras clave: generaciones; trauma cultural; memoria; estructuras de sentimiento; melancolía

Since 2003, several internationally recognized historical documentaries and memoirs have narrated the story of the so-called children of Pinochet—Chilean individuals who grew up in the shadow of the 1973 coup d'état and the seventeen-year dictatorship that followed. Films such as *El eco de las canciones* (Rossi 2008), *El edificio de los chilenos* (Aguiló 2010), and *Mi*

vida con Carlos (Berger-Hertz 2010) offer intimate and reflective accounts of the experiences endured by the children of the military regime's political prisoners, exiles, and the disappeared. Based on interviews and family archives, such as photo albums and videos, these documentaries reconstruct narratives of familial and national pasts, highlighting the losses suffered after the violent and abrupt military intervention (Palacios and Donoso 2017). Additionally, books like *En voz baja* (Costamagna 1996), *Formas de volver a casa* (Zambra 2011), and the nonfiction anthology *Volver a los 17: Recuerdos de una generación en dictadura* (Contardo 2013) provide in-depth biographical accounts of the postcoup generation. The television drama *Los 80* (2008–2013) portrays the silent patterns of everyday complicity with the regime in middle-class families and the effects of depoliticization (Carlin 2006) stemming from dictatorial repression and the implementation of neoliberal policies.[1] Such works depict the experience of growing up during the dictatorship, and they are framed, narrated, and represented from the late 1990s and 2000s.[2] Initially, they focused on the children of left-wing political victims of the regime, but they soon expanded to encompass diverse experiences related to the challenges of growing up under the neoliberal policies implemented during the 1980s and later, as well as experiences of those born into families of the regime's accomplices and supporters.

This article focuses on this generation of memory producers, analytically understood as carriers of trauma, following Alexander's (2004) conceptualization. These individuals—writers, documentary filmmakers, and memory site activists—lived their childhood during Pinochet's dictatorship and have dedicated their cultural work and activism to the production of memory. Our goal is to understand their political and cultural actions as a generation and how they have engaged with the legacy of terror.

The following sections present a conceptual review of the literature on generations and the transmission of memories in disruptive or violent contexts. We introduce the theory of cultural trauma and the role of its carriers (Alexander 2004), a term we use to describe the work of cultural producers from Chile's postcoup second generation. We then propose that Raymond Williams's (1978, 2005) concept of structures of feeling offers valuable insights for understanding affect in postconflict societies. Following this, we describe our sampling and interview methods before presenting and discussing our results.

Throughout the analysis, we argue that applying Williams's concept of structures of feeling to the postcoup generation of trauma carriers offers a deeper understanding of how collective memories are transmitted and activated across generations. Williams originally developed this concept to analyze works of art, but we contend that it also is helpful for illuminating the affective dynamics of this generation of trauma carriers in Chile. By exploring specific structures of feeling elicited from biographical interviews, we expand the common understanding of melancholy, which is often interpreted as unresolved mourning, ambivalence, or inaction. We suggest that Pinochet's children share a collective feeling of melancholy in response to the loss and defeat experienced by their parents—the preceding generation. Melancholy is mobilized through their critique of the society in which they came of age (in the 1990s and early 2000s), a historical moment in which the collective projects that had defined precoup Chile were absent. Drawing on our interviews, we argue that melancholy, as a shared affect, operates in a sociopolitical framework, fueling social critique. We observe that, despite their varied political and social backgrounds, trauma carriers engage in emerging practices and meanings related to social justice and human rights. By placing affective elements (in this case, melancholy) at the center of our analysis, we demonstrate how structures of feelings underpin the processing of cultural trauma.

[1] The seven-season series told the story of a middle-class family and its struggles with economic survival and the fear of repression. For an early discussion of depoliticization, see Moulian (1997).

[2] We define the postdictatorship period as lasting until the first government of Michelle Bachelet (2006–2010).

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Investigating the interplay of the cultural memory of disruptive pasts and postconflict generations

In recent decades, there has been growing interest in understanding the role of memory transmission across generations in postconflict societies as they confront experiences of historical disruption (Alexander 2004; Erll 2011; Hirsch 2012; Huyssen 2003; Olick 2007). Generations play a crucial role in the selection, re-creation, production, and circulation of generational memories. As Aleida Assmann (2010) states, generations are social entities that produce their own memories. In this context, questions arise regarding how generations remember traumatic legacies and assign meaning to them. This aligns with Mannheim's (1952, 360) broader assessment, which argues that generations engage with social and cultural heritage in a more detached and novel manner, reevaluating what should be forgotten or remembered.

However, in cases of historical trauma—such as war, violent conflict, and dictatorship—academic literature has illustrated how traditional forms of generational transmission may fail or be absent as a result of the disappearance of earlier generations (Hirsh 2012) or the traumas and mechanisms of silencing experienced by the first generation (Schwab 2010; Jara 2016; Frei 2018). Marianne Hirsch's (2012) postmemory perspective, developed in the context of the Holocaust's aftermath, reflects a distinctive model of memory in which generations that did not have firsthand experience of a disruptive event create their own secondhand, vicarious representations based on fragments and testimonies left by the previous generation. Her work has been significant and influential in the field of memory studies in Latin America (Kaiser 2005; Ros 2012), helping illuminate the fragmented, fragile, and haunted nature of intergenerational memory transmission to the children and descendants of the disappeared. Hirsch's research has focused on the affective force of memory in cases where memory has been inherited but not directly experienced. As a result, transmission has become more open yet more problematic, no longer relying solely on familial or community foundations but introducing a more complex temporal framework (Kennedy and Silverstein 2023).

