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Memories of Exile and Temporary Return: Chilean Exiles Remember Chile

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Abstract:

The exile after the military coup of 1973 has been the largest emigration flow in Chilean history. Using oral histories of Chilean exiles collected in the Midwest of the United States as evidence, I describe and analyze their memories of Chile during President Allende's government and compare them with their memories of recent visits to Chile. I argue that in order to begin recuperating the memory of exile we need to understand the complex relations between the process of exile, the memories of the country of origin, and the nation-state. I conclude this article by proposing that memory not only relates to the remembrance of things past, but also how that remembrance is projected into the present and future as a way of describing the construction of identities, citizenship, and the nation-state. These constructions are a central component of the connections former exiles want to have with the country of origin, including their inclusion in the nation's history.

Keywords: Chile, Exile, Memory, Home-country visits

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¿Sabes una cosa? Quiero a mi madre, que es lo que me queda allá, quiero a mis muertos, quiero a la casa de la higuera, que ya no existe, quiero al mar de Orzan, quiero a los recuerdos, buenos o malos, pero no me pidas que ame a mi país.¹

Introduction

Sitting in his mid-western suburban home, José Miguel reflected on the Chilean military coup that led to his political emigration to the US:

The military coup and the whole period of the military government was a very traumatic thing for my generation, for Chile, but for my generation...[it] affected us in a very direct way...that marked my life, so it is hard for me to know how my life would have been if I had stayed there.²

The Chilean military coup of 11 September 1973—or *Once* (11th) as it is known—that deposed President Salvador Allende (1970-1973) and his coalition government *Unidad Popular* (UP), is a pivotal point in the history of Chile as a state, as a nation, and as a society. This event created what Alexander (2004) calls a “cultural trauma”;³ an occurrence remembered by

¹ Manuel Rivas, *La mano del emigrante* (Madrid: Alfaguara, 2001), page 20.

² This interview took place on 29 January 2011. I collected these oral histories in Spanish as part of a larger project on Chilean migration to the US since the 1950s. Michigan State University’s Human Research Protection Program revised and approved this research and the oral history protocol. The names I use are pseudonyms. Translations of the quotes are my own.

³ For Alexander, cultural trauma ‘occurs when members of a collective feel they have been

everyone who lived through it (Joignant 2007). One political weapon used by the dictatorship to attempt silencing dissent—as other Latin American regimes had done in the past—was to exile the opposition (Sznajder and Roniger 2009). One central characteristic of the Chilean exile during Pinochet’s dictatorship—as was also the case for other 1970s South American dictatorships—was the transformation of exile from a short-term event associated with political elites, to the largest political emigration in the history of the country (Wright and Oñate 2012). According to some authors, at least 200,000 people left Chile between 1973 and 1990 because of political persecution (Sznajder and Roniger 2009; Wright and Oñate 2012). Other authors, such as Norambuena (2000), estimates that over 400,000 people left Chile as exiles. Only a small percentage of those who left returned permanently to Chile at the end of the dictatorship (Norambuena 2000). In this article, I use oral histories of Chilean exiles who remained abroad to discuss the complex relations between political emigrants, their memories of their home country, and the nation-state.

While the term exile most commonly refers to the diaspora resulting from the military dictatorship, there are important nuances in how Chileans left the country during this period. The day of the coup, the military swiftly closed Chile’s international borders and suspended international flights for ten days, while at the same time converted military barracks, stadiums, ships, and other buildings into concentration camps. This made leaving the country extremely difficult for well-known leftist political elites, political activists, and foreigners who were

subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways’ (2004: 1).

participating in the UP government. Thousands sought asylum in diplomatic missions. Usually, after negotiations between the mission and the dictatorship, the government allowed these asylees to leave the country. Shortly after, in November 1973, the dictatorship adopted Decree Law 81, and a year later, in August 1974, Decree Law 604. These two laws gave the dictatorship unconditional authority to expel Chileans, thus giving exile a legal framework (Norambuena 2000; Wright and Oñate 2012). In 1975, after negotiating with several international organizations, the dictatorship adopted Decree Law 504. This law commuted political prisoners' sentences with expulsion from the country. Along with these 'legal' exiles, their families as well as many others who suffered harassment, incarceration, or torture left in the early years of the dictatorship (Wright and Oñate 2012). Finally, the economic crisis of the early 1980s created a new exile. The dictatorship's structural adjustment policies and increasing political repression during the 1980s anti-government protests led many to emigrate (Norambuena 2000). Estimates indicate that close to 52% of all exiles and political emigrants left Chile between 1973 and 1976; 16.3% between 1977 and 1980; and close to 10% between 1981 and 1984. About 76% of the total number of exiles during the dictatorship left the country with their families (Norambuena 2000). While these numbers shed light on the mass movement of people produced by the dictatorship, it does not provide a better understanding of the memories and migration processes of the exiles.

Nations that have gone through massive collective traumas, as those produced by the Southern Cone dictatorships, have had to engage in multiple processes of national reconciliation. A central component of this reconstruction has been is the recognition of the role that collective

memory plays in these processes.⁴ These processes, however, are yet to be completed; the memories of the period are still a disputed field, as continuous comments by politicians in the Southern Cone countries praising the dictatorial regimes attest. In this article, I argue that bringing the voices of the exiles and their experiences to the debate of collective memory adds a new layer of complexity to the process of nation reconciliation and its reconstruction. Thus, it enriches this process by adding exiles from afar who were forcibly separated from the nation but who remain members of the nation-state.