For memories of violence to become effectively represented and remembered through cultural narratives that resignify the experiences of victims and marginalized groups subalterns in postconflict societies, a trauma cultural process of trauma must unfold (Alexander 2020, 2004). The tensions and dynamics between generations, memory transmission, and social change come to the forefront of understanding the diverse ways in which each generation confronts and addresses its past (Aguilar and Ramírez-Barat 2019). In this context, trauma is an experience collectively perceived as disruptive by members of a group (Alexander 2004). This literature highlights that the intergenerational transmission of disruptive events differentiates lived experience from collective memory, emphasizing the nonlinear and complex processes of memory formation in postconflict societies (Achugar 2016; Hirsch 2012; Jara 2016; Rosenthal 2009; Alexander 2004). Consequently, collective identity is shaped through forms of remembrance that frame the past as traumatic (Eyerman 2003; Alexander 2004). As Ron Eyerman (2003, 12) states, "It is through time-delayed and negotiated recollection that cultural trauma is experienced, a process which places representation in a key role." He highlights how memories are activated across different generations through narratives that circulate in music and literature and contribute to a shared process of identity formation speech (Onwuachi-Willig 2016).

Alexander's (2004) and Eyerman's (2003) perspectives help us understand that the construction of collective memories in times of crisis and their aftermath can lead to the emergence of new collective identities, which can evolve with further reinterpretations. Different generations remember and reinterpret highly symbolic events from disruptive pasts in their own ways (Badilla 2020; Aguilar and Ramírez-Barat 2019; Jara 2016). This

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process involves temporal and social developments where mediated experiences and representations of historical memory play a crucial role. Aguilar and Ramírez-Barat (2019) emphasize that generational memories are heterogeneous and shaped by specific group dynamics. Thus, understanding how memory is mediated and activated through identity-making processes is crucial for grasping the dynamics of intergenerational memory transmission in postconflict societies. This process of memory production involves a wide range of cultural forms, including cultural productions, commemorations, rituals, and mass media (Olick 2007; Alexander 2004).

For memories of violence to be effectively represented and remembered through cultural narratives that resignify the experiences of victims and marginalized groups in postconflict societies, a cultural process of collectively built trauma must unfold (Alexander 2020, 2004). To achieve this, a cultural process of narrative or collective representation building of the events must be done, raising an understanding of the experience as disruptive and traumatic (Alexander 2004). Consequently, collective identity is shaped through forms of remembrance that frame the past as traumatic (Eyerman 2003; Alexander 2004). As Ron Eyerman (2003, 12) states, "It is through time-delayed and negotiated recollection that cultural trauma is experienced, a process which places representation in a key role." In his research, Eyerman demonstrates that slavery persists as a cultural trauma, serving as a foundational form of remembrance that has shaped people's identity well beyond the institution itself. He highlights how memories are activated across generations through narratives circulating in music, literature, and speech (Onwuachi Willig, 2016), contributing to a shared process of identity formation.

This process of producing cultural trauma may lead to tensions between generations, as the memory transmissions may occur in diverse ways, and each generation may confront and address its past differently (Aguilar and Ramírez-Barat 2019). Even different generations remember and reinterpret highly symbolic events from disruptive pasts in their own ways (Badilla 2020; Aguilar and Ramírez-Barat 2019; Eyerman and Turner 1998; Frei 2018; Hirsch 2012; Jara 2016; Rosenthal 2009). This process involves temporal and social developments in which mediated experiences and representations of historical memory are crucial.

In this context, carriers are pivotal in the transmission and activation of memory. According to Alexander (2004), carrier groups are collective agents in the trauma process. They "have ideal and material interests, they are situated in particular places in the social structure, and they have particular discursive talents for articulating their claims ... in the public sphere" (Alexander 2004, 11). Various groups, whether elite or subaltern, as well as different generations, can assume the role of carriers. However, this approach often emphasizes interests and narratives, tending to overlook the role of affect and emotion in generational and intergenerational dynamics. However, as mentioned, generational memories of historical trauma are heterogeneous, indicating that a more nuanced explanation of intergenerational transmission of cultural trauma is necessary, particularly the affective elements involved.

To illuminate the role of affects and emotions in processing cultural trauma, we propose Raymond Williams (1978, 2005) perspective on structures of feeling. While Alexander (2020) draws on the concept of structures of feeling to explain cultural meaning and emotional identification, he does not explicitly link it to the cultural trauma process. Although Williams does not typically fall within the standard conceptual framework of memory studies, we incorporate his theoretical approach because it more effectively explains our findings on the affective intergenerational bonds. The concept of structures of feeling highlights the affective force of memory and suggests that cultural production itself contributes to the formation of generational collective identities. Williams developed this theory to understand intergenerational cultural processes not specifically related to trauma but in contexts of social change. He analyzed how an upper-class group formed a

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generational identity based on shared values and meanings through creative work. In doing so, they constructed new and emerging narratives that challenged the official consciousness and social conventions of the time. Williams (1978, 131) argued that these values and meanings were not individually experienced by group members but stemmed from "a particular quality of social experience and relationship, historically distinct from other particular qualities." In essence, they represented "a kind of feeling and thinking" that had a social character (Williams, 1978, 22). In this regard, Williams's structures of feelings enable a historical understanding of the affective elements shaping the production of social representations of life. These structures of feeling enable a social critique of the present, as the generation becomes participants in culturally structured frames of classification and meaning, as well as affective responses to them. As other researchers in the memory field argue, the concept seeks to "register the encounter between the strongly codified and its lived presence" (Sarlo 1993, 14) and to "encapsulate[] and valorize[] the felt sense of life shared by a community. Unconscious or at least not learned, 'structure of feeling' ties people together and is intrinsic to their cultural universe" (Falasca-Zamponi 2020, 104).