In this paper, I analyze exiles' memories of Allende's government, and of their visits to Chile. In terms of temporality, I center my analysis on those who left Chile between 1973 and 1976 and who have visited the country since 1987, the year before the plebiscite leading to the end of Pinochet's dictatorship. I discuss the role home country visits play in the reestablishment of connections between exiles and their home nation. I also analyze the constructions of fear as a component of the process of reconnection with the home country. In general, I argue that unlike other human rights violations, and despite the growing literature on exile, Chile has not yet come to terms with the process of exile. While scholars and the state have extensively documented the dictatorship's assassinations, torture, and disappearances, and there are multiple memory sites for its victims, the disappearance of national and personal dreams has yet to be explored. I propose here, that in order to begin recovering the memory of exile, we need to understand the influence of the dictatorship in the exiles' memories of the nation.

This article comprises five sections. After explaining the method of collecting the oral

⁴The literatures on memory and the importance of memory in national reconciliation is vast and is not my objective here to engage directly with this field.

histories, I introduce the discussion about memory in Chile and the complexities of developing a memory of Chilean exile. Following this context, I center my analysis on three memories: (1) Memories of Allende's government, which are memories of a loved but failed project, and memories that influence their current understanding of Chile; (2) Memories of home visits, or how exiles make sense of the everyday life they left behind; and (3) Memories of fears, which comprise the continuous effects of cultural trauma in the exile's notion of national belonging. I conclude this paper by restating the role of recuperating the memory of exiles as a central component of the construction of the nation.

Methods

To obtain an in-depth understanding of the conditions of exile to the United States (US) and the memories of this process, I conducted oral histories with Chileans who left the country as exiles between 1973 and 1976. Because of the supporting role the US government played in the coup itself and the dictatorship, this country received very few Chilean exiles. According to Sznajder and Roniger (2009: 233), as of 1984, only 1.3% of all exiles resided in the US. This partly explains the almost inexistent literature on Chilean exile to the US, except for Eastmond's work analyzing the reception and incorporation of a community of exiles in California (Eastmond 1997). From those who I interviewed, and which stories are part of this article, three came as humanitarian parolees directly to the US. Two others left Chile as children with their families to Panama and Belgium, following their fathers' release from prison by the Decree Law 504; later moving to the US as adults. Two others came to study in the US. In the first case, his parents sent him to the US out of concern for his political activism. In the second case, he left with his mother for Mexico, later lived in Mozambique—where there was a significant exile

community—before moving to the US. These Chileans left the country because the dictatorship harassed them or their parents at their workplaces, fired them for political reasons, imprisoned them, and/or suffered torture. I collected these oral histories between 2010 and 2011 in the US’ Midwest.⁵

This method is “a powerful tool for discovering, exploring and evaluating the nature of the process of historical memory—how people make sense of their past, how they connect individual parts of the present, and how people use it to interpret their lives and the world around them” (Frisch 1990, cited in Hamilton and Shopes 2008: ix). Using oral histories to research the memories of exiles helped me establish connections between the social actor and history. I use them as *sociological generalizations*. These are “claims that a given personal narrative illuminates a particular social position or social-structural location in a society of institution or social process and that it illustrates how agency can operate in this locus” (Maynes et al 2008: 129).

My analysis focuses on the discussion of three memories: a) the memories of Allende’s government; b) the memory of home visits, and c) the memory of fear. These memories were present in all the oral histories. I used them as codes to comprehend the organizing frameworks of the relations between the exiles and Chile. These memories are not only relevant to my interviewees; other scholars have found similar recollections in their research with Chilean exiles (Rebolledo 2006; Wright and Oñate 1998; Kay 1987).

⁵ In this paper, I used the most representative oral histories of Chilean exiles. I also interviewed two other people who did not leave the country for political reasons in the same period. I also interviewed four others who left Chile for political reasons between 1982 and 1989.

Memory in Post Dictatorial Chile

Conceptualizing memory in the social sciences is extraordinarily relevant to understand how a nation's future is constructed. Memory is more than the chronology of past things, but the meaning that certain past occurrences have (or are given) in the present (Lechner and Güell 2006). Memory is the dimension of time that deals with the present of past things, the present of present things, and the present of future things (Ricœur 1984). Members of the nation—regardless of where they live—construct notions of social order, form collective memories, and define the type of nation they seek to build by considering the intersection of these three components of memory. In the case of post-dictatorial Chile, the creation of this collective memory is still part of a struggle that will define the future of the nation, state, and society. Following Lechner and Güell (2006), memory is more than administering the past; it is how we relate to a past that frames both our present and the collective construction of the future.

We can separate the social and historical processes of post-dictatorial Chile, which contextualizes my discussion of memory and exile, into two demarked periods: before 1998 and after 1998. The event that marks this separation is Pinochet's detention in The London Clinic on 16 October 1998. By this date, almost an entire decade had passed since the end of the dictatorship in 1991 and the fears, or at least the uncertainties that had marked Patricio Aylwin's government had dissipated. In terms of human rights reparations, Aylwin's government (1990-1994) had brought, in his own words, "justice within reasonable possibilities" (Aylwin 1990: 325). As Stern (2006) argues, the first government of the *Concertación*⁶ had run its course

⁶ The *Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia*, commonly known as the *Concertación*, is

through impasses and negotiations between reinstating rights, bringing some judicial light to human rights abuse, protecting the nation from a return to dictatorship, and offering a commitment to truth. The second government of the *Concertación* started in March 1994 with the inauguration of Eduardo Frei Ruiz-Tagle (1994-2000).

Between 1994 and 1998, two “souls” coexisted in Chile. The first soul was that of a Latin American economic “jaguar”—drawing a parallel to the Southeast Asian economic “tigers.” The government portrayed an image showing how the country had left the dictatorial past behind and had become a paradigmatic example for peaceful and secure economic development, as well as a place where political and public institutions worked (Frei Ruiz-Tagle 2000). The country’s economic elites, benefiting from this new normality, argued that any attempts to recover the memory of the human rights abuses would interfere with economic growth and development; an argument that was successfully installed in the nation (Moulian 1997).

The second soul was the constant struggle to construct a collective memory of the dictatorship and of human rights abuses. Along with the commemorative acts surrounding *el Once* and other emblematic dates, there were continuous and severe attempts to recover memory in Chile (Joignant 2010). During this period, Chileans observed the first inaugurations of spaces of memory, new trials against military officers for cases of human rights abuses, the detention and incarceration of Miguel Contreras—the leader of Pinochet’s secret police, the *Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional* (DINA)—and finally the detention of Pinochet in London.

As a dormant volcano suddenly becomes active, memory erupted over Chile on 16

the conglomerate of center and center-left parties formed to participate in the 1988 Plebiscite that defeated Pinochet. The *Concertación* governed between 1990 and 2010.

October 1998 as Chileans awoke to the news of the detention of Pinochet in London. Pinochet, still a Senator for life and thus immune from arrest in Chile, had been detained for the death and disappearances of Spanish citizens through a judicial request from the Spanish Judge Baltazar Garzón. This episode brought not only the topic of the memory of human rights to the forefront of discussion in the everyday life of Chileans, but also gave pre-eminence to the memory debate—which up until then had had very little space within the Chilean democratic transition.

Pinochet's detention opened a 'Pandora's Box' of memory. In earnest, civil society began addressing questions about the future of the nation, which until then had only been vaguely considered by the political system. According to various polls, until October 1998, a majority of the country supported some sort of retributive justice on human rights cases. The political and economic elites, however, considered the memory of the dictatorship an inappropriate and irrelevant topic of national debate and concern (Lechner and Güell 2006; Stern 2006).

Starting in 1998, the idea, relevance, and effects of memory have become visible to the entire nation. Since Pinochet's detention, Chilean society has seen his trials in England, his return to the country, resignation from the Senate, several trials in Chile, and his death in 2006. From a perspective of cultural production, during these two decades, Chilean cinema has produced several successful films on the military coup and the period of the dictatorship, as well as television channels have begun to address the theme of memory and dictatorship in their programming (Sorensen 2009). The commemoration of the thirtieth anniversary of the coup in 2003 led to the publication of several books of memoirs and to an important growth in the academic analysis on memory (Garretón 2003). The inauguration of *El Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos* (MMDH - Museum of Memory and Human Rights) in 2010 coalesced in one place the work on sites and places of memory (Norambuena 2012). Finally, in 2013, the

commemoration of the 40 years of the fall of Allende reignited the discussion about memory in the country and led to numerous political acts and social mobilizations related to the coup and to the dictatorship (Waldman 2014). At the center of these discussions, recollections, and representations, however, have almost entirely involved situations that happened within the geographical borders of Chile. There was no place for the role of the memory of exile; this has been all but left outside of the (re)construction of Chile after the dictatorship.

Exile in Chilean Memory

The vast literature on the human rights violations during the period of military dictatorships has centered mostly on the *desaparecidos* and on torture; only recently a systematic body of social science research has emerged about exile. As Rebolledo (2006) has argued, while exile was a theme of constant concern among those who fought against the dictatorship both inside Chile and abroad, as a theme, exile became considerably less relevant once the dictatorship ended and exile—as an internal policy—legally ended. Until present, exile has not been an important component of the two official Truth Commissions in post-dictatorship Chile: the Rettig Commission and the Valech Commission. At the same time, while there are several memory sites dedicated to those tortured, murdered, and who disappeared; there are no memory sites dedicated to exile.⁷ Most of the social sciences scholarly literature on the dictatorship produced in Chile has centered on the sociological and political origins of the dictatorship and

⁷ The website <http://www.memoriasdelexilio.cl> developed in 2014 by the MMDH as part of its theme ‘Exile and Asylum’ is an exception. There, former exiles can upload short recollections, memories, and testimonies about their experience.

democratic transition, or on testimonial and journalistic literature on executions and torture. Only recently have Chilean social science researchers researched and published about exile in Chile (a few examples are Rebolledo 2006; Norambuena 2000; Del Pozo 2006). Nevertheless, during and after the dictatorship, exile was a recurrent theme in literature, music, biographies, and film (Roniger 2016; Wright and Oñate 1998; 2012).⁸

The reason for a lack of Chilean public interest and scholarship towards exile in the post-dictatorship years is two-fold. On the one hand, the dictatorship continuously criticized those who left the country for political reasons. The regime presented them as traitors who were constantly plotting against the nation and its values, as well as framing them as living a “golden exile”, travelling around Europe funded by their political parties (Rebolledo 2006: 16; Wright and Oñate 2012:149). On the other hand, the *Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria* (MIR – Leftist Revolutionary Movement), argued that exiles were cowards. The MIR stated in 1973 that, unlike other leftist movements, party members were not going to seek asylum to attempt leaving the country. Promoting the slogan “*El MIR no se asila*” (the MIR will not seek asylum), most of its cadres remained in Chile after the coup. By establishing this political stance, the MIR implied that those who left Chile were trying to save themselves and thus abandoned the struggle, while

⁸ On the contrary, cultural production on Chilean exile has been vast. Just to name a few: Raul Ruiz’s film *Dialogues of Exiles* screened in Paris in 1975; the publication of the journal *Araucaria de Chile* published in exile between 1978 and 1990; the short stories and novels of Carlos Cerda, Fernando Alegría, Antonio Skarmeta, and Isabel Allende, among many others; and the music of Inti-Illimani, Quilapayun, Canto Nuevo, Patricio Manns, and many other well-known musicians of the *Nueva Canción Chilena* era.

people inside Chile suffered the repression from the dictatorship.