As we show in the following sections, melancholy is the specific intergenerational affect that sustains the children of Pinochet's structure of feeling. We draw on the concept of melancholy as explored by thinkers like Judith Butler (2003) and Enzo Traverso (2021), who examine this affect from a sociopolitical perspective. Reflecting on the aftermath of September 11 in New York and on the consequences of "deliberate act[s] of violence against a collectivity," Butler (2003) suggests that something valuable can emerge in the wake of political violence: Melancholy triggered by loss may be accompanied by a recognition of the value inherent in unfinished or thwarted utopian projects. As Petra Rethmann (2022) argues: "Melancholia does not inevitably mark historical fixity or unaccomplished mourning, but rather a temporal openness to mnemonic productivity and solidarity. It is in this sense . . . [that] melancholia does not index a pathological response to loss, but a political alternative to normative mourning."

In contrast, Traverso (2021) is more pessimistic, examining the melancholic political sentiments in left-wing culture that nostalgically cling to a utopian era lost after catastrophe. In this context, we aim to understand melancholic feeling as "a potentially productive and critical relation to the past" (Rethmann 2022, 1). We avoid using the concept of nostalgia, as employed by first-generation cultural producers like Patricio Guzmán (2011) in his work *Nostalgia de la luz*. *Nostalgia* often refers to a longing for a firsthand experience, which does not apply to the generation we are studying.

Methods

To understand the structure of feeling of memory producers and memory activists from the Chilean generation born in the 1970s and 1980s, we designed a qualitative study in the interpretivist and phenomenological tradition of social science (Lareau 2021; Guba and Lincoln 1998). We revisited a previously studied topic, the cultural production of memory for the second generation of the dictatorship, but we focused on the cultural producers themselves. This required a participant-focused methodology (Lareau 2021) to understand what people do and, more importantly, the meaning they ascribe to their practices.

Incorporating a "dirtbagging approach" (Rubin, 2021) we designed a purposive sampling, selecting interviewees on the basis of specific criteria aligned with our research focus on cultural producers of memory. We built a database that served as a universe of the cultural production of the generation on memory issues, including novels, plays, and films related to the dictatorship released from 2000 onward. We gathered information from publishing houses, film festival websites, secondary literature, and key informants, ultimately including individuals born between 1970 and 1984. This process resulted in an

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audiovisual database of seventy-four producers and a literature and drama database of sixty-three individuals. In a second phase, we expanded our scope to include memory site activists of the same generational cohort because, although their criteria align more with political and social activism than with artistic fields, they play a key role in producing collective symbols and shaping memory frameworks. For memory activists, we employed a snowball sampling technique, starting with contacts from organizations responsible for memory sites. Our final sample included six novelists, eleven filmmakers, ten memory-site activists, two visual artists, and nine other cultural producers, such as poets, musicians, and dancers. Our sample reflects a mix of political, biographical, educational, and family backgrounds, which adds further depth to the research findings.

The interviews were conducted between 2017 and 2018 in six cities. They were structured to reveal the participants' motivations for engaging in memory work from both biographical and cultural perspectives, understanding the biographical account as a partial narrative that continually updates and reflects the social relationships individuals establish throughout their life trajectories (Bertaux 1980). Our focus on the cultural realm required close examination of the mediation and meaning-making processes in the participants' creative works.

The interviews, lasting approximately ninety minutes, were conducted by the lead researchers and two research assistants. Before each interview, we adhered to an ethical protocol in which we explained our research objectives and asked interviewees whether they preferred to use their real names or remain anonymous.

To analyze the results, we made ethnographic field notes for each interview and developed analytical memos throughout the fieldwork, coding the interview transcripts later using Atlas.ti. We identified the main themes in interviews and situated them in relevant historical context, providing what Geertz (1973) calls "thick description." This also allowed us to explore new interpretations of the data, eventually leading to the insight that Williams's approach was pivotal for understanding melancholia as an affective force driving memory transmission. Similar to the abductive qualitative analysis perspective proposed by Timmermans and Tavory (2022), we conducted our research from design through analysis and writing, focusing on "figuring out both what surprising observations are a theoretical case of, and where the theoretical case and the findings diverge in interesting ways." We initiated an inductive process, identifying key elements related to how our interviewees discussed their work, their perspectives on the past and present, their views on their own generation and preceding ones, and their expressions of feelings toward the past.

Context for meaning: Navigating the postdictatorship period and beyond

Between 1973 and 1990, Chile endured a military dictatorship marked by the murder and disappearance of over three thousand individuals, with thousands more subjected to torture (Lira 2021). Although Chile had previously enjoyed a relatively stable democracy compared to Argentina and other neighbors (Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán 2013; Wright 2007), the authoritarian regime garnered support from a significant portion of the population (Huneeus 2000). The period left behind a society divided on memory, with stark contrasts between Pinochet's supporters and his opposition (Stern 2006). The end of the dictatorship in 1990 came about through a peaceful process characterized by a political pact between center-left and right-wing sectors. This transition coincided with the emergence of a global paradigm of transitional justice, which would significantly influence the country's efforts to confront its authoritarian past (Kelly 2018; Bernasconi 2019). In Chile, the journey toward reconciliation began with the Rettig Report in 1991 (produced by the National Commission for Truth and Reconciliation), which offered an official historical

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narrative detailing the past and social fabric's rupture (Loveman and Lira 2002).[3] This process was grounded in the global language of human rights and guided by a memory framework inspired in part by the "never again" mandate of the Holocaust. It also connected with the Latin American experience of grassroots organizations that fought authoritarianism during the 1970s and 1980s (Kelly 2018; Bastias 2013). However, the narrative work of truth commissions remained disconnected from material justice until the following decade (Collins 2013; Loveman and Lira 2002). Critics noted that, although the primary aim was to seek reparations for victims, the prevailing desire to move past the dictatorship hindered a reflective approach to social responsibility throughout the 1990s (Loveman and Lira 2002; Jara 2016). During the first decade of the transition, there were neither official policies to publicize the commission's work—in contrast to Argentina (Crenzel 2008)—nor educational programs to communicate the findings in schools and beyond. At that time, only one site—Villa Grimaldi on the outskirts of Santiago—was operational as a public memory space.

At the same time, the postdictatorship democracy was solidifying the entrenchment of neoliberal policies, resulting in rapid economic growth between 1986 and 1998. This economic success diverted almost all attention to the economic domain (Moulian 1997). During this period, the country witnessed a significant expansion of the middle class (Stillerman 2023). Chile entered a decade of social amnesia, characterized by the emergence of new highways and shopping centers that transformed its urban landscapes. Critics have characterized this decade as one of political demobilization.

Human rights violations became the dominant language of memory politics, providing an affective high ground from which to delegitimize the military dictatorship. The change was marked by the detention of former dictator Pinochet in London, an event that attracted global public attention. Most importantly for the present work, this moment sparked a generational renewal in the public debate surrounding the past. In 2006 and 2011, students born and raised under democracy led large-scale social mobilizations to reform the education system and address their inheritance of the dictatorship-era constitution imposed in 1978 (Badilla 2020; Donoso 2017; Fleet 2011). This resurgence in social mobilizations from 2006 onward opened broader critiques of the dictatorship in the public sphere for the first time, lending new significance to the commemoration of the fortieth anniversary of the coup in 2013. The impact of these anniversary commemorations, combined with the student mobilizations of 2011, paved the way for new narratives that portrayed the Popular Unity government of 1970–1973 (a left-wing political alliance that supported the socialist government of Salvador Allende) as an important and valid attempt to bring about social transformation toward a more just society.

The Chilean case is not unique. During the 1970s and 1980s, the Southern Cone countries (Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay) experienced authoritarian governments that used antisubversive tactics and state terrorism to suppress left-wing parties and movements in the broader geopolitical context of the Cold War (Jelin 2002; Kelly 2018). Although each country's experience differed, strong human rights movements emerged in Chile and Argentina in response to state violence (Kelly 2018; Bickford 2000). From the 2000s onward, the generation of children of the dictatorship in Argentina and Uruguay also initiated memory processes, each with distinct national characteristics (Kaiser 2005; Ros Ros, 2012). The research presented here may shed further light on this phenomenon.

We conducted our fieldwork between 2017 and 2018, before the social uprising that began on October 18, 2019. In the months that followed, Chilean society witnessed large-scale protests against socioeconomic inequality and the political system as a whole. These

[3] Later, the National Corporation for Reparations and Reconciliation (1996) produced a second report that characterized the victims of the dictatorship. During the 2010s, two national commissions were established on political prison and torture (Valech I and Valech II).

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events led to a constitutional process involving the election of two conventions tasked with rewriting the constitution, which was ultimately rejected in two referenda. The October demonstrations were initially led by students but quickly spread to encompass all sectors of society (Stillerman 2023), including the postcoup generation to which our interviewees belong. Although we do not focus on the social mobilizations themselves, we believe that the analysis presented here is valuable for understanding the aftermath of traumatic events in postconflict societies. We illuminate the roots of current issues raised by the protests by exploring the cultural framing of discontent during the postdictatorship period; the development of collective generational identities in the postcoup generation, which have preserved valuable memories of the past in the present; and how melancholy, as a structure of feeling, has fostered not only rage but also new forms of social critique.

Results and discussion

Melancholy, cultural trauma, and structure of feelings

Starting in the 2000s, a postcoup generation of cultural producers emerged as collective actors in processing cultural trauma in postdictatorial Chile. Through various works and practices, they began to activate intergenerational memories of the past that would otherwise have been restricted to previous generations and reduced social circles. The literature on generations and memory in contexts of disruptive pasts has produced insights into the intergenerational links between first and second generations in postconflict societies. As we explained in the previous sections, derived from the Holocaust experience, it has been stated that the children, or the second generation, build their own memories from incomplete narratives they receive from the previous generation and through cultural narratives at the societal level. In divided societies with active oppositions, however, like the Chilean case, the transmission of family memories was part of activist culture (Jara 2016), in which speaking was a form of resistance. As Stillerman (2023, 5) has shown in his study of the expansion of middle classes in Chile, the opposition to the dictatorship had an intergenerational dynamic of identity investments that went beyond class, including tastes and values: "Parents' political commitments and intergenerational trauma resulting from political repression profoundly affected activists." In our interviews, an intergenerational link emerged that was based on a feeling of loss and melancholy not only toward the events themselves but also toward the previous generation, who were opposed to Pinochet.