Many of those who returned in the later years of the dictatorship and after it ended—nicknamed *los retornados*—had obtained degrees from European or US universities and brought back new customs, different from those who stayed during the “cultural blackout” of the dictatorship (Correa et al 2001). Attempting to assist in the return of exiles, Alwyin’s government created the *Oficina Nacional de Retorno* (National Office of Return), which gave these *retornados* tax breaks for importing goods, facilitated the homologation of higher education diplomas, among other benefits (Correa et al 2001). These benefits only helped fuel resentment toward *los retornados*, up to a point where it was not acceptable to mention in public that one had been an exile; even their extended families avoided mentioning the time of exile. For many relatives of former exiles and for the public, particularly in the early 1990s, those who left as exiles were perceived to have had to leave because they had done something wrong, or illegal (Rebolledo 2006; Wright and Oñate 2012).⁹

Until the late 1990s, it seemed that exile—as numerically relevant as it was—was irrelevant to the writing of large-scale national histories. Even historians excluded from history

⁹ Many citizens in these countries normalized the idea that if someone had been detained, killed, or exiled during the Southern Cone dictatorships, was because they had done something bad, as a sort of denial against the obvious human rights abuses. For many, it was not impossible to believe that the same organizations built to protect citizens—the police, for example—were guilty of such horrendous crimes. Therefore, many people believed that those exiled, and to a lesser extent those who were killed, got what they deserved, since most likely they committed a crime against the nation (Melissa 2009).

survey books published at the end of century. Books like *Historia del siglo XX chileno* (Correa et al 2000) and Loveman's *Chile: The Legacy of Hispanic Capitalism* (2001), for example, barely touch on the topic of exile. It seemed, that societies in the process of reconciliation—as Chile was in the 1990s—attempted to forget and hide the life experiences of exiles because the study of exile yields unpleasantness of the past (Cancino 2003).

However, as historical and sociological research shows, exile is part of the nation; the personal and social experiences of exile and national construction are inextricably linked (Norambuena 2000). In sum, personal narrative histories of exile present an everyday perspective and humanize the fears, dangers, failures, and successes of those who were compelled to leave. The sole narratives, however, do not explain completely the complexities of exile and its connections with larger historical processes. We need to complement these narratives with comparative studies in receiving countries to study the multiple effects that exile has had on Chile (Del Pozo 2006; Sznajder and Roniger 2009).

Beginning in the late 1990s, many authors have sought to develop a more theoretically informed understanding of Chilean exile. This new “generation” of scholarship attempts to provide interdisciplinary macro explanations to exile using personal narratives, governmental documents, and archives, as well as other sources (Sznajder and Roniger 2009; Roniger et al 2012; Coraza de los Santos and Gatica 2016). Nevertheless, the vast impact of exile on the nation is still understudied.

On the one hand, most research production has focused on the permanent return of exiles and their impact on the political transition, as well as on the cultural production in home countries. We have yet to uncover exile's location within the Southern Cone dictatorships' policies against their opposition. Comparative analyses dealing with exile's multidimensionality,

including personal, collective, local, national, regional, and global experiences also remain unexplored. While there has been some cross-country comparative efforts, this literature is still scarce (Del Pozo 2006; Sznajder and Roniger 2009; Doña-Reveco 2012; Roniger et al 2012; Calandra 2013; Roniger et al 2018). These analyses are critical to the construction of future societies—in the home and receiving countries—and to the reconstruction of nations that have suffered political and social traumas.

Fue una Experiencia muy Linda: Remembering the Dream

For those who supported Allende, his triumph on 4 September 1970 marked the beginning of a new era. Finally, in the midst of strong political and social polarization, the *Chilean road to Socialism* was to become a reality. For many scholars, social and popular mobilizations of the 1960s and early 1970s prelude the military coup of 1973 (Correa et al. 2001). In contrast to this, my interviewees argue that this period was a moment in Chile's history when politics were not only central within every individual act but was also a time to construct a new nation.

José Miguel, for example, began participating in politics in 1971 in his junior year in a public high school and the UP government was just beginning. Until then, he had lived an upper middle-class life, including attending private schools. According to him, the discourse of Allende's campaign influenced him to change to a public school to observe how Chile really was, becoming "a sympathizer of the Socialist Party," as he self-identified. He remembers Allende's government as a highly politicized time. He told me: "I was very involved in the political situation because it was very much a part of the environment; it was a very different life to that which is lived now...Politics permeated everything." The increasing relevance of

everyday political actions pulsed throughout the country.

In Punta Arenas, in the far south of Chile, Álvaro had a similar understanding of political life in Chile. As a teenager, he had been an active participant in the Socialist Party's youth, and during the UP government became the executive director of a state-owned tourism company. This company funded vacations for working class families on *estancias* expropriated by the government during the land reform process. Álvaro recalls his experiences campaigning for Allende and later working for his government as "a beautiful experience." For him, this experience would allow him to fulfill "a dream, a chance to change everything, to turn everything, everything upside down."