The affective investment in a lost past interrupted by a military coup was paradoxically experienced as estrangement from their own present. Our interviewees would express this affect as a private emotion, but it is part of their generational structure of feeling. Consider, for example, the following excerpts, in which interviewees describe their generation and emphasize their perceived differences from the previous one (their parents'):

> I think [our] generation . . . is a critical generation, but I'm not sure whether it's been able to articulate or achieve collective positions as a generation, because there's a lot of discontinuity. There are many people who don't have . . . a means; they don't have a collective vision. I think that there are people who ultimately fall into this imposed model of very strong individualism. (Filmmaker, born in 1984)

> Today there's a whole generation that's resigned to a model that's more voracious than the dictatorship. There used to be solidarity, vestiges of a country that was

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different, compassionate, class-conscious … organizations, working on a project that was ready for the taking. (Memory activist, born in 1984)

My period of active involvement must have been, I guess, from 1985 or 1986 to 1988; I mean, once democracy was reestablished, that was it. I felt that the process … I didn't feel in any way represented, and it didn't take long at all for that disappointment to start to set in as the process advanced. To start with, of course, no, because nobody was really aware of what was being agreed, of what was being forged behind the politics of the deals, behind the consensus and all that. But I think that in [my novel], there's a bit of a feeling in the air … I mean, Aylwin's first speech, "justice wherever possible"—I think that it affected us as a generation. It was incredible how those words hinted at what was to come over the years – an incomplete story. So yeah, I think that there was enormous disappointment, but at the same time the sensation that conditions had of course changed and we were no longer living in a state of repression; we weren't in a dictatorship in the sense of the bad times and all that, but I don't know, I prefer to talk about postdictatorship than about full transition to democracy because there was real continuity with the dictatorship, I mean, the same constitution! I mean, really. (Writer, born in 1970)

By definition, collective memory constructions refer to both the present—when the events are recalled—and the past (Assmann 2008; Erll 2011). What we can understand from this is that the particular bond between past and present has a generational element whereby our interviewees read their present with a feeling of melancholy toward the previous generation, thus building intergenerational solidarity based on an imagined past. We observe this as a form of intergenerational solidarity produced through a comparison between their generation and the previous one, whereby their own biographical experience (which they described as "depoliticized" and "within an individualized society") is undervalued when compared to the past, rife as it was with utopian left-wing militants and social activists in the context of Latin America's budding emancipatory projects. This undervalued self-representation fueled the second generation through melancholy felt toward the past and apathy toward the present.

Throughout our interviewees, melancholy emerges as an affect that is intergenerationally passed across generations of memory activists and activated in the present by the carrier generation. Another way their identity making as a generation of cultural carriers occurs is through accounts of isolation, disconnection, or being peripheral to the generation's mainstream cultural production and political discourse, which they classify as neoliberal:

Yes, I mean, I started making the film in 2003, 2004, and the situation was very different then. So, I was also working from a very lonely place and that sort of thing wasn't talked about much. In fact, the year that [my documentary] came out, there were six other films, and we were all creating, working alone and unaware that each of us … it was a generation that was doing it for the very first time. They're all sister works; we didn't know each other, we weren't working together, and we didn't know what the others were doing, and that's how it was. It's like, at the end of the day, all of those films are charged with that perspective of "I," the first person trying to create a theme that's always both private and public, public and private. (Audiovisualist, born in 1971)

I don't think … [that] I'm from a generation of very daring people. I think mine is a very emasculated, very repressed generation. I think the generation after mine is a bit

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> more open, like people in their thirties, I mean. People in their forties, aged forty to fifty, I think they're more repressed. And like, maybe I feel that political discourses are a bit of a lie ... Because people my age these days are only interested in making money, having a family, and that's it. They don't want to share. But I think that's part ... I don't think it's the fault of each person individually; I think it's part of the work done by the dictatorship. (Singer, born in 1975)

In contrast, admiration of the previous generation, either in ideological terms or for what they suffered and achieved, was apparent in many interviews. This feeling builds on an explicit appreciation of the political imagination of the left-wing organizations of previous generations—either the generation of their parents who participated in the Popular Unity movement or those who fought against the dictatorship in the 1980s. We observe that they experience and mobilize intergenerational affects based on a melancholy toward former political projects. The structures of feeling underscoring their memory works, in this sense, relate to a recovery or reappropriation of those projects or practices. As a filmmaker from a politically mixed family stressed:

> For me, what ... caused a change ... [was that] I understood that there were many people who had given their lives to ending the dictatorship ... and I understood that I owed them a debt, and that's how I felt. It was very strange; I felt that I owed a debt, and I said, "Someday I'm going to do something." But I didn't know what I was going to do, because I didn't ... just imagine, I was just finishing high school ... So, I would say that my three documentaries ... have to do with this debt ... I felt it was something I had to do. (Filmmaker, born in 1972)

A singer from Valparaíso remembered:

> So, it wasn't only my parents; I think my aunts and uncles and everyone else played an important role in the struggle against the dictatorship. And they set up this cultural center I was telling you about in the neighborhood, and most people from the area were involved, because it was a very politically committed neighborhood ... There were workshops, people ran community kitchens, because everybody was really poor. I mean, the dictatorship affected everyone whether they were consciously involved in politics or not; everyone was affected. So, there were community kitchens, activities for the children, all sorts of workshops. Theatre, music, painting ... all sorts. And people who went along to get involved; local people, who at the time were forming groups ... slightly more extreme groups to fight the dictatorship. So, there were ties to people that you didn't know too. And that was pretty normal, but there was also a lot of joy, a lot of companionship, a feeling that people were there beside you. That's why I was saying that I don't remember being scared of certain things. (Singer, born in 1975)

Elsewhere, the fight against the dictatorship is narrated in epic fashion with the depiction of heroic left-wing militants who, in the 1980s, committed themselves to an insurrectional solution to the tyranny of the military regime. Our subjects' solidarity with the previous generations derives from the fact that there was neither activism nor a sense that any real transformation of society was possible during their own lived experience of the postdictatorship years. However, they grew up hearing social narratives of past heroism, political organized class struggle for social change, and strong political commitment, which contrasted with their cultural frameworks.

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Those experiences can also bring up old traumatic links, as one artist told us:

> When I arrived, I realized all those women were ex-detainees or from that generation. There were only two or three of us who were sort of daughters of that generation . . . . With this group of women . . . it's like . . . all the things that one didn't know about . . . or there were lots of things that weren't talked about . . . at least in my house . . . well, they were talked about, but very little. And, although there was . . . although my mother was very connected, my biological father too—he was a Mirista—despite that, it wasn't talked about. Nobody wanted to talk about it, y'know? So here [at the *arpillería* or patchwork art workshop for ex-detainees] . . . I said to myself, this is my opportunity to get involved with this and find out about it straight from the horse's mouth . . . I found the sessions really intense . . . I cried. I couldn't concentrate on my sewing . . . the situation was overwhelming. They weren't very detailed testimonies, but just being there and sharing with someone who had had such intense experiences . . . that still hit hard . . . . I started going . . . we would often start sewing and we'd begin to get to know one another, to form relationships with them. It was a big group. Very big . . . Perhaps it's my desire to learn because I . . . being from the next generation . . . I'm interested in that link. I think that's what interests me about being there; to keep working on it, to go further into it. (*Arpillería* artist, born in 1976)[4]

The melancholy toward the socialist political project, framed at that time under a class-struggle political framework, which was led by the previous generation and crushed by the military dictatorship, is part of what is felt to have been lost. Lost because they did not themselves have the biographical opportunity to form part of that revolutionary movement; lost because they feel unable to fulfill the utopian project themselves; lost because they empathize with the trauma left behind by the human rights violations suffered by the previous generation. We argue that this loss constitutes a melancholic structure in the sense proposed by Butler (2003) in that it allows them to appropriate those residual values by shaping their structure of feeling.

The affective force of the past in the present

The feelings interviewees described stem from an affective identification with past cultural formations, encompassing affects, values, and social narratives. However, they perceive themselves as reappropriating seemingly older or out-of-sync values with postdictatorial Chile. As one writer explained:

> When you asked me at the beginning how and why I wrote about this subject or why I wrote in this way, I immediately thought of a documentary that aired on Channel 7, on TVN [the national television channel], which featured Chilean documentaries. They showed one about the victims of the Caravan of Death in the north. During the introduction, the presenter said, "I know this subject has been covered many times already, but I hope you like the documentary. I put a lot of effort into it." It made me wonder, are we bored of this issue? At some point, did we as a society become fatigued by it, or is that just my perception? It feels like everyone is asking themselves why we don't focus on something else—something more entertaining. (Writer, born in 1981)

[4] A Mirista is a militant member of the Chilean extreme-left movement Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR), formed in 1965.

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The perception of valuing nonmainstream values might be conceptualized as residual elements present in generational change. As Williams (1978, 2005) posits, every social context contains residual elements of the past that persist alongside social transformations. These residual elements are affects and narratives that have been devalued, replaced, or rendered nondominant. Although these residuals may no longer hold a dominant position, they can still be transmitted, inhabited, and incorporated into present cultural production from earlier historical periods. This residual identification with past political forms contributes to the generation's identity making and explains their distance from the perceived current dominant values of individualism. Instead, they emphasize the significance of past political imaginaries as a cultural contestation of the present. Their empathetic affect is rooted in various forms of intergenerational ties.

Residual elements stem from the appreciation of social justice initiatives led by the Popular Unity government between 1970 and 1973, the struggles against the dictatorship, and the sense of belonging to a political community unified by solidarity. As a singer from Valparaíso expressed:

> Despite all the terror inflicted by the dictatorship, I think there were also positive outcomes, including the emergence of individuals like me, like my sister and many others, who chose to take responsibility for their own history, for their family history and the history of our country. (Singer, born in 1975)

In this context, they experience and mobilize an intergenerational affect rooted in the loss of a form of political engagement established by previous generations, which was framed at that time as a class struggle. Although they participate not in class struggle politics, but in cultural memory practices, their memory work pertains to the recovery or reappropriation of older projects and collective practices associated with social justice and a sense of political community. For example, one interviewee who had no prior direct connections to the dictatorship described how an audiovisual project enabled him to meet the mother of a disappeared person, with whom he went on to forge strong affective ties. In another example, a documentarian shared how crucial it was for her to feel the close support of filmmakers from the previous generation when creating her first documentary on memory. Despite experiencing some tensions with first-generation activists regarding tastes and management styles, site activists also described their development of strong affective bonds with certain individuals from that earlier generation.