Edgardo, born in 1954, shared similar memories of his participating in politics and helping create, as he called it, "a new Chile." Before becoming an exile, he lived in the Southern part of the Atacama Desert, an area of mining and vineyards known as *El Norte Chico*. Edgardo's political influence comes from his father, a white-collar worker and union leader at a copper mine. He remembers participating actively in politics from very early in his childhood; politics touching all aspects of his life. He told me, "leftist political influence in my house was very strong. I was always in that environment." He proudly recalls Allende visiting his house frequently. During Allende's 1964 presidential campaign, Edgardo distributed political propaganda throughout the mine's company town in El Salvador.¹⁰ For him, being a politically active adolescent felt normal.

Edgardo joined the Socialist Party but was also a member of the *Frente de Estudiantes*

¹⁰ Allende ran for president twice before his 1970 election, once in 1958 and a second time in 1964.

Revolucionarios (Front of Revolutionary Students, FER), the MIR's high school group. His joined FER to participate in the revolutionary process "in a very combative, let's say, and idealist way to work for the big achievements that the UP had offered...Not the great achievements, the great promises." His work during the UP was both political and social. As a FER member, he engaged in street fights with right-wing groups and in party politics at his high school, including leading school take-overs. What he recalls more proudly, however, is his work supplying children with half a liter of milk a day for free; a central part of Allende's social program (Corvalán 2003). In the *Norte Chico*, however, no one distributed the milk to the mountainous rural areas near his town.

... [Allende's promise of half a liter of milk] did not reach every community, because the children of the high mountains, they never got it.... because nobody was concerned with delivering it to them. A group of us got organized, supported by the Socialist party. They provided us vehicles and contacts for us to carry the milk to them and everything that they needed for a year...we did it around Christmas so we could spend time with them...we gave them toys, all kind of stuff. A group of four or five friends [traveled] on mules; thirty, forty mules with the boxes of milk, presents, and all the stuff for two days until we reached the [farthest] communities. I mean in the high mountains, practically on the border with Argentina.

As we can read in Edgardo's recollection of Allende's government, it was not only the social importance of the policies, but also how he participated in the construction of a 'new' Chile by fulfilling these policies.

Aida's father first job as an economist was to work in the administration of a state-owned

copper mine. Fulfilling a campaign promise, Allende nationalized all large copper mines in 1971 (Correa 2001). The nearest town to the copper mine was *Potrerillos*. In this town, Aida and her family lived in “a very luxurious” neighborhood that previously had housed the *American* administrators of the mine. The most beautiful of all houses, she remembers, “was the house that used to be for the main manager [of the mine] and was renamed *la Casa del Pueblo* (the People’s House) during Allende’s government and used for meetings and things.” When the *gringos* were still the owners of the mine—she told me—only the servants could enter the houses in the *American* neighborhood, but “with Allende all of that ended and everyone could enter.” Although Aida remembers the opening of this house as a signal of Allende’s commitment to social justice, for others, historical class structures were not easy to overcome. Her school friends—especially the children of miners—found it difficult to overcome historical customs, and would not visit friends living in the former *gringo* neighborhood.

During the late 1960s and 1970s, the possibility of constructing a new Chile and the clashes with the socially and politically conservative right-wing parties led many people to participate in politics. For many, this participation meant assassination or disappearance, for others, led to their exile. Regardless of the suffering of exile, this group remembers Allende’s government as a lost opportunity to develop a better nation. Their imagined construction of Chile today is grounded in their memories of life during the *UP*.

Visiting Home and the Nation

Exiles are a special type of emigrants who are continuously moving “between their past back home and their present abroad” (Sznajder and Roniger 2009: 19). Thus, exile’s memories of their home country visits constantly relate to regaining contact with things that had been part of

their everyday life. Regaining what was lost or what they missed by living abroad are important reasons for their visits (Rozinska 2011). In general for emigrants the visit home is, “a secular pilgrimage” which connects directly with construction of a migrant identity (Baldassar 2001:3). The growing literature on the relationship between home and memory argues that emigrants describe home—Chile in this case—in reference to what used to be and compare it to what currently is. This is a place that is “imagined, recreated, longed for, and remembered in the present through the diasporic imaginary” (Stock 2010: 24). Home visits are inextricably connected to the reaffirmation and maintenance of a national identity and/or a “kind of spiritual renewal” (Baldassar 2001: 44).

In Pablo’s memories, for example, going to the cemetery takes a central role during his first visit back to Chile. The dictatorship expelled Pablo via the Decree Law 504 in 1975, which did not allow him to return until 1989, a few years after the death of his mother. About this visit, he recalls, “I went back after fifteen years...and the terrible thing [was] to arrive to Chile and go to a cemetery and see on a tombstone, the name of your mother.” The experience of being away from a country for the passing of a family member is common for emigrants. The dictatorship’s policies toward exiles made this experience even more painful. The government did not legally allow many exiles to return to the country, even to mourn and bury the dead (Rebolledo 2006; Wright and Oñate 2012). Pablo was not the only one of my interviewees who lost relatives while abroad. Both of Álvaro’s parents died during his exile, as did Aida’s grandmother; neither were able to return for the burials.

In her interview, Aida presents a different type of this secular pilgrimage. During her first visit, she attempted reconnecting her personal history with the country’s history. Even though legally Aida could have returned to Chile in the last years of the dictatorship, she was only able

to do it for first time in 1991—more than 15 years after leaving. Family and personal reasons had prevented her from returning before then. On her first trip, she visited the house she had been born and lived in until the day she left with her family to Belgium. About this visit, she told me:

I went to my old house. I have the impression of looking around for my things. It was what I wanted; it was my project to go to my house, to try to find my friends. I went to the house and took pictures, for example. I found the house empty and all run down, but still standing... [for me] it was a return to recover (myself). Yes to do that a little, *to find yourself a little*. It was something very intimate. It was not easy [for] the people that had just returned. For my father it was not easy either, and yes for me it was more an *encounter with my history*.

Other interviewees who had left Chile young also discuss this search for a collective identity of being a “former” exile. For some, as in the case of Christian, being a “former” exile opens the possibility of feeling “at home” in Chile. He recalls, however, that every time he has returned to Chile has felt like a foreigner, out of place. It took him several years and visits to find that space. While visiting in 1995, he recalls, “[I] found a very open group of people who lived abroad and returned, the well-known *retornados*... that was an entire social space that I could belong to if I lived in Chile ...a space where I had a place.” This shared identity of being a *retornado* connects him with those who returned to the country and decided to stay. Finding his group, for him, meant having a connection with the nation if he decided to return permanently.

I argue that these memories of return, which respond to questions about recent home country visits while in the US, are a part of a dialectical relationship between the concepts of nostalgia and identity. Hage (2010) argues that nostalgia is a settlement strategy, not a feeling that impairs adjustment to the receiving culture. As such, the exile in this case, connects this

feeling to the construction of a possible future, a future in the receiving country. The development of a homelike or familial place helps migrants build a home in the new country (Hage 2010: 420). The possibility of developing positive feelings of nostalgia influences this settlement. Concurrently, these positive feelings of nostalgia define the type of life that migrants want to maintain abroad.

The other component of the dialectical relationship, identity—a social category that projects and receives meaning—migrates with people (Maines 1978). The existence of the home country as a mythic place, as a “presently existing space of the past”, and as an everlasting reconstruction influences the development of the exile’s identity (Hage 2010: 426; Stock 2010). Exile and the exiles’ visits to their home country, profoundly affect their social construction of identity (Baldassar 2001). It is during these return visits that exiles engage with the nation at a micro level, the level of everyday life. This engagement might reinforce the exile’s ethnic identity through the renovation of shared identity feelings with certain group of Chileans. This connection reinforces the desire that exiles have of being part of the future construction of the nation.

The Everlasting Memory of Fear

In 1998, the United Nations Development Program office in Chile (UNDP-Chile) published the report *The Paradoxes of Modernization* (UNDP 1998). In this report, the UNDP argued that, although there are relevant advances in Chilean socioeconomic development, there is growing social discomfort because the existing “model of modernization” is clearly insufficient or at least inefficient (PNUD 1998). The conclusion was that, most Chileans did not trust the state ability to support their basic needs, particularly access to retirement funds, health,

and education.

These paradoxes of modernization reflected a growing sense of fear in a post-dictatorial nation. This fear, particular to Chile in the late 1990s, clashed with the institutional country image (Frei Ruiz-Tagle 2000). While the UNDP report only studied the perceptions of those living in Chile at the time, my interviews show that former exiles—who only visit Chile for short periods—also share this fear. This fear is inherent in the construction of a nation that has become “modern” through the application of neoliberal economic policies in a dictatorial setting. The fears of the 1990s and 2000s are not the same as the fears during Pinochet’s dictatorship. After all, the fears of the post-dictatorial period did not imply the possibility of torture, death, or disappearance by the state.

Those who stayed in the country overcame those fears through a process of, in the words of Garretón (1992), catharsis and exorcism during the transition years between the dictatorship’s end and the new democratic government’s early years. The political advertisement campaign against the dictatorship for the 1988 plebiscite, with its message “without hate, without violence, and without fear” influenced this catharsis and exorcism. A second example of this catharsis and exorcism was the ceremony at the National Stadium—a dictatorship’s prison camp and torture center in 1973—on 12 March 1990, the day after the inauguration of the new democratic government. Indeed, Heraldó Muñoz, who worked with Allende and occupied diplomatic and cabinet positions in every *Concertación* government, wrote in his memoirs that this act was “a kind of ‘exorcism’ of the evils perpetrated at that place” (Muñoz 2008: 218-219).

Many exiles, due to political, family, or economic reasons, were unable to return until several years after the end of the dictatorship. Those exiles, who remained abroad and did not visit Chile during the transition period, did not go through this process of catharsis and exorcism

with the rest of the nation. In their interviewees, they mention feeling pushed aside and forgotten by the nation. This disconnection, as well as the traumatic experiences of being exiles, meant that their visits were obscured by fear. In some cases, this fear still resides within them.

Magdalena, for example, describes being fearful of sudden change, of a new coup-like situation. She began describing these fears as part of her self-evaluation of being an exile and a union organizer in Chicago.

I am very afraid. I am very afraid things would change in a second. I cannot go [again] through a situation like that [the coup]. Actually, I do not think that I have told this to anyone, as clear as I am telling you now, but I am afraid; and *these are my fears*. Not others. I am not afraid of earthquakes. I am not afraid of anything of the sort; *these are my fears*. I am afraid of the political earthquake. That suddenly, everything will change again, leaving me on the ‘losing side’. All that abuse, I do not think that I could handle it. Neither psychologically nor physically. I could not handle the abuse. I am terrified of that, and of putting my family through something like that. Here [in Chicago and as a union organizer], however, I am very brave. Here I am not afraid; in Chile, I panic...