It is interesting to note that while our interviewees expressed a sense of melancholy regarding collective projects—invested in their processing of trauma—they did not actively engage in collective associations or practices. Instead, our interviewees often approached their work from an individualistic perspective, frequently describing their cultural production as occurring in isolation. This may stem from several factors, including the lack of collective initiatives and the competitive nature of national funding for cultural production in Chile, where individuals must vie for limited resources. Additionally, this trend may reflect a broader societal process of individualization. However, site activists do characterize their work as a collective endeavor. For instance, a memory site activist from Valparaíso shared how they became involved in working at the site:

> Politically, it was about finding myself fighting in different spaces, influenced by the older generations who fought, especially those from the 1980s, who are closest to me. In Valparaíso, I met them during various protests and became actively involved in the ——— Collective around the end of 2014 or beginning of 2015. We successfully secured a lease for what's now the Casa de Memoria, and we built it up from there. Our work is divided in two areas: the Casa de Memoria, which extends the collective's activities, and the collective itself, which focuses more on political engagement

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> regarding human rights and memory. The Casa de Memoria serves as a space for sharing these activities with the community, making them more open and accessible, especially in Valparaíso. So, that's that. (Site activist, born in 1981)

This melancholy does not necessarily preclude a critical stance toward preceding generations. Some interviewees express skepticism regarding the notion of the heroic militant, having personally experienced the costs associated with such roles. Nevertheless, in their reflections on their motivations for engaging in their work, we observe a shared sentiment of productive melancholy toward residual values. For instance, one filmmaker recalled that her initial idea for a film was to resurrect part of the utopian project of the Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR) as a means of channeling her search for meaningful political involvement, which she felt was lacking in Chile at the time. Our subjects' solidarity with the first generation is also rooted in the absence of their own generational utopia for societal transformation.

The sense of admiration for, and strong ethical ties to, the previous generation—combined with criticism of their own—leads them to perceive themselves as secondary actors, overshadowed by the epic narratives of earlier social activists, whom they regard as the true historical figures of significance. As one novelist shared with us:

> I felt that this subject, or the way the issue [the dictatorship] was addressed, always drowned out the voices of those who hadn't been protagonists but were, as Alejandro Zambra states in *Formas de volver a casa*, secondary actors. Those of us who had been speaking in a low voice [a reference to the novel titled *En voz baja*] because the leading voices of the discourse were the parents ... it was kind of a desire to narrate from a place that has been silenced. (Writer, born in 1970).

As the interviewee continued:

> I find it interesting that the narrative that comes later is that of the children. It's about recovery because we don't want to be orphans; we want to be sons and daughters to reclaim that space that's been lost. So, that's why the feeling of returning home is so meaningful .... "Let's put ourselves down on paper." In Zambra's novel and in Alia Trabucco's there are even scenes in which they're putting on their parents' clothes. So, "Let's put ourselves in our parents' shoes." Ultimately, it's not a case of "Let's deny it, let's kill our father"; it's "What would we have done?" (Writer, born in 1970).

Expanding the language of human rights to an emergent social critique

The intergenerational links described here inspire a commitment to social justice activism. As one interviewee noted:

> One thing is political commitment, but that generates commitment that goes beyond friendship. You join the older generation's fight for what they lost, as it were, but you also start to share projects for today. I mean, the desire to fight for one's companions hasn't faded, even after so long. What has changed are the new reflections regarding how far we could take it, why we didn't do such-and-such, and the different contexts. But there is a will to contribute, to fight ... So, that debate and that issue develop into a wonderful fraternity; it's not just about ideological discussions or learning things, but sharing experiences. And you begin to relate it to your childhood. I lived through nine years of the dictatorship. (Memory activist, born in 1981).

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Those expressions are part of the emergent social critiques articulated by our interviewees. On the one hand, they adopt a language of human rights, while on the other hand, they voice strong criticisms of the transitional justice processes implemented by postdictatorship democratic governments. They leverage the language of human rights to highlight the limited impact of these processes concerning institutional justice and their effectiveness in addressing the perpetrators of state violence. The human rights paradigm has fostered a generational language of social critique among them.

In their negotiation with the moral frameworks of the 1990s and 2000s, this generation has developed a more expansive understanding of human rights, critiquing what they collectively describe as a "neoliberal model," particularly in reference to the privatization of social rights. In some instances, their assessment of recent history is intertwined with a historical narrative of long-term structural abuses and social oppression, accessed through a profound memory linked to cultural trauma:

> Ultimately, one way or another, Latin America is essentially one country—a place where the same events have occurred and repeated themselves over and over again, almost like a pattern, right? It made me reflect on the bloody tradition in Latin America that began with the arrival of the Spanish, who were nothing more than soldiers [*milicos*] who came here and caused immense disruption. That's the issue, right? (Writer, born in 1973)

The expanded language of human rights also functions as a contested moral ground for promoting social justice in the present, or an ethical commitment to supporting communities currently experiencing human rights abuses, including indigenous peoples, immigrants from poorer countries in the context of rising Latin American migration, women or individuals belonging to LGBTQ+ groups:[6]

> My connection to the area of human rights hasn't stemmed from incidents that directly affected my family members, not at all; instead, it arises primarily from human empathy and a political alignment with leftist ideas. I have a historical interest in this field and a genuine desire to ensure that certain chapters of our recent history are never repeated. Furthermore, I aim to amplify our commitment to respecting human rights in various contexts, extending beyond the scope of the dictatorship. (Audiovisualist, born in 1976)