Magdalena connects the description of her fears with her forced migration in the context of the dictatorship. Her family did not leave immediately after the coup; they left in 1975 when the dictatorship expelled her father using the Decree Law 504. They lived in Chile during the years with the highest violence and human rights abuses. Magdalena links this violence with a memory that has affected her visits. She remembers her last days in Chile as “sad, they are sad and that is why it took me so long to go back to Chile. I mean, I remember bleakness, waiting for so many days to see my father turning the corner, coming to visit us, the terror of not knowing what was

going to happen to him, our terror...I lived in a state of terror and despair.”

Magdalena is not the only one with these feelings of fear. Álvaro remembers how the first nights in Chicago made him remember his fearful last days in Chile. He mentions sirens of ambulances and street cleaning trucks awakening him at night; those sounds resembling police sirens and army trucks coming for him. These stories of fear refer to a more general policy imprinted by the military regimes of the Southern Cone, that of a “culture of fear;” defined as a “wholesale, everyday experience of human rights abuse” (Lechner 1992: 26).

Bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes, such as the Southern Cone dictatorships, besides dismantling the existent political system, and portraying themselves as the nation’s saviors from Communist domination, constructed “institutionalized systems that deliberately produced and spread fear” (Garretón 1992: 23). According to the Chilean dictatorship, the surgery to eliminate the “Marxist cancer” would not, and could not, be done overnight. This surgery included using all possible tools to eliminate the thousands of foreign extremists that, according to them, were ready to take over Chile and convert it into a Communist dictatorship (Loveman 2001). These institutionalized systems of fears mediated our relationship with the state, as Lechner argued, “no real democratization can take place unless we take responsibility for fear” (1992: 33). Hence, one of the problems influencing the exiles’ renovation of ties with the nation-state is how to overcome these fears.

Using Garretón (1992) typology of social fears in dictatorial regimes, I argue that exiles’ memories of first visits to Chile are composed of two types of fears. On the one hand, the fear of what is known, related to the memory of suffering torture directly or through a loved one. On the other, the fear of the unknown, connected to the quotidian disinformation of the changes within the country. These exiles felt these fears from the moment they landed in Chile. Pablo

remembers that shortly after landing, in his first visit in 1989—in the last year of the dictatorship—he was called to the airport’s police station. This, however, was nothing more than a misunderstanding produced by his niece, unable to recognize him. He remembers it as a fearful moment that brought back memories of his imprisonment and torture. He told his niece “remember that I was in a concentration camp and I was tortured by these people, and it is not the best way of welcoming me...I have not forgotten.”

Pablo’s story connects with his memory of political repression. While for Chileans who did not suffer torture directly, as for example Pablo’s niece, the police and the army—although feared as a body—they were still the representatives of order. Thus, people not affected by political repression, who had done nothing wrong, did not fear the police (Lechner 1992; Salerno 2009). On the contrary, for those whom the dictatorship had imprisoned or tortured, forgetting these fears was difficult. Edgardo also had a similar experience. For him visiting Chile was “an enormous pleasure to return and [at the same time caused] extreme fear.”

Álvaro, who returned for the first time in 1987, remembered his arrival to the Santiago airport in similar terms. He recalls flinching and attempting to avoid entering the country as he approached the immigration officers; he feared being detained again. During this same visit, he travelled to his hometown of Puerto Natales. His friends and family were waiting for him at the airport near Punta Arenas with “flags and banners, [I thought] here is where they get me, how can they [expose me]!” Later that day, a police officer with a list in his hand pulled over the car that was driving him to Puerto Natales. The officer looked at the list and asked him directly, by name, for his identity documents.¹¹ For him, this event showed that “[they – the dictatorship]

¹¹ Álvaro is not my only interviewees with an anecdote of being followed while visiting in the final

still had enormous control.” He concluded telling me that he did not have a good time on his first visit; he was always “a little nervous, [every night I] slept a little worried.” Álvaro’s evaluation of this trip coincides with my argument above; Chileans who stayed in the country were able to go through a process of catharsis and exorcism allowing them to regain control of their lives and confront fear. He told me “it seems that all of them [his friends], many of whom had been in prison, had already...had normalized their lives, I don’t know, [they were] speaking loudly, you know...*they had overcome fear.*”

An opposite argument could be that returning during the dictatorship would increase the memory of fear among those who suffered human rights abuses. The experience of these exiles, however, attest that continuous reencounters with the nation are required to go through a similar exorcism. This process is two-fold. On the one hand, the nation and society are recovering from fear. On the other hand, the exiles’ return allows them to engage with a healing or healed society. The narratives of Aida and Magdalena are good examples of this. Aida returned for the first time in 1990. During this visit, she argues, the fear towards the dictatorship was still apparent. She remembers that people on the streets asking her where she was from and “I would say I am the daughter of exiles and [people] would be afraid...I mentioned the word exile and [people] would not want to talk to you again.” She has returned several times since then. During a visit in the

years of the dictatorship. Pablo remembers seeing the same people repeatedly everywhere he went, he even remembers how they were dressed (“it is typical, the blue suit, the blue tie, the white shirt with black buttons”). Edgardo remembers being followed in the South of Chile where he was vacationing. This led him to cut his vacation short and quickly return to the US. These activities are another form of reinforcing fear among former exiles and political emigrants.

mid-1990s, she recalls feeling that “things [were] loosening up.” Fifteen years later, in 2010 Aida “discovered a much nicer country, the people [are] more open...now you can talk about everything without sensing that fear.”

Magdalena has a similar, albeit more personal, encounter with Chile. She returned the first time in 1995, five years after the end of the dictatorship. She recalls “[I] almost died...it was very hard. I got off the plane and I saw the police and I almost died. I almost died, I had a panic attack, luckily I was with my mom, my dad and my brother, it was the four of us...they held me because I had a huge panic attack.” It was only after visiting Chile twice that she was able to “close chapters” and feel more connected to Chile. Magdalena told me that in 1995, the press still gave little space and relevance to those the dictatorship killed or disappeared. However, during a visit in 2005, she observed “more debate on this topic [of the dictatorship], it is more [often] in the newspapers, there was a sort of opening up on this matter.” How the newspapers dealt with the dictatorship’s crimes exemplified for her the country dealing with her past. This allowed her to, at least, partially reconcile with Chile.

Exile is a human rights abuse as stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 9. Exile, however, was not part of the truth and reparation commissions set up by the Chilean government in early 1990s and early 2000s. I argue that this lack of presence directly related to exile’s characteristic of becoming a human rights crime only outside of the nation-state. By deciding to expel part of the opposition, the dictatorship produced a physical separation between the exile and the nation-state. This separation, for many, has become permanent. The Chilean nation has excluded exiles from the social process of “catharsis and exorcism of the transition period”, a key process to deal with the “legacy of fear” of the dictatorship (Garreton 1992: 24; Lechner 1992). For the exiles, the home country is not only a place of nostalgia; they

also remember it as a locus of nightmares (Stock 2010). This forces exiles still residing abroad to individually engage in their own exorcisms. This process of reconciliation influences how and in what ways exiles construct their own identities as well as the home country connections they want to keep.

Conclusion

According to Lechner and Güell (2006), collective memory does not only refer to the past. It also refers to a possible future. This “memory of the future” is the memory of the things that could have happened (Lechner and Güell 2006: 36). The memory of the present influences the memory of the future; it is what the future would look like if our memories and expectations influenced its construction. Emigrants’ memories formed after visiting the home country directly influence the memories of the future, the construction of return plans, visits, and utopias for the nation.

In parallel to other studies on Chilean exiles using oral histories and interviews, the narratives of former exiles presented here evoke connections with the nation that influence the construction of a Chilean identity and belonging (Rebolledo 2006; Wright and Oñate 1998; 2012; Kay 1987; Eastmond, 1997). Edgardo, for example, argues that while he loves Chile, he has no good memories of a country that tortured him. Thus, he cannot recognize the symbols of the nation—the flag, the anthem—as his own. Especially after the dictatorship used them to reinforce nationalistic feelings and support for the regime among the Chilean population. Other exiles share similar feelings of anger toward the nation.

Magdalena feels “deeply Chilean,” as she argues, but for her, the national hymn and the flag—the symbols of her Chilean identity—have a double meaning that is hard to reconcile.

Besides being her symbols, they are also the dictatorship's symbols. She still feels "a lot of resentment for what happened, and I am angry that many things are not recognized," referring mainly to torture, exile, and the fears she carries. This resentment influences the exiles' identity construction and feelings of national belonging. Through their interviews, however, these former exiles mentioned several times that they still want "a place in [Chile's] collective memory... [I] want to be part of the official story of the country," as Aida told me. For these exiles, becoming part of the nation's history means being recognized as full members of the nation, a group of people that Chile's history cannot forget or silence.

I argue in this concluding section that Chilean national history needs to reconsider the place of the dictatorship's exile and the role these exiles play in the country's historiography. Exiles should become part of national history for two main reasons. First, an inclusive history of the nation requires incorporating all voices, including the voices of the diaspora. These voices are part of the ongoing construction of the nation. Second, identity construction is spatially bounded (Baldassar 2001). Places of origin and destination connect and influence exiles and migrants' identities (Pavlovic 2011). When the nation silences emigrants—forced or voluntary—from their home country's history, negatively affects their own identity development. Thus, to begin recognizing exiles as part of the nation's history, the nation needs to admit publicly that exile as a human rights abuse. Another important part is accepting exiles' memories as a central component of the dictatorship's history and the ensuing democratization process. Acceptance should be similar to what the country did with other human rights abuses, such as political assassinations, disappearances, and torture.

Second, I argue that the social sciences need to develop more studies connecting memory studies to migration. While growing, the literature in this field still leans heavily toward cultural

and literary studies (Lacroix and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2013). As with migration, we need to think of memory as a spatial process, since “movement is what produces memory” (Creet 2011: 9). We need to expand international migration research to incorporate the memories of those who migrated and those who returned. We need, as well, more research on the processes of forgetting and its impact on identity constructions. As Glynn and Keist (2012) argue, migrant memories influence migrant incorporation and belonging. At the same time, how a nation decides to remember influences migrants’ feelings of belonging, both in the origin and destination countries. Remembering and forgetting are political acts; leaving out emigrants and exiles from national histories diminishes their role as citizens and in the (re)construction of the nation.

Finally, home visits are an intrinsic component of migrant transnationalism. Emigrants, including exiles, use these visits to participate in political elections, to prepare definitive returns, and to replenish their national or ethnic identity. Migration scholars have explained many of the connections between emigrants and the state, but have yet to explain under what conditions emigrants develop these connections and what influences the strength of those connections. These connections—and the construction of a *citizenship-a-la-carte*, as Fitzgerald has accurately described them—are not solely based on benefits from a nation-state, migrants’ familial love, or migrants’ unquestioned patriotism (Fitzgerald 2008). The memories emigrants have of the country of origin, of the reasons for migrating, and of the overall migration process are at the core of these connections.

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