Or as the singer interviewed explained, she chooses songs by Violeta Parra that address contemporary political issues, such as "Arauco tiene una pena," which highlights Indigenous repression in the south.[7] This song, and others like it, gained popularity during the later months of the demonstrations:

> We decided to put together a repertoire that reflects not only Violeta's life but also the shared experiences we all have to some extent. In this aspect, which is deeply political and highly relevant, Violeta's lyrics resonate powerfully. We included certain songs that align with our political commitment, such as "El santo padre," "Miren cómo sonríen," "Arauco tiene una pena." These songs hold significance that Violeta

[6] The internationalization of the Indigenous movement and the campaign for the release of Mapuche political prisoners since the late 1990s are crucial for understanding its significance in Chile. During the social protests of 2019, the Mapuche flag emerged as a symbol of social discontent.

[7] Arauco, a province in southern Chile, has historically been inhabited by the Mapuche, even after the Spanish arrived (1541–1604). The Mapuche continued to have sovereignty over their territories until the Pacific War (1879–1882).

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recognized in her time; they originate from the past and remain relevant today. Through Violeta's songs, we express our current political stance. (Singer, born in 1975)

This activist's perspective is echoed and summarized by a site activist:

That's the Casa de Memoria, because the collective is rooted in the subject of memory. This memory is not solely associated with horror—the human rights perspective extends beyond the violations committed by the dictatorship against the Chilean people. It encompasses how human rights continue to be violated today, often in more subtle and sophisticated ways. Ultimately, the violations that occurred during the dictatorship were intended to impose a model that aimed to neutralize and annihilate a specific political sector. Although they attempted to achieve this, it didn't work entirely, yet the project continued; today, the model is a product of that process.

We, as a collective, have engaged in various struggles, many of which have experienced resurgence. Education, as a central pillar, is perhaps the greatest motivator. The issues surrounding the Mapuche people are particularly pronounced in the sacrifice zones, as well as during environmental disasters. There's a declaration of interest and a concerted effort to raise awareness of these issues. Neither the collective nor the *Casa de Memoria* seek to push a particular agenda or proclaim a specific purpose; rather, they aim to raise awareness, broaden perspectives, and highlight the ongoing relevance of the struggles against a model established during the dictatorship. (Memory activist, born in 1981)

Memory-inspired cultural production and activism have evolved into a political practice that mobilizes international discourses on human rights while intersecting with nationalistic political narratives and agendas (see, e.g., Gutman 2017). In light of these human, political, and social rights concepts, our analysis explores how interviewees understand and articulate their emergent forms of political participation.

Conclusions

From the 2000s onward, a broadened cultural narrative surrounding the trauma experienced by Chilean society during its seventeen-year military dictatorship was appropriated and reinterpreted in various spaces, communities, and platforms by a generation of cultural producers and trauma carriers. The children of Pinochet have activated the memory of the military coup and redefined its significance, including the experience of growing up during the dictatorship. This cultural processing of trauma, through the memory work of a generation, has expanded the community of remembrance in contemporary Chile. On the one hand, this generation's cultural production often reflects melancholic and intimate recollections of the dictatorial period and its lingering effects. On the other hand, the generation has expressed a sense of estrangement from the present, mobilizing and activating cultural discontent.

We highlight the role of affects and emotions in the generational framing of traumatic memories in postcoup Chile, proposing that generational memory is grounded in an intergenerational bond characterized by a melancholic affect toward the previous generation—one that is linked to their experiences of repression and resistance during the dictatorship, as well as a malaise regarding the current state of affairs and accompanied by intragenerational bonds that are perceived as weak.

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To deepen the analysis, we propose an unconventional theoretical framework for memory studies, drawing on Raymond Williams's perspective regarding the close connection between cultural production and intergenerational affective bonds. We believe that his concept of structure of feeling provides a more compelling explanation for our findings about the melancholy observed, showing the role of affects in processing cultural trauma and the emergence of a new language for social critique.

Moreover, we propose that the discourse of human rights provides the children of Pinochet with a framework for evaluating both the past—specifically the violations committed by the dictatorship—and the present, characterized by the enduring consequences of neoliberal economic policies implemented during the dictatorship and perpetuated by subsequent democratic governments. We contend that these intergenerational ties have become the creative forces driving our narrators' efforts to produce memories and mediate national trauma, contributing to the construction of expanded meanings of human rights.

Our research has also illuminated the intergenerational bonds among a generation of memory producers who carry a cultural trauma experienced in the country fifty years ago but one that remains at the center of a political divide. We have approached the concept of generations as a social location (Mannheim 1952). As demonstrated in our analysis, trauma carriers activate a memory that is deeply rooted in the history of class conflict. This raises questions about the relationship between generational memory and class-based identifications. However, further research is necessary to clarify the relationship between carriers based on generational positions and specific class formations.

Finally, these findings illuminate the cultural production of memories among the second generation in the Southern Cone. In these cases, the emphasis has been on production rather than the subjects of the generation itself. However, it would be speculative to assert that a similar bond has emerged in these contexts, particularly in Argentina, where a group of second-generation cultural producers has developed a more radical critique of the previous generation, as demonstrated in various studies (Blejmar 2016). Future comparative research is necessary to gain a deeper understanding of these intergenerational bonds.

